



**FORUM OPENING ADDRESS**  
**“MOVING FORWARD – WOMEN OF BRUNEI DARUSSALAM”**

**Yang Mulia**  
**Datin Hajah Adina binti Othman**  
**Deputy Minister of Culture, Youth and Sports**

**At**

**THE WOMEN’S FORUM 2010**  
**Empire Hotel and Country Club**

**5<sup>th</sup> August 2010**

Bismillahir Rahmanir Rahim.

Segala puji-pujian bagi Allah Subhanahu Wata'ala, selawat dan salam ke atas junjungan besar kita Nabi Muhammad Sallallahu' Alaihi Wasallam, keluarga dan para sahabat serta pengikut-pengikut Baginda yang jujur lagi setia hingga ke akhir zaman.

Yang Mulia,

Mr. Stuart Kemp, Executive Director of Asia Inc;

Yang Mulia,

Datin Paduka Dyg. Hajah Apsah bte Hj Abdul Majid,  
Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Education;

Yang Mulia,

Pg. Datin Paduka Hjh. Mariana binti PDNLDR Pg Hj. Abdul Momin,  
Deputy Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Industry and Primary  
Resources;

Yang Mulia,

Dato Paduka Awang Timothy Ong,  
Acting Chairman of Brunei Economic Development Board;

Directors of Departments;

Senior Government Officials;

Our three prominent speakers from abroad;

Asia Inc's partners for the forum, the Brunei Economic  
Development Board and Bank Islam Brunei Darussalam;

Participants to the Women's Forum 2010;

Ladies and Gentlemen.

Assalamualaikum Warahmatullahi Wabarkatuh and a very good morning.

Alhamdulillah, we are grateful to Allah the Almighty by whose grace, we are gathered here today for the Women's Forum 2010. First of all, I would like to thank the organizing committee for inviting me to be part of The Women's Forum 2010 today. I would also like to extend my heartiest congratulations to Asia Inc for organising this very important event for the 3rd consecutive year where women in different fields and organisations come together to share experiences and views on the important roles of women in the development of the nation. This is indeed a commendable initiative for the advancement of women in the country. It is my ardent hope that this forum will provide a venue to assess how far women have come, make new commitments and address issues related to the new aspirations and new challenges faced by women, so that we can then move ahead with renewed energy towards gender equity and empowerment within the perimeters of MIB.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

“Gender” refers to the socially constructed roles and responsibilities of women and men, in a given culture or location.

These roles are influenced by perceptions and expectations arising from cultural, political, environmental, economic, social, and religious factors, as well as custom, law, class, ethnicity, and individual or institutional bias.

Over the last decade, gender issues have become increasingly the focus of international attention linking the advancement of women to the effective solution of today's global problems - globalization and poverty, illiteracy, health, HIV/AIDS, violence against women, and the gender gap in political and decision making position and gender gap in Information Communication Technologies.

However, despite efforts which have been made and continue to be made by International bodies to address gender issues through various international instruments, gender inequalities continue to exist. They threaten not only the well being and dignity of millions of girls and women but seriously jeopardize efforts to bring about sustainable development and world peace.

It has been reported that the majority of the world's poor are women. Not only are the numbers on the increase but also the depth of poverty which is worsening. In conflict-torn areas, the majority of people displaced are women and children. More women get affected by HIV and AIDS virus than men. More women get violated, assaulted and are subjected to different forms of

violence than ever before, and more and more women and the girl-child get exploited in human trafficking.

To address these issues, many countries in the world have made several efforts to improve the situation. Many countries have enacted legislation to comply with human rights and international labour conventions that promote women's economic rights, equal access to economic resources and equality in employment. Significant steps have been taken to achieve progress in girls education and training at all levels. Steps have been taken to improve women's access to health care, including reduction in maternal mortality and introduction of a gender perspective into health care, prevention and treatment of sexually transmitted diseases and greater attention to mental health, occupational hazards and environmental health. Many countries have emphasized eradication of violence particularly domestic violence as a national priority area in national crime prevention strategies. For many, the steps have meant significant progress in the development of women, especially where there have been sufficient political commitment and resource allocation.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Women form a substantive proportion of the world population. As such, no country can afford to ignore the need to harness and develop their women to the full potential so that women can move together with men towards the national development of the

country. Any country which chooses to place their women at an subservient position will be doing so at their own loss.

In Brunei Darussalam, the 2009 estimated population shows that women comprise 47% of which 75.3% are those aged 39 years and below. Alhamdulillah, in Brunei Darussalam, Women have come a long way from the 1950s. The Government of His Majesty the Sultan and Yang Dipertuan Negara Brunei Darussalam has always been committed to provide the people of Brunei with a high quality of life, regardless of gender. The enlightened policies of the Government can be attested by the good and sound indicators of the country such that Brunei Darussalam has achieved almost all the Millenium Development Goals and is placed 30th in the UNDP Human Development Index. The Government fully recognizes the importance of women's role in the socio-economic development of the country and this is reflected in Brunei Darussalam's Vision 2035, which stress on equal opportunities for women in the work force and nation building. Women in Brunei Darussalam are given equal rights in education, training, healthcare, employment, business, ownership of assets, benefits and citizenship, among others.

Legislation for the protection of women and girls are manifested in many Acts and Orders, including among others, Compulsory Education Order 2007, Employment Order 2009, Work Place Safety and Health Order 2009, Trafficking and Smuggling of Persons Order 2004, Unlawful Carnal Knowledge Act 1938, Old Age and

Disability Pensions Act 1954 and Women and Girls Protection Act 1972. The recent inclusion of Domestic Violence or “dharar syarie” in the Islamic Family Order 1999 and Married Women’s Act 1999 provides better protection for victims of domestic violence and has very extensive coverage for abused victims from restraining orders, compensation, right to shared property and mandatory counseling. All these legislations guarantee the promotion and protection of women from a rights-based approach.

In terms of education, our progressive educational policies have made a mark on the literacy rate for girls which has made quantum leaps from 8.3% in 1947 to 91.5% in 2001 and is currently estimated at 98.2%. Education For All (EFA) Development Index (EDI) for 2009 classified Brunei Darussalam as being close to achieving the four most quantifiable EFA goals, that is Universal Primary Education, Adult Literacy, Gender Parity and Quality and Quality Education. In 2009, Brunei Darussalam ranked 36 from 129 countries with a high EDI which stands at 0.972. The Compulsory Education Order 2007 ensures that all children attend school for a minimum of 9 years, while the national education policy emphasises that every child should have at least 12 years of schooling. The primary school net enrolment rate shows the number of girls equal that of boys. However at the tertiary level, girls outnumber boys with the number of UBD’s female graduates at 73% of total graduate population in 2007. This appears to be the trend in many countries today and is a worrying concern, which cannot be ignored by policy makers. Our challenge will not

be merely to increase the participation of women but rather the increased participation of both men and women together, in equity and in unison.

The expansion of educational opportunities has led to an increase in the number of women in the workforce working in professional, technical, managerial and administrative jobs with the labour force participation rate increasing from 20% in 1971 to 56.7% in 2008, with 39.4% of the labour force consisting of women. Women have also successfully permeated into many male-dominated fields. In the civil service, Brunei Women now constitute about 49% of the civil service work force where they occupy 28% of senior management posts. Prior to Dec 2008, non-graduate married women personnel were employed on a month-to-month basis in the Civil Service. Today, the employment of all women employees are, to a large extent, based on the same terms as men i.e. on permanent service. The salaries of women are on par with that of men and are subject to their length of service. As per the Employment Order 2009, all female employees are entitled to 9 weeks maternity leave with payment benefit for 8 weeks. The Work Place Safety and Health Order 2009 regulates the environment of their work place.

Women also enjoy equal access to healthcare. Sound Government policies in the delivery of health services are reflected in the excellent indicators such that Brunei Darussalam has achieved

MDG Goals 4, 5 and 6. Female life expectancy is currently estimated to be 79.8 years compared to males at 76.6 years. The leading causes of death for women are similar to that of developed countries. The maternal mortality rate is currently 0 per 100,000 live births. Infant and child mortality rates have reduced significantly from over 30 deaths per thousand live births in 1970s to current rate of 7 per thousand live births and Mortality rate for children under 5 was 9.5 per thousand live births. Quality antenatal and postnatal care has ensured that more than 99% of women receive antenatal care, with each woman making an average of 8 antenatal visits during each pregnancy. More than 99% of deliveries are conducted by trained midwives in hospital settings.

In the business sector, women have responded positively to the Government's call to develop the small and medium enterprises (SME) sector as a potential means of diversifying the economy away from oil and gas. SMEs contribute 92% of the employment opportunities in the private sector and a substantial proportion of these SMEs are owned by women. Their active involvement is encouraged and nurtured by the Government and the private sector through equal access to the provision of incentives and entrepreneurial support. As of March 2006, women made up 62% of beneficiaries of micro-credit financing schemes under the Ministry of Industry and Primary Resources. More than half of the beneficiaries of the micro-credit facilities run by the Department of Community Development for the poor, are women.

As for women who are relatively poor and disadvantaged, there is a range of welfare measures provided by government agencies and NGOs such as monthly financial assistance, educational allowances for the children, food, housing, financial assistance to embark on income generating projects, assistance in acquiring employment, old age pensions, and other benefits in times of natural disasters.

Ladies and gentlemen

Whilst remarkable progress has been made in terms of equal access to education and training, employment, skills and knowledge acquisition, healthcare and protection against violence, the challenges ahead is to go beyond the basic level, that is by increasing the quality of the services and nature of development for women. In recognition of this, the Ministerial level National Council on Social Issues identified women issues as one of the issues that needed to be addressed. On Women issues, the Council will be assisted by a Special Committee on Women and the Family Institution. Issues such gender sensitization, gender responsive budgeting and a range on other issues are areas that can be addressed.

Gender equity is about being fair to both men and women. While traditional attitudes on gender issues may typecast women in a specific role, the encouraging news is that gender attitudes and

behaviors are learned and can be changed. Through positive action such as gender sensitization, the gender perspective can be applied to all existing programmes and can also be a basis for the formulation of policies and programmes. It is therefore imperative that policy makers review existing policies and programmes and incorporate the gender perspective into them.

Common female stereotypes which portray women as weak, dependent, housekeepers and less important have not really taken root in Brunei Darussalam as women have always played prominent roles in the economy, as depicted by their roles in the Padian. These traditional independent roles have been further strengthened by women's acquisition of education. However, it cannot be denied that the increase in working women has affected the traditional role of women in the family institution. To ensure that the family institution does not deteriorate due to the new role of women who need to divide their time between their work place and home, working women need to learn new skills such as time management as well as new care-giving skills for family members. As Brunei Darussalam still practice, in general, the extended family system, such family members may include not just the spouse and children, but also parents and parents-in-law. The balance needs to be struck between the woman's role in the workplace and her role as care-giver. This will represent a challenge to our working women, but one that needs to be dealt with towards achieving sound Work-Life Balance or Work-Home Balance. The responsibilities of the working mother should not be

women, it would be a great loss to the nation if these capabilities were left untapped.

Other challenges include the decline in fertility rate, increase in divorce rates, violence against women, teenage pregnancies and abandoned babies. All these issues are intricately linked to our value system, our moral values, and more explicitly, the values we are imparting to our children and our young people. The role of parents and schools are paramount here to instil in our youth noble virtues, good moral values and sense of responsibility guided by the principles of Islam.

To conclude, I am extremely encouraged by the significant progress made by the women of Brunei in the past few decades. These achievements reflect the capabilities of our women which have been proven by their ability to permeate into practically all fields of work, including previously male-dominated professions. However, we acknowledge that there are areas that still need to be addressed including invisible barriers and the glass ceiling. Working women are basically surrounded by male-driven work ethics and women need to learn how to get around these and to promote and replace these work ethics with gender driven ideals. On an individual basis, women need to believe in themselves, to have courage to speak out where there is a need, within reason, in fairness and in sincerity. Achievements should be gained through sound and logical action, not through antagonism and aggression. For those who have attained the higher echelons, reach out to

those below and give them a hand to lift them up. I am confident that together, we can bring about change towards the advancement of women, guided by the national philosophy of Malay Islamic Monarchy.

Thank you.

Wabillahi Taufik Walhidayah, Wasalamualaikum Warahmatullahi Wabarakatuh.