

**KEYNOTE ADDRESS OF
THE HONOURABLE
PEHIN DATO ABDUL RAHMAN TAIB,
MINISTER OF EDUCATION
ON
"QUALITY EDUCATION FOR BRUNEI
DARUSSALAM: CHALLENGES AND
OPPORTUNITIES FOR A SUSTAINABLE
FUTURE"**

**ASIA INC HUMAN RESOURCES DEVELOPMENT
ROUNDTABLE 2007**

**AT INDERA KAYANGAN BALLROOM
EMPIRE HOTEL & COUNTRY CLUB
9.00AM
AUGUST 27TH , 2007**

Bismillahir rahmanir rahim
Assalamualaikum warahmatullahi wabarkatuh

***Permanent Secretaries, Deputy Permanent Secretaries,
Excellencies, Honoured Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,***

It gives me great pleasure to be here today at this auspicious occasion. Let me congratulate the organizers on their remarkable achievement in bringing together representatives from a wide spectrum of government, business and educational organizations and instructions from near and far to engage on issues of a sustainable future. The topic of sustainability and management of our natural resources has been raised in other international forums particularly at the level of ASEAN, APEC, UNESCO and the UN World Summit. However, this forum is indeed timely as it highlights the significant impact of global resources on most countries.

My presentation today will touch on issues in the context of education. I shall briefly talk about the general aspect of sustainability at the global level, its development and how this has an impact on the region and Brunei. I will then speak on the role of education and the impact that it can have on sustainable development. With this as a background, I will then describe where Brunei stands in terms of its strategies and development, particularly with regards to some of the key challenges it faces in inculcating early awareness and desirable habits among present and future generations on sustainable development.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Sustainability refers to the conservation, protection, and regeneration of resources over an indefinite period of time. Central to sustainability is the idea that today's decisions affect the future of human health and well-being, the environment, and the economy. Sustainability requires knowledge and understanding of past events as well as the ability to make informed predictions of future events. The aim of sustainability is to make equitable decisions and to conduct activities so that human health and well-being, the environment, and the economy can be improved and maintained for future generations.

Sustainability is a complex idea. It requires understanding, not just of social, environmental, and economic issues, but of their ongoing interrelationship and interdependence. The process of sustainable decision making involves a critical examination of our priorities, habits, beliefs and values.

The challenge of sustainability is that it must be a collaborative process – citizens need to agree upon a vision as well as an action plan for the future. This requires collective and conscious decision making, and is at the heart of Education for a Sustainable Future.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

In the last century, engineers have developed unprecedented technologies which have allowed many to have clean water, adequate and safe food, be cured of many diseases, fly all over the world and into space, and communicate instantaneously around the world by wireless telephones, TV and through the Internet from personal computers small enough to fit in one hand. This first industrial revolution has reduced the death rate so dramatically that population has increased six-fold in the last 150 years. By the year 2000, the Earth's population exceeded six billion people – double what it was in 1960. Each day we add another quarter million people to our numbers (Suzuki, p.43).

If we imagine the lives of our forefathers, at the time when humans first began to spread across continents, the first 20,000 years or so, populations were small and resources abundant enough that attention to sustainability issues was not always necessary. Since the Industrial Revolution, however, increasing human populations and, accordingly, consumption have escalated our demand for the Earth's resources. As populations continue to grow, even further demand will be placed on those resources – resources that are finite and upon which we depend for sustenance and life. Many of the world's Nobel Prize-winning scientists agree that human beings and the natural world are on a collision course.

We must understand that Ecological Health equals Human Health. In 1992, a group of eminent scientists from around the globe, including 102 Nobel Laureates, drafted the World Scientists' Warning to Humanity, which read in part:

“We, the undersigned, senior members of the world’s scientific community, hereby warn all humanity of what lies ahead. A great change in our stewardship of the earth and the life on it is required, if vast human misery is to be avoided and our global home on this planet is not to be irretrievably mutilated.”

This “great change” cannot be achieved by merely building more waste treatment plants or air pollution control devices. A fundamental change in thinking, values and action is critical to human health and survival and must be a part of the education, research, operations and community interaction of all professionals, especially health professionals.

The environment is not a competing interest: it is the playing field on which all other interests intersect.

Along with this growth has come some undesirable, unsustainable, inequitable (and mostly unintentional) environmental, health and social impacts, particularly in the last half century. These impacts, urgently require a different model of living in the 21st century - a new industrial revolution. How do we create this future? This will require a huge shift in thinking, values and action. To quote Einstein, *"The significant problems we face cannot be solved by the same level of thinking we used when we created them"*. We must re-invent the world socially, economically and environmentally. In effect, we must de-couple social and economic progress from environmental deterioration.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Rapid migration of large numbers of people all over the world corresponds with an increase in the volume of raw materials and finished products in international trade by 800 times in the last century. It has been estimated that economic output has increased over 20 times, fossil fuel use 30 times and industrial production 100 times in the last century. With the recent rapid development in Asia, particularly India and China, the pace is likely to increase even more rapidly. Can this rate be sustained and for how long?

The increase in population density and human activities on a global scale that requires ever increasing amounts of the earth's resources mean that environment changes are no longer confined to a small part of a region. International trade agreements create access to new commodities and new markets, and the Internet allows instant contact, virtually anywhere on the Earth. Events that were once distant, including the mounting frequency of natural and human-caused disasters, are now beginning to have an almost immediate impact upon us. For example, drought, floods or other natural disasters in this region are likely to affect supply or increase the cost of food products in our neighbourhood supermarket; forest fires or volcanic eruptions can affect regional air quality; and nuclear accidents can contaminate the Earth's atmosphere in a matter of days.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Education for a sustainable future is important because it can contribute to improving, and indeed, transforming the world in which we live. What are the challenges if we are to adopt this stand? We can move faster towards a sustainable world if we understand the principle underlying this concept, and provide humanity with the skills to critically evaluate information, adapt to change, and find creative solutions to intricate problems.

A sustainable future will require people who think and act differently than they do today and will necessitate industries and businesses to minimize their own negative impact on the earth's ecosystems. It will therefore require persons with new skills, knowledge, attitudes and values in order to take personal responsibility for sustainable development, Because human being are at the centre of concerns for sustainable development, significant attention must be given to education to improve their capacity to address environment and development issues.

The challenge of Education for a Sustainable Future (ESF) is to enable students to make choices that incorporate the essential principles and value of sustainability. To do this, students need to be given opportunities to think and act according to the principles of sustainability. This process will contribute to their development as informed and responsible citizens who demonstrate attitudes and make decisions that reflect concern for the sustainability of this planet.

Brunei Darussalam, and perhaps many other nations, must recognise a number of barriers and challenges if they are to be successful in achieving their goals for education for a sustainable future.

The United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development that began in the year 2005 and will end in 2014 emphasises the transformative role that education must play in creating a sustainable future. Education needs to be relevant to each learner's real life situation whilst facilitating a journey of inquiry and critical reflection that builds their capacity to respond to the challenges of sustainability.

I believe education for sustainability is about developing the skills and capacities of future generations to actively take part in the creation of a sustainable future. Educating **for** sustainability rather than just **about** sustainability implies an active learning process that encourages students to articulate their vision for a sustainable future and then identify the questions, issues and challenges as a starting point to guide their own learning and future actions. Ultimately, students gain lifelong skills for active citizenship and sustainable living. Education for sustainability promotes informed action through inquiry and critical reflection.

The learning experiences itself needs to become real, future-oriented, action-focused and more importantly – relevant! It must be oriented to life, not just the economy, and seek to develop capability and not just competence. Education for sustainability is grounded in our present challenges but oriented to the future.

As a member of the United Nations, Brunei Darussalam supports the ideals of The United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (UNDESD) which provides an opportunity to progress towards implementing universal quality education that fosters the knowledge, skills, perspectives, and values that lead to a more sustainable future. Quality education is at the heart of our strategic plan. We must work harder towards translating our desire for a sustainable future through our curriculum and our teaching in the schools. Our school and higher institutions should be committed to and involved in special projects, such as the *Heart of Borneo* project. It should not be just about reading textbooks in school but about putting into practice what has been learnt. Here, the teachers and school leaders can become role models for promoting positive attitudes towards a healthy environment and sustainability of our natural resources. They must not be perceived to just preach but must be seen to practise it. However, teaching children to understand and respect our environment and become committed to sustainability should not be confined to just within the school. It should be a wider community effort, beginning with the home and including private or public partnerships. This is part and parcel of quality education for all.

Education for a Sustainable Future can effect change and provide students with hope. It can instill a desire to work for the collective good of the planet, and inspire needed changes in behaviour that will help ensure our survival. If this paradigm shift is to occur, sustainability must become both a Bruneian and a global priority.

Higher education plays a profound and pivotal, but often overlooked, role in making this vision a reality. It prepares most of the professionals who develop, lead, manage, teach, work in and influence society's institutions. Besides training future teachers, higher education strongly influences the learning framework of primary and secondary education. Higher education can play a critical role in creating and disseminating the knowledge, skills and values for society. Moreover, higher education has unique academic freedom and the critical mass and diversity of skill to develop new ideas; to comment on society and its challenges, and to engage in bold experimentation in sustainable living. Students must be challenged to understand and apply the concepts of sustainability and to envision a sustainable future. They need to know what to aim for in their future, and to understand that they have to personal power to make a difference and effect change.

In order for students to make informed decisions and embrace life practices that demonstrate an understanding of and belief in sustainability, they require particular knowledge, skills and values. We must help them embrace a lifestyle consistent with the principles of sustainability and take personal responsibility for a sustainable future. They should be able to work collaboratively towards an equitable quality of life for all, think critically about global issues and take action locally.

What are the essential values that students should have? I believe they should first value their individual health, and not subject themselves to unnecessary health risks. They should be informed and concerned about local, national, and global issues, and the future; demonstrate respect for the environment; consume less; replace, reduce, reuse, recycle, restore, and revitalize. They should also advocate for the health of the environment, for government policies that support the environment and demonstrate awareness of how their actions affect both others and the environment as well as make choices to contribute to the common good.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

There are many competing demands on us education, through our teaching and curriculum, to provide an effective education system that supports economic development, our nation's wellbeing and for our young people to learn skills and knowledge to survive in a very competitive globalised world. Many challenges, but also opportunities, lie ahead of us. I am please to say that we, in education, have been working relentless in improving our education system. We hope to introduce a new education system for the 21st Century, which will be phased into our primary and secondary schools in the coming years, accompanied by new and revised examinations to measure achievement. We are in the process of building more schools and institutions of higher learning, including technical and vocational institutions, as well as upgrading existing institutions. Our aim is to introduce greater flexibility in our system, provide children with more choices and multiple pathways towards higher education. Our vision is to provide an education towards a developed, peaceful and prosperous nation.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

We consulted our key stakeholders: parents, experts, teacher, school leaders, the community and they all tell us that they want us to focus on the following:

- ❖ Develop children that become part of a caring, ethical and resilient society;
- ❖ Provide the human resource needs of a diversified economy;
- ❖ Provide wider choice of education;
- ❖ Nurture well-rounded students;
- ❖ Raise achievement;
- ❖ Develop life-long learning skills; and
- ❖ Prepare students with valuable and marketable skills.

If you will bear with me, I will highlight some of the challenges that are facing us in education, as part of our drive towards quality and excellence. They are:

- ❖ Enhancing the quality of service providers, particularly our schools, colleges and institution of higher learning;
- ❖ Increasing relevancy and more balanced curriculum that reflect present and future needs of society and young learners;

- ❖ Improving schools, including the environment for teaching and learning, and involving more use of computers and modern technologies in the classroom;
- ❖ Improving school leadership and providing financial autonomy to schools; and
- ❖ Developing effective partnership with community and industry.

I believe we can achieve all these if we work together and have adequate resources and are committed to our aims. This will require that we develop a professional, accountable organisation and efficiency organization. Part of our drive for efficiency and professionalism is to improve teaching and learning, through our scholarship schemes, training programmes at Universiti Brunei Darussalam and Universiti Islam Sultan Sharif Ali, and in-service programmes. Besides increasing the percentage of student cohorts entering tertiary to 20% and above, we are working on improving the quality of the outputs of these cohorts. For example, we would like a greater percentage of our student cohorts to achieve 5 'O' level at grade A to C and for more of them to succeed in mathematics, English language and in the pure sciences. Hopefully, the majority of them will go on to universities and achieve good honours in key subjects that are needed by the country.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The challenges are many but so are the opportunities available to us. What is essential for us is the individual and collective will and resolve to act on the measures we have identified to ensure that our youth are prepared through education and training to meet the global needs of a sustainable future. With that, I wish you success in your deliberations at this forum.