

ACCEPTANCE SPEECH BY YAB DATUK PATINGGI ABANG HAJI ABDUL RAHMAN ZOHARI BIN TUN DATUK ABANG HAJI OPENG, CHIEF MINISTER OF SARAWAK AND PRO-CHANCELLOR SWINBURNE UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY, SARAWAK CAMPUS IN CONJUNCTION WITH AWARD OF THE HONORARY DOCTORATE OF THE UNIVERSITY BY SWINBURNE UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY, MELBOURNE, AUSTRALIA

VENUE OF GRADUATION CEREMONY: MELBOURNE EXHIBITION & CONVENTION CENTRE, MELBOURNE

20TH DECEMBER 2018

SWINBURNE UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY, MELBOURNE

Ladies and gentlemen,

1. First and foremost I would like to record my thanks and appreciation to Swinburne University for conferring me with the award of an Honorary Doctor of the University. It is indeed an honour for me to be here today in Melbourne to receive the award.

Ladies and gentlemen,

2. Sarawak as a Malaysian territory on the Island of Borneo is a part of the association of Commonwealth countries that has a long association with Australia. Sarawak, Land of the Hornbills, was once ruled by the White Rajahs and was later handed over to the British to become a British Crown Colony in 1946. During the Second World War Sarawak was briefly occupied by the Japanese and Australia were among the countries that had sent military forces to Sarawak to liberate it from the Japanese at the end of the War.
3. Australia has been a place where many Sarawakians come to study and even our two previous Chief Ministers were educated in Australia under the Colombo Plan. Sarawak's association with Australia has endured to this day, and when we in Sarawak were looking for

partners to assist us in the development of our tertiary education and human resource development, Australia, Swinburne in particular, was there to lend us a helping hand. Swinburne overseas campus was established in Kuching in the year 2000, thanks to Australia's generosity and thanks to the people in Swinburne for their willingness to assist us in Sarawak to develop our human capital.

Ladies and gentlemen,

4. To be honest, I was somewhat thrust into politics some 40 years ago. The rest, as the say, is history.
5. I have served in various ministerial capacities in the Sarawak Government from tourism to public housing to agriculture to industrial development. I can confidently say that I was there in the past 40 years to see and did my bit to steer Sarawak from an agriculture and commodity-based economy to one that was diversified into manufacturing and industrialisation.
6. When I took over the helm as Chief Minister in 2017, I have the conviction that Sarawak has to move away from conventional economy to one that is driven by digital technologies. We have to follow the rest of the world towards the digitalisation of our economy which present vast opportunities for us beyond the shores of Sarawak. We are setting aside a big budget to upgrade our digital infrastructure to enable 4G services to be available in all parts of Sarawak to support our vision of turning Sarawak into a strong digital economy by the year 2030.
7. Sarawak has a population of about 2.8 million and this is not sufficient to support a strong domestic economy and we have to turn to the rest of Asia with a population of 3 billion as markets for our products, agricultural products in particular. We still have large tracts of land which landowners can develop to produce food. I believe with smart and precision farming, and IoT, coupled with good marketing

strategies and logistics we can penetrate the Asian food market and become a net exporter of food.

Ladies and gentlemen,

8. We are also trying to reduce our carbon footprints and work towards developing a green economy, preserve and protect the natural environment especially our rainforest. We have stopped issuing permit to large scale logging and setting up of oil palm plantation on state land. We are very keen to develop a sustainable timber and oil palm industry, develop non-timber products, set aside more and more forest areas as national parks and develop them into tourism assets.
9. We have already developed a substantial portion of our energy generation by harnessing the hydro potentials of our rivers. Our industries are now run mainly by renewable energy from our hydro dams. We are also carrying out research into the development of hydrogen as green energy from water with the hope that one day we can benefit from an economy that is built around the use and production of hydrogen as an emission free fuel.
10. We believe we have the potentials to transform our economy away from conventional into a digital economy with all the strength that we have. Our political stability, our effort in earnest towards good public governance, our abundant natural resources, our vast renewable energy potentials and our strategic location at the centre of Asia are our strong points that we must capitalise on to transform the economy and upgrade the quality of life and living standard of our people.
11. We know what we want to do for ourselves in Sarawak is a very tall order. But we count ourselves fortunate that we have partners like Swinburne that is willing to help us in our effort to train and develop our human resource potential as part of our overall transformation plan.

12. I am proud to say that Swinburne Sarawak is a very successful partnership between the Sarawak State Government and Swinburne University of Technology to provide Australian degrees at affordable prices in Malaysia. Since being established in 2000, Swinburne Sarawak has graduated over 7000 students with 65% from the State of Sarawak, providing a strong mechanism for developing and retaining local talent.
13. Swinburne Sarawak has created a significant social and economic impact for the State generating around 1,400 jobs and 150 million ringgit per annum to the Sarawak economy and producing about 700 graduates each year.
14. The State Government is working closely with Swinburne Sarawak in our quest to make it a leading university in Malaysia by 2025. We are working hand in hand to develop a 'world class' campus in Kuching with around 5,000 students and a research ecosystem that links closely with Swinburne.
15. To conclude let me thank Swinburne once again for the award and may it may be a motivation for me to work harder to make Swinburne Sarawak a premier university in Malaysia and in Asia.
16. Thank you.