

**Address by
Tan Sri Dato' Dr Abu Bakar Suleiman, President**

**Convocation Ceremony
Saturday, 08 June 2013
Auditorium, 4th Floor, IMU Bukit Jalil Campus,
Kuala Lumpur**

YBhg Dato' Seri Dr T. Devaraj, Chancellor
YBhg Dato' Dr Amir Abbas, Pro Chancellor
YBhg Tan Sri Yahya Awang, Chairman of the Board of Governors
YBhg Dato' Dr Gan Ee Kiang, Member of the Board of Governors
Dr Mei Ling Young, and members of Faculty,
Distinguished guests, Ladies and Gentleman

Welcome to the IMU Convocation. This is a special day for the graduands and the families, as well as for the staff of IMU, as we celebrate the success of bright young people, who are about to go into the world and make their mark.

Today is the time for celebrations. Celebrate your success, which had been the result of hard work. Celebrate also the support received from your families, friends and other supporters. Today also is a time of reflection – what have been achieved during your time at University? I suspect that most of you have already achieved a great deal in different ways. However do understand what have been achieved have enabled and qualified each and every one of you – to start at the beginning of your careers. For many if not most, it would be the beginning of your professional careers.

As you go into the world you may well soon realize, how you are leaving some of the best days of your life behind you. Here at IMU you had learnt, played, developed and matured as individuals, made friends and created lasting impressions on your colleagues and others at IMU. You had worked hard and faced numerous challenges and overcome them. You can now look forward to embark on the career of your choosing.

The world you are all going into can be both an exciting and a frightening place. Exciting because the potential that the future holds is unlimited, and the dazzling advances in science, technology and knowledge knows no bounds. It is also frightening because the future is also uncertain as we observe natural disasters, social upheavals and also the wanton violence and senseless carnage all over the world, reported regularly, almost instantly in the media. This appears to be the reality of the world that we live in, even if we are unable to make sense of some of the occurrences.

Within the country we are also going through exciting times, and changes are occurring. In Malaysia as in most developing and developed countries, the rural population shrinks as the urban population inevitably grows to, in some cities, unmanageable levels.

In rural society traditionally, there may not be much mobility, and the community is in place for all individuals, irrespective of family, religion or social class. This community in rural society has been romanticized through the ages. The reality however can be different and is more harsh, hence the attraction of the city for so many rural dwellers.

The key to survival in the rapidly growing urban areas is the development of communities in the city. Human beings need community, for constructive purposes. The West African writer and teacher Malidoma Some observed that human beings have “an instinct of community”. In this modern era we observe this instinct for community materializing as growing fragmentation and separation. Hence we experience terrible ethnic wars, militia groups, special interest groups and chat rooms. This instinct of community is being used to separate and protect us from each other, rather than to create a global culture of diverse, interwoven communities. We search for those who are most like us to protect ourselves from the rest of society. Can we go into a future worth inhabiting through these separate paths? Surely it is a major task for all of us to relook and rethink our paradigm and understanding of community, so that we can move from the current paradigm of closed protectionism to one which embraces openness and welcomes the concept of a global community.

Human communities are formed with two basic needs – the need for self determination and the need for one another. In this modern world there are difficulties in accepting the inherent paradox of these needs. We strive to satisfy one need, but at the expense of the other. All too often the price of belonging to a community is to forfeit one’s individual autonomy. In seeking to be members of a community, can we really abandon our need for individual self-expression?

Difficult as it is, we need to be able to live and prosper within this paradox. Our communities must support individual freedom that ensures the health and resiliency of the community. As individuals we must acknowledge our neighbours and make choices that is based on a desire to be in relationships with them and as a means to ensure the health and resiliency of our communities.

So many people now spend time in the virtual world, and superficially the World-Wide-Web appears to be the location for new communities. How do these groups in the World-Wide-Web embrace the paradox of community? There is great potential in the World-Wide-Web, with global connectedness. However what has happened have been the creation of stronger boundaries that keep groups isolated from one another. Specialised groups get together to reinforce their sameness with each other, and their separateness from the rest of society. Ironically such specialized, self-reflecting networks can lead to as much destructiveness of the individuals as any dictatorial, doctrine-based organization.

In neither type of groups are members invited to explore their individualism, while being in relationship with others who are different from each other. In neither type of groups do we see the observance of the paradox of freedom and community.

This paradox and promise of community had been discussed in the work by Margaret Wheatley and Myron Kellner-Rogers, from the 1990’s and are equally relevant now.

We need to continue our conversations about “who we are”, and about ‘what matters”. These conversations may be private or public, and we all need to listen. This listening can be private or public. These conversations are about purpose, shared significance, shared values, and we need to commit to continuing these conversations. The conversations among friends and strangers, discovering a shared sense of what is important, the dreams of possibility that is shared, will surely be much greater than anything arising when we are isolated from each other.

A major challenge to all of us is to understand and make sense of what is going on around us locally and globally, and understand what we can do in working towards creating communities based on a coherent belief of shared significance and a mutual belief of why we belong together. We have a legacy of great diversity, linked with creativity. We need to build on this and continue to enhance relationships, without the need to focus on proscriptions and making demands in this process.

It is part of our vision that our graduates will make a difference to their communities. This challenge needs to have the understanding that individualism and the building of communities have an inverse relationship. In this modern age building a community and a society, implies inter dependence, inter connectedness and integration.

In working towards exercising a leadership role in rebuilding a community and a society, it will do well to remember the advice of Gandhi that all causes of violence in human life are related to:

Wealth without work
Pleasure without conscience
Knowledge without character
Commerce without morality
Science without humanity
Worship without sacrifice
Politics without principles
Rights without responsibilities

We must all respect life. We must all learn and strive to live together harmoniously, taking pride in our individualism, culture and heritage, and at the same time valuing the diversity of our community and respecting our various differences. This is challenging as communities around the world increases in complexity. Indeed going forward learning to manage greater complexities will demand greater leadership that I hope all IMU graduates will learn to excel in.

To all graduates, congratulations on your success and I wish you all well in your future endeavours.

Thank you.