



Malaysia

Dato' Seri Hishammuddin Tun Hussein
Minister of Education



Hishammuddin Tun Hussein, born August 1961 is the fourth child of the third Prime Minister of Malaysia, Tun Hussein Onn. He received his early education in Malay College Kuala Kangsar (MCKK) and went on to continue his A Levels and tertiary education in the United Kingdom. Hishammuddin has had a long and distinguished career in the Malaysian Government. A practicing lawyer by profession, he has experiences from junior posts in the Ministries of International Trade and Industry and Primary Industries to a full Ministerial post in Youth and Sports in 1999. Forty-six year old Hishammuddin has been Malaysia's Minister of Education for the past 4½ years. Earlier this year, Hishammuddin launched an ambitious revamp of the country's Education Systems. The Blueprint focuses on reducing the disparities between urban and rural schools, enhancing the position of teachers as well as creating centres of excellence and autonomy. Hishammuddin balances his position in Government with a challenging role as the leader of the Youth Wing of the ruling political party – United Malays National Organization (UMNO) and its 800,000 members. As a Muslim in a multiracial and multi-religious nation – a microcosm as Asia's great faiths and civilizations including Buddhism, Hinduism, Christianity, Confucianism and Islam, Hishammuddin is a passionate believer in Malaysia's hard-won ethos of tolerance and moderation.

Inclusive Education: The Way of the Future

My heartiest congratulations to the Council of International Bureau of Education (IBE) for proposing the 177th Executive Board and the 34th Session of the General Conference of UNESCO for organizing the 48th Session of the International Conference Education (ICE). This conference is timely and is a good platform to promote dialogue among Ministers of Education to highlight some interesting and complex issues as well as to engage audience in debating about the future of inclusive education.

Inclusive education is regarded as providing education for all students regardless of their strength and weaknesses to become part of the school system. It also involves pupils with special education needs. Recently, the drive towards inclusive education reflects a community which can nurture, develop and use the skill, talents and strengths of all its members. Thus, the term is viewed as transforming education systems and other learning environments in order to respond to the diversity of learners. Its aim is to enable teachers and learners to feel comfortable with diversity and see it as a challenge and enrichment of the learning environment.

The provision of quality education for all should be evident in our policy on inclusive education. Those who are vulnerable to marginalization and exclusion, including the poor or disadvantaged, girls or women, orphans and children affected by HIV and AIDS, the disabled persons with different capacities, the minorities and indigenous populations, the migrants and refugees, children of foreign workers, and juvenile delinquents should not be segregated in the quest for knowledge and better quality education. I believe all member countries have



drawn up series of action plans in providing inclusive education for these groups of citizens.

The Malaysian Education Development Master Plan 2006-2010 emphasises on access to and equity of quality education. It is our responsibility to provide and ensure equal opportunity in attaining quality education. In providing equal opportunity to quality education, the Master Plan adopts a dual approach, levelling the playing field and accelerating excellence of education institutions. With strong political will, Malaysia will continuously pursue the EFA goals through concrete development action plans on early childhood care and education, gender and youth issues, skills and lifelong learning, literacy and increasing participation rate.

Like other countries, Malaysia is working hard to achieve the EFA goals, especially in strengthening the literacy skills among the pupils. With the expansion on policy of compulsory primary education and free public education, almost all primary and secondary school pupils have access to schooling. Various literacy intervention programmes to strengthen their literacy skills are provided, including children of the indigenous communities who may experience difficulties in becoming literate in the National language. In addition, Malaysia has developed a new primary school syllabus for children from indigenous communities which incorporate their culture into the syllabus to better prepare them for effective learning in school.

In terms of intellectual growth and capacity building, the needs of the academically inclined students are secured through the provision of a school curriculum that develops students' interests in the fields of science, technology and arts. Acknowledging that one size does not fit all, the Malaysian educational system is also responsive to the less-academically inclined. For these groups of students, the system provides an alternative pathway to learning within the mainstream with the inclusion of vocational subjects in regular schools to motivate them to learn and develop skills to prepare them for the workforce.

In meeting future demands of a workforce that is skilled, competent, knowledgeable and versatile, I believe that students need to continuously develop thinking, learning and living skills. Efforts to strengthen students' learning skills are evident in the school curriculum to prepare them for changes that will occur due to the developments in science and technology and lifelong learning. To facilitate this, I shall continuously uphold the rights of all students to new knowledge, skill and experiences. This represents the underlying reason for equipping all urban and rural schools with ICT facilities - so that all students have access to ICT and develop skills to seek information through technology.

I believe this conference would engage the Ministers and policy makers in enriching discussions and active debates on inclusive education. I wish all delegates and participants a rewarding and benefiting experience and hope that new knowledge and insights on inclusive education would enable the policy to be expanded, thus improving the quality and delivery system of education.

Last but not least, I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate UNESCO particularly the International Bureau of Education for providing a platform for policy makers and to all individuals responsible in improving the quality and delivery of education in the 21st century.