

SPEECH BY
YBhg Tan Sri Abu Bakar Suleiman
President, International Medical University
Convocation at IMU Bukit Jalil, 8.45 am

YBhg Dato Dr Amir Abbas, Chancellor
YBhg Dato Gan Ee Kiang, Pro Chancellor
YBhg Tan Sri Dato Dr Yahya Awang, Chairman BOG
Members of the Board of Governors
Members of Faculty, Distinguished Guests

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Welcome to the IMU Convocation. It is a special day of celebrations for the new graduates after their hard work and dedication. It is also a special day of celebrations in tribute to the parents and supporters who have made sacrifices for the new graduates. This is a debt that is difficult to be repaid.

I appreciate also the contributions of the IMU staff who have worked hard to ensure the success of our graduates.

We will also honour Professor Chris Stephens of the University of Southampton today. He has been a staunch supporter of IMU for a long time. I am grateful that he has been able to be with us today.

It is a pleasure for me to congratulate all the new graduates and their families on their success leading to today's convocation, and celebrations. As new graduates, the future is before you in a world that is full of promise and challenges. It is also a world that is full of success and wonder, that is driven by our major advances in science and technology. People can look forward to living longer, cancer can be cured if detected early, food is plentiful.

Success however comes with challenges. As people live longer, there will be more older people around. Are we able to look after them? Can we afford to allocate sufficient resources for their well-being? What will be the contribution of these older people to society? Do we have an understanding of all this?

In the past, we had been concerned that there would not be enough food to feed the global population. While this is still a problem in parts of the world, we are now faced with an epidemic of obesity, including childhood obesity. We now have to put food into the curriculum in schools to educate kids about healthy eating, as one of the approaches in dealing with the epidemic of obesity. How far do we go to control advertising on food products? Do we do this in a similar way that we deal with tobacco?

In our world dominated by technology, where news spreads globally in an instantaneous manner, populations will be influenced by what happens in other countries, as censorship is doomed to fail. Inevitably our youth will of course be influenced by the values, ideologies and practices from the west. We can benefit from this, however, we need to be careful as context does matter, and enormous conflicts can arise.

Democracy as an ideology is surely admirable and we work to practise it. However forcing it down the throats of countries and populations not ready for it has repeatedly resulted in disaster. This lesson has never been learnt. Arrogance combined with being naive about different cultures and countries, has been a lethal mix as we see countries, populations and civilisations being threatened with destruction. The ensuing chaos in Afghanistan, Pakistan and the Middle East is on-going, and will not easily stabilize. The global media tends to provide a biased view depending on the ideology held by the owners. The attention of viewers have been riveted recently by news of the decapitation of a number of foreigners that had been held captive by ISIS. The thousands of Muslims killed by ISIS did not receive the same media attention. In a similar manner the human tragedies in the USA, as a result of the draft to man the armies for foreign adventures have never received sufficient media attention. The destruction of individuals, families, small businesses and communities in the USA caused by the draft has been appalling. This suffering is continuing into the future.

The imperfections of our world however poses the challenge and the opportunities for our youth to do better, to innovate, to do good, and create a better future than the current and past generations of leaders have done.

In being influenced by the developed countries, do we need to agree or to subscribe to their views that the pursuit of happiness involves the promotion and the pursuit of the ideology of rights?

As Immanuel Kant had put it, individuals have rights to be free of persecution, to be treated as ends and not means. Thomas Paine had declared that the dignity of man requires the rights of man. Such rights are surely one aspect of our humanity.

The achievement of happiness must surely mean taking the right path to the right kind of life. The modern, intense focus on the rights of the individual cannot surely ignore the importance of humility, love and justice.

We must surely understand that rights must be balanced by responsibilities. Kant had said the rights of individuals must be combined with duties. We can also learn from the ancient Greek philosophers. Aristotle for example viewed responsibilities or duties from a different light. Aristotle's view was not the balancing of individual rights with responsibilities, but rather that we live our lives not only as individuals, but also as a member of society. Aristotle's approach is that the individual finds meaning in life and the path to happiness is by living life as a member of the community or society. Aristotle noted that "man is a social animal".

In much of the western world, the rights of individuals has become like an ideology, and placed on the pedestal above other doctrines. Individuals are not held accountable for their behaviour towards others, except for the need to respect their liberty.

In light of the modernisation, development and expansion of commerce in much of the developed world, where the market reigns supreme and consumer choice is paramount, the overriding value has been the pursuit of desire and pleasure. The power and seduction of marketing has convinced consumers and the youth that the path to happiness lies in more purchases and more possessions. Where will this self-centred value lead us? As we become more successful and more developed as nations and societies, there is ever increasing inequality and disparities in our society. The stink of corruption is everywhere, in governments, in banking and in other sectors of the service economy.

How do we view the indifference of our leaders in dealing with many issues, including dealing with tragedy and hardship around the world. Whether it had been the genocide in Kosovo and in other regions since Kosovo, or in dealing with illegal migrants on boats in the sea of South East Asia, Australia or Italy, or the killing of civilians in war zones, the indifference appears to be on a global scale. This indifference is in stark contrast to the promotion of liberty and individual rights by developed nations.

Surely the path to happiness through charity, compassion and justice which are in the teaching of the great religions, and by Aristotle and Confucius can be a guidance for our future.

As graduates of IMU I urge you to live the vision of IMU, which is to excel and serve, and be caring, ethical individuals who are willing to take a leadership role in your respective communities. Take the path to happiness through a life of virtue, that will also reward you economically.

Your experience and learning at IMU have been merely the start towards a life of learning. It will be a good basis for all of you to become educated individuals who will be valued by your communities.

I wish you all well in your future endeavours.