

**146th IPU Assembly and related meetings,
Manama, Bahrain**

General Debate: Promoting peaceful coexistence and inclusive societies: Fighting intolerance

My Fellow Parliamentarians,

1. Malaysia is unique as we are a truly multiracial and multi religious nation. The key point to note is that the minorities in Malaysia are substantial, not nominal and yet we have found a good formula for living peacefully together.
2. Based on racial demographics, Malaysian citizens consist of Bumiputra of whom the Malays are a majority at 67.4 % of the population, Chinese at 24.6% and Indians at 7.3% and others 0.7%.
3. As for religions, the demographics are Moslems at 61.3%, Buddhists 19.8%, Christians 9.2%, Hindus 6.3%. What is more interesting is the fact that you have racial groups in different religions too. For instance, it is not uncommon to have a Malaysian Chinese who is a Christian and not Buddhist. Interracial marriages are accepted and are much more common than a decade ago.
4. I believe there is no equivalent country in the world with these demographics. As such, I humbly stand before you, to offer and share some views and policies on the main theme of this IPU Assembly, promoting peaceful co-existence and fighting intolerance.
5. Malaysia ranks 18th out of 163 countries in the Global Peace Index. Compared to some of our ASEAN neighbours, we are ahead of Indonesia, Laos, Cambodia, Thailand, Philippines and Myanmar. Malaysia is also ranked the 4th most peaceful nation in the Asia Pacific Region after New Zealand, Singapore and Japan.
6. How did we achieve this? At the social and communal level, citizens instinctively practice mutual respect, with a heavy dose of tolerance and understanding, and, it

may sound trivial, but a deep love of good and diverse food have helped to cement our multiracial societies. We also rally around our sporting activities such as badminton and squash. Besides being a serious foodie nation, where does all these communal goodwill stem from? I believe that the goodwill of Malaysians primarily stems from common Asian values found in Islam, Buddhism and Hinduism, all of which promote universal values of peace and respect.

7. The quest for a Malaysian identity is an ongoing project, and thankfully is one of the main preoccupations of the younger set of Malaysians.
8. On the governmental side, the efforts to build a more united Malaysia has had mixed results. In the aftermath of terrible race riots in 1969, successive Malaysian governments have utilised the tool of positive discrimination to try to shape a more equal society between races. The rationale of social justice is absolutely correct but the implementation of these policies has to some degree been subverted by corruption and abuses of power by political elites.
9. Having said that, the things that successive governments in Malaysia have done right are as follows:
 - pushing for a national identity with the Rukun Negara, or the National Principles
 - promoting good values on national unity via the education system and state media
 - safeguarding religious freedom
 - recognising and implementing fair race and religious holidays for all
10. On the economic front, the discovery of oil in the 1970s with the adoption of liberal economic policies since the 1980s, Malaysia has had good economic growth which resulted in the creation of a bigger middle class for all races.
11. The middle class tend to be more tolerant and progressive, shunning most forms of extremism. Of course, the distribution of the economic pie could have been better without corruption, but we cannot deny that a sizable middle class has been successfully created.
12. However, Malaysia is not perfect and we are not immune to extremism. Of late, we have seen more emphasis on religion and race politics during recent elections. This is a worrying global trend and when coupled with the deployment of fake news via social media, it can be a potent challenge to democratic norms.

13. To counter these challenges, we will need to educate our people to be wary of fake news, and at the same time demand giant social media companies to be much more responsible in filtering and removing fake news.
14. While we should try to regulate social media, the real policy work is still to focus on the younger generation and continue to deliver quality education that can transform them into more discerning and critical citizens. Civic mindfulness, and social media moderation training are must haves.
15. Malaysia also needs to continue to integrate all races into all public and private sectors in a fair and equitable manner. The only true way to combat intolerance is to ensure every race and religious groupings have a fair share of the economy working harmoniously together.
16. Thank you for your kind attention and thank you to our most gracious host, Bahrain for your incredible hospitality. I hope my sharing of the Malaysian experience in promoting peaceful co-existence and fighting extremism can be of some use to all.