

**OPENING ADDRESS AND OFFICIAL LAUNCHING OF  
ALLIANCE FOR HEALTHY CITIES (AFHC) GLOBAL  
CONFERENCE AND GENERAL ASSEMBLY 2018**

**BY**

**YAB DATUK PATINGGI (DR) ABANG HAJI ABDUL RAHMAN  
ZOHARI BIN TUN ABANG HAJI OPENG  
CHIEF MINISTER OF SARAWAK**

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**BORNEO CONVENTION CENTRE KUCHING SARAWAK**

## **1.0. Preamble**

1.1. First of all, I wish to extend to all of you a warm welcome to Sarawak. I am delighted that you have chosen Sarawak to hold this global conference and generally assembly this year.

## **2.0. Healthy cities**

2.1 Let me start with the background of the history of our communities. Almost all the communities started as fishermen and farmers, as well as hunter-gatherers. As such, all our communities grow from small and closely-knit families. We have many small communities, of at least 27 different indigenous ethnic groups, spread throughout Sarawak along the coast and rivers towards the interior. We learn to survive by adapting to our natural environment which eventually defines each of our unique cultures. We learn to live together in peace and harmony and happiness as we cooperate and work together. In every culture in Sarawak today, you will find that we try to be nice and help each other whenever we can.

2.2 Some of our communities have grown into townships and urban centres by virtue of trade with the outside world. In larger communities, we lose some of the close and warm human relationships that we enjoy in small communities. The clear attractions to urban life are jobs and money which allow us to buy many services to pamper ourselves. Those providing the services have to work very hard. As working in urban centres involves hard work, people tend to neglect their health. Urbanites need to try to live a more balanced life. Eat well, exercise and sleep well.

2.3 There is a campaign to remake Kuching as a city with a soul. It is precisely such attempts as to infuse a soft touch that makes a hard-pushing city into a safe, happy and healthy place to live.

### **3 Government and the Private Sector**

3.1 The private sector likes to think that the government usually interferes with its economic pursuit. They develop their land according to commercial considerations. During an economic boom, they become ambitious and overdo things. They construct more buildings as property prices rise in the hope of making lots of money. Property speculation pushes prices so high that poor people cannot afford to buy the houses for their families to live in. We see many properties left unused.

3.2 It is not for the government to try to balance the property market. Market forces should bring about adjustments to supply and demand and prices. Sufficient information of the market is required for the private sector to manage itself. The government can help to enable relevant information to be made available to the market in a timely and regular basis through legal requirements for individual developers.

### **4 City Planning**

4.1 As towns grow, they naturally adapt to the increasing needs for facilities. But not all towns grow into big cities. Big cities grow because they are properly designed for growth as attractive places to live, work and play as healthy cities. Cities are big, vibrant and healthy by design.

4.2 We have realised the need for proper city designs for towns and cities in Sarawak. For a start, we are going to design Kuching to be a competitive and healthy city. A city that is competitive and healthy is vital for economic progress because it attracts investments and talents and a desire to make life better for everybody. Kuching has grown to be a big and thriving city in Sarawak that it is today through the foresight and efforts of my predecessors.

4.3 The challenged for the present Government is to elevate Kuching City to the next level of development. We are now

coming to the limits of city development as presented by existing infrastructure of Kuching City. The existing public transport system consisting of buses, taxis and private cars is beginning to create regular traffic jams at particular junctions and times – a situation which is stressful because we are not used to traffic jams of any form here.

4.4 For the future growth of Kuching City, we need to rethink our public transport system. We may need to introduce the bus rapid transit (BRT) and the light rail transit (LRT). The idea is not only to solve existing traffic problems (which is relatively minor), but to prepare the basic infrastructure of the city for significant growth in the coming years, with a doubling of its population and growth of its economy.

4.5 A good public transport system will allow efficient connectivity of integrated wholesome townships. Each township shall be self-contained and provide proper housing for ordinary people made affordable with the support of good jobs and business opportunities to achieve a good standard of living. Integrated wholesome townships are a more balanced approach to ensuring that housing is affordable for ordinary people.

4.6 As we plan for the future, the question of economics always comes in. The role of a good government is always to make good investments today to ensure economic growth in the future so that ordinary people can pursue a healthy and happy life. There are business models which we can look at to ensure economic viability of projects. One is to take advantage of the rise in asset value in the surrounding areas of the new public transport system. The benefit from the rise in the asset value should be used to offset some if not all the cost of the construction of the public transport system.

## **5 IT and City Health**

5.1 We cannot ignore the fact that the Information Technology is very much part of our daily lives today. IT has been good in telecommunications and information sharing, making the big wide world into a small global village. It is good that all trivial information is instantly available making our daily lives all the

more efficient. There is more instant communications between family members and friends especially over long distances among global nomads. There is tele-advice and tele-medicine to bridge the knowledge gap over geographic distances.

5.2 However, too much information may stress us all as well. We know that the information on our actions is being stored somewhere in the cloud by some global giants. More unnecessary information is also being pushed to us, either to sell or to steal from us. We are now probably living in a world where machines know more about us than we know about machines or about each other. Even as we communicate, we do so with a machine in faces, even in a face-to-face situation such as we are having in this conference.

## **6 Smart Cities**

6.1 City councils are trying to improve efficiency through the automation of basic amenities. By making information available, city dwellers can waste less time in waiting at traffic lights or looking for vacant car park spaces. By leaving menial jobs to machines, human beings can use their extra time to develop better social relationships with one another.

6.2 The concept of Smart Cities also deals with the integration of economic activities with the natural environment and cultural activities. This is a more encompassing approach to living which is more akin to our traditional way of living whereby communities are always doing things together. Smart City Living helps to tie the feet of ordinary people firming on the ground, as they go soaring into the digital stratosphere.

## **7 Improving Social Welfare in Urban Centres**

7.1 Cities grow because of the division of labour and specialisation. This is what Adam Smith has taught us. But he did not alert us to the problems of relative isolation and stress in our specialisation in our own narrow fields of business. He did not tell us that the mainstream economy ignores people who are deemed not useful to economic efficiency and growth.

7.2 Healthy living in the city should be the ambition for both successful city dwellers and those who are discarded by economics. We therefore enter a world that is not entirely economics or business. We have to deal with the social aspects of city design and the organisation of social groups who provide critical but invisible services to the needy in urban centres. I understand this is an exciting but difficult topic of which I shall leave it to the assembly of experts here to deliberate in this conference.

## **8 Concluding Remarks**

8.1 There are many topics concerning healthy cities which I don't think I should attempt to comment on all of them, no matter how lightly. I hope I have said enough to convince you that the Government of Sarawak understands the importance of healthy cities and fully supports the concept. This Government is happy and proud to be with you in this journey of promoting healthy cities.

8.2 A healthy city is a successful city; a successful city may not be a healthy city. The challenge for all of us is to build successful and healthy cities. In Sarawak, we are embarking on this journey. While the journey is not easy because there is too much politicking, the path ahead is clear. We have to find ways and means to overcome obstacles and politics and get into the business of healthy living.

8.3 I wish you all the best of luck in your deliberations and hope that you will have a healthy time in Kuching City.

Thank you.