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Rights
Opening Speech

By

Dato Mohamed Rahmat
Opening Speech by the Minister of Information
Y.B. Dato' Mohamed Rahmat

Yang Berbahagia Timbalan Naib Canselor UKM,
Wakil-wakil Kedutaan asing,
Wakil Carl Duisberg Gesselschft, Mr. E. Stottle,
Wakil Asian Mass Communication and Research Information, Centre, Mr. Vijay Menon,
Ketua Jabatan Komunikasi,
Tuan-tuan dan puan-puan.

Saya ingin mengucapkan berbanyak-banyak terima kasih atas kesudian pihak penganjur untuk mengundang saya ke majlis ini pada hari ini. Lebih-lebih lagi kerana hal ehwal alam sekitar dan perkaitannya dengan media massa merupakan satu topik yang paling saya diminati.

This workshop on "mass media and the protection of the Environment" is very relevant to us in Malaysia today because of the several issues that are confronting us. These issues have been reported in the Malaysian mass media, but I sometime think the basics have not been thoroughly touched upon.

Environment is important to mankind. It is fundamental to our existence. The air we breathe in must be fresh, the water we drink ought to be clean, and the surroundings we are in should be pleasing to our senses.

The Malaysian government is committed to the achievement of a beautiful and clean environment. Various policies have been promulgated and actions implemented to achieve this noble objective.

Campaigns have been carried out by the various government agencies with the objective of instilling in the hearts and minds of the rakyat the need for Malaysia to be a clean society.

Anti-litter campaigns in several big towns, have been very successful, especially in the Malaysian capital city of Kuala
Lumpur. But more can be done. This cleanliness campaign is not limited only to big towns. It is also extended to the villages, as can be seen in the "kampung contohs" that the Malaysian government is having.

Beside these campaigns aimed directly at the rakyat, the government has also taken several actions to make industries contribute to a clean Malaysia. The Malaysian government has passed several laws and regulations to make industries comply with the objective to make Malaysia pollution-safe. I will not go into detail as this falls within the purview of the Ministry of Science, Technology and Environment, but suffice if for me to say that all government agencies have contributed to this realization.

It used to be said that environmental problems are the concern of the rich countries only and that for the developing countries, the feeling is that development must come first. Developing countries assumed that they would worry about the environment later. But this is far from true.

The government must continually endeavour to strike a balance between the need to clear the jungles for development and the need to leave it as they are. The government is aware of the need to achieve a balance between the need to achieve development and the need to maintain the environment. Indeed the government is concerned that in the long run there should be proper maintenance of the environment for the well-being of Malaysians.

No society can continue to exist if it destroys the environment - an environment that provides the sustenance for
the population. Destruction of the environment for its sake is not only bad, but, as a Muslim, it is against Islamic teaching.

A good example of some actions by the government can be seen in the development of FELDA schemes. Several thousands hectares of jungle areas have been cleared but this has been to resettle people who are in need of land. What was once jungle land is now replanted with thousands of hectares of rubber and oil palm trees. These provide employment to once-poor Malaysians but also provide returns to the national economy.

Another example is the land given to private individuals and companies to plant rubber, oil palm, cocoa or crops in what was once jungle land. Malaysians can judge for themselves the benefits obtained from implementing such a policy.

What then is the role of the mass media in the protection of the environment? In this aspect there are several roles that the mass media can perform.

One is the creation of awareness on the importance of a clean Malaysian environment. The Malaysian mass media have and will continue, I believe, to champion good causes.

Awareness can be instilled by the mass media in several ways. One is the reporting of events that highlight the importance of a clean environment. Anti-litter campaigns have always gained the cooperation of the press. So is the need for Malaysians to dispose off their household garbage in the proper way. We sometimes do not realize that the sum of an individual action may eventually equate the sum of million actions. If one person were to keep his surroundings clean, dispose off his household garbage properly, and if others follow his example than
we can be happy that all of us will be contributing to a similar course of action.

Awareness comes in also in the reporting of several laws and regulations that the Malaysian government has passed. This awareness will make Malaysians conscious of the government’s sincere efforts to make that environment clean. This awareness also makes it possible for the rakyat to play a positive role in keeping a keen eye on those who violate these laws and regulations.

This awareness if properly instilled will make the rakyat and the government united in combatting pollution.

The fight to preserve the environment clean is a role to be played by each and everyone of us. It is a role to be played by the ordinary farmer, the senior government servant, and the professionals.

Of course we do admit that at times some environment areas are affected but this is not because of the policy of the government.

So let us move together – the government and the rakyat. Let us keep Malaysia clean and beautiful. We can reap so many benefits if we have a clean and beautiful beaches, hills, kampungs and towns. As Malaysians, we will be more healthy if our surroundings are clean. More tourists will like to visit us as they are not be driven away by dirty environment.

The Malaysian government is very concerned about the quality of the environment but unfortunately, often times, it has been accused to be otherwise. The various government agencies continue
to monitor the environment, and where appropriate actions have been taken to effect this objectives.

It is time for the government agencies to be proactive in highlighting environment issues that are of concern to the public. We have become too passive to complaints made by vocal groups. To this end my ministry will give due attention to highlighting issues in environment in the various government media so that the public can therefore see for themselves what the government has done, and is doing.

The private mass media must also do their bit. Not many media organizations, however, have personnel conversant enough in issues pertaining to the environment. The issues are complex and should be approached as such. I therefore welcome the efforts of the organizers in organizing this workshop for Journalists.

Journalists can report events well if they have a clear perspective in appreciating them. A thorough analysis can be presented to audience members if journalists themselves clearly understood the issues at hand. By making journalists aware of the complex dimension of environment, they will then be able to portray to the public a better picture of the situation that we are in. After all the process of communication becomes more meaningful if communicators that is the journalists are able to communicate the contents to the receivers in a clear holistic picture. They will also be made aware that environmental issues are complex as they touch on every facet of human lives the economy the health, agriculture to mention just a few and very time they write they must be aware of these interrelationships.
I take great pride to note that the German Foundation, Carl Duisberg Gesellschaft has chosen Malaysia to conduct the workshop here. By going through the Asian Mass Communication Research and Information Centre, CDA has found a worthy host in Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia.

I am also proud that there are participants from Nepal, Sri Lanka, Philippines and Thailand and also journalists from Malaysia. This adds to the international dimension of this workshop.

To the participants I hope you will find time to tour some of the places in Malaysia as this country has much to offer. You will be pleased if your did that. Do have time as the saying goes "All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy."

With that, I have great pleasure in declaring open this workshop. Thank you.