

On 22 October 2012 the Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (National University of Malaysia) conferred the degree of Honorary Doctorate of Philosophy for contributions in International Relations (Ijazah Kehormat Doktor Falsafah <Hubungan Antarabangsa>) to Dr Surin Pitsuwan, Secretary-General of ASEAN.

**ACCEPTANCE SPEECH OF SECRETARY-GENERAL OF ASEAN
UPON RECEIVING AN HONORARY DOCTORATE OF PHILOSOPHY FOR
CONTRIBUTIONS IN INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS**

"I feel very fortunate: I have the best of both worlds, a Harvard education, and a UKM degree!"

Chancellor of the University *Duli Yang Maha Mulia Yang Mulia Yang di-Pertuan Besar Negri Sembilan*
Tuanku Muhriz Ibni Almarhum Tuanku Munawir

Chairman of UM Board of Directors, Prof. Emeritus Dato Dr. Zawawi Ismail

Prof. Sharifah Hapsah, Vice Chancellor

Excellencies

Parents

Graduates of UKM

Distinguished Guests

Ladies and Gentlemen

I am privileged to join you this morning in this august hall which is dedicated to the memory of the late Prime Minister Tun Abdul Razak, one of the founding fathers of the Association of Southeast Asia (ASEAN). I am also pleased to be here to celebrate another year of your achievements as a university and to extend my congratulations to all the young men and women who graduate today and who will start a new chapter in their lives and careers. Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia has played a big part since its founding in developing the potential and talent of thousands of young people who come from so many different parts of the world. The Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia is a great university, a well-known centre of excellence in Malaysia and the world and you continue to make big advances in the field of education and research.

I am particularly pleased that this distinguished university is also now so firmly and clearly an integral part of our universe of education. You are not only educating future generations of Malaysians but you also open your doors for educational opportunities to thousands of students from all over the world. The university has become a successful microcosm of opportunity and openness and access to good education. You are moulding not only good citizens of Malaysia and ASEAN but our future citizens of this world as well.

The Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia bestows a great honour upon me this morning with an Honorary Doctorate for contributions to International Relations. I accept this award with great humility and pride.

I feel very fortunate indeed: I have the best of both worlds, a Harvard education, and a UKM degree!

More than anything else this award also confers recognition on the importance of the idea of regional cooperation and regional integration. This award honours the efforts of many of our regional leaders, the officials and the many stakeholders of ASEAN - including those that are no longer with us – who, over the last 45 years, kept the peace in our region through their wise and far-sighted policies. Such an award honours the recipient, but it also surely honours and raises the profile of international relations and of ASEAN. It is therefore their wisdom we are also celebrating with this award.



Over the last five years my life experiences have been enriched by my work as ASEAN Secretary-General in the world of regional integration and regional community building. We – the peoples of the ten member states comprising over 600 million people—are being knitted together daily by aspirations and values, and relationships amongst ourselves and with our neighbours near and far alike into One Community of nations and peoples.

The importance of regional cooperation and integration, like the importance of universal education, should not be underestimated and should be well understood. There are many benefits that we enjoy and many opportunities that we create for our peoples through cooperation among

ourselves. But regional cooperation does not happen overnight. In the case of ASEAN it has taken vision, sweat and tears to come to where we are today. In the last 44 years ASEAN has built an enormous web of agreements and plans which have bound all of us together. It has not been an easy journey considering the fact that 50 years ago Southeast Asia was a region of violent conflict.

Let me take this opportunity to publicly acknowledge with deep gratitude and admiration the work and visionary commitment of our leaders and our officials, many of whom are no longer with us, who worked hard and tirelessly to bring us to where we are today – and to be part of an organization that is respected by the world.

The genius of ASEAN is also seen in the alliances ASEAN has built with its dialogue and development partners all over the world that have brought untold benefits and opportunities. ASEAN has always been committed to dialogue and discussion amongst ourselves and with others to promote peace, amity and prosperity.

We have also learnt that in a world that has increasingly grown more complex our strength as a community is our diversity and our respect for this diversity. UKM is a great example of this principle of diversity and tolerance. The ASEAN Charter, which came into force in 2008, spells out our commitment to democracy, diversity, development, gender equality, and human rights.

We have to build upon this strength.

But for all our achievements ASEAN is not yet a “perfect union”. It will take many more years, much more sweat and tears, and many more compromises and sacrifices to become a community where ASEAN citizens can live and work freely in any part of the region in the conditions of democratic peace and practices where there is social justice regardless of gender, race and religion, where there is access to education, and where richer neighbours can – in the words of former Prime Minister Tun Dr. Mahathir Mohamad – “prosper thy neighbours”.

This is the message of regionalism that I want to convey to the university as a great institution of learning, to the teachers amongst you, to the parents and to the graduates: that ASEAN is an on-going piece of work and it will require you representing the people of ASEAN – students, schools and universities, the business community, the NGOs, the media, etc – to do your part in building an ASEAN community in partnership with our leaders and officials.



This is because the next phase of ASEAN's development and community building will require the more active participation and involvement of the people. Centres of excellence like Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia and the young men and women they educate and train can contribute to the deeper integration of the region. Universities throughout the region in the Erasmus spirit can initiate or increase their collaboration with one another: research, student and faculty exchanges are among the many things you can do for the community and to benefit from the opportunities. If you don't already have ASEAN Studies in your curriculum then you should establish one. There are many things that you can do and aspire to do in the spirit of ASEAN.

Imagine that one day in the not too distant future that as a Malaysian you can study in Myanmar, work and live in Vietnam, invest and do business in any part of the region, and travel and work freely as an ASEAN citizen on an ASEAN passport. Our ASEAN Political-Security Community, the ASEAN Economic Community and the ASEAN Social-Cultural Community can only be realised faster if you become part of this aspiration and work in progress.

Let me conclude by reiterating my sincere thanks to a university whose ideals, values, and diversity I share. I am privileged to be part of you and will endeavour to promote UKM. To the graduates let me say how fortunate you are for having studied in the classrooms of a great national university. You are now armed with the values and skills to build your careers, to be a good citizen of your country, and a good ASEAN citizen if you are from this region, and to be good global citizens.

Thank you.