

Exclusive Interview with

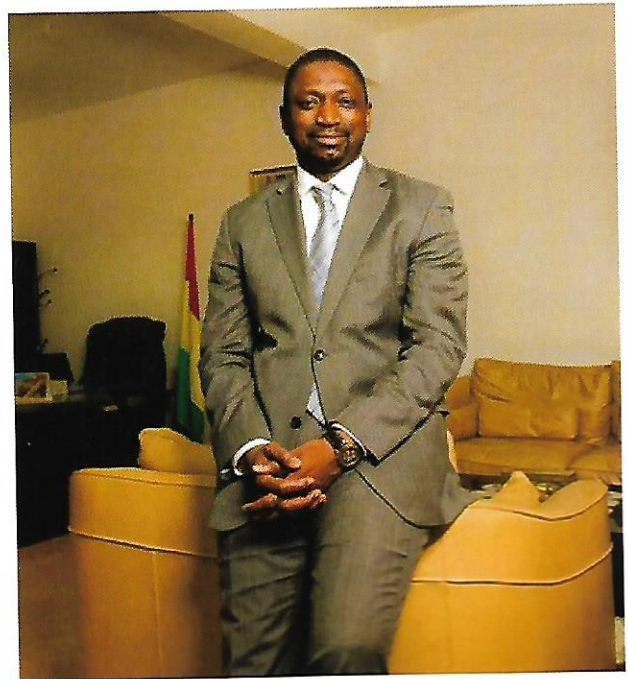
PROF. DATO' DR. KOUTOUBOU MOUSTAPHA SANO

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Saudi Arabia (Ph.D, AIKOL 1996)

Dr. Maulana: His Excellency, could you recount your journey from a postgraduate student of IIUM to becoming the Deputy Rector of the university.

HE Prof. Sano: First, I would like to say, I celebrate as an alumnus of IIUM. I am proud to be part of the IIUM alumni. Coming to Malaysia in 1993 was a major turning point in my academic and professional career. It was a divine grace from God that continuously impacts every aspect of my career to this day. I joined IIUM as a young lecturer in November of 1993. There were many renowned professors teaching at the University at the time, and I felt I needed to prove that my appointment was based on merit. I pursued my PhD at the Kulliyah of Law in 1994 and completed it in 1996. I was asked by the department of Usul Fiqh to help different departments, such as Usul and Usulul Fiqh, Quran and Sunnah Studies and the department of Usuluddin and comparative studies under the Kulliyah of Islamic Revealed Knowledge and Heritage, KIRKHS.

I supervised 45 PhD students pursuing different areas of studies, and I am pleased to say that some of them have gone on to become professors themselves. Two years later, I was promoted from lecturer to Assistant Professor. In 1996, I met the requirements to become an associate professor. Three years later, I achieved



my life-long dream to become a full professor at 35 years old. Some say I was actually the youngest full professor at the university. I was also appointed as the head of the International Students Unit, the deputy dean for International Students Affairs, the director for International Relations and Promotions Office, and the first director of International Institute of Muslim Unity.

I was the recipient of a Quality Service Award from IIUM from 2000 to 2001, being the very first recipient of this award, alhamdulillah. I have learned a lot from this long journey, having experienced being a member of the IIUM Senate for ten years, as well as being a member of the IIUM Majlis and of other organizations. Along the way, I was able to produce several books that were published in a number of Muslim countries. Among them being the Encyclopaedia of the Usul Fiqh history, as well as the Encyclopaedia of Hajj and Umrah.

In 2004, I was appointed as the first Deputy Rector for Internationalization and Innovation. I would like to point out that I owe a great part of my achievements to the different managements of IIUM that supported my participation in national and international conferences. This has increased my interaction with renowned scholars from all over the world, allowing me to refine my academic contributions. My appointments from 1995 to 2009 had taught me a lot, both academically and administratively.

The 5th of January, 2009, marked another milestone in my professional career. I was appointed by the Transitional Authority of Conakry to head the Ministry of Religious Affairs. I later became a cabinet minister for the Ministry of International Trade and Corporation for five years. Thereafter, a Minister of Diplomacy. I have also become an advisor for the president for almost 5 years. After that, I became the Secretary General of the International Islamic Fiqh Academy OIC, in Jeddah, becoming the youngest staff for that position.

Dr. Maulana: We recently heard about the memorandum of understanding between the International Islamic Fiqh Academic (IIFA) and IIUM, particularly with the Kulliyah of Islamic Revealed Knowledge and Human Sciences. What are the benefits that IIFA can bring to IIUM and the Muslim Ummah?

HE Prof. Sano: IIFA, the International Islamic for Academics, was founded by the 57 members of OIC. As we all know, the OIC was established particularly to deal with the Ummah's political issues. However, as the time progressed, we saw the need for a body that can look into the intellectual issues of the Ummah such as the issues of halal and haram, fatwa and thought, including any arising issues in Shariah, such as economics, medicine, and vaccines. So, this body was established to clarify any new contemporary issues and is a platform for scholars to discuss the issues of the Ummah on an annual basis. Thus, IIFA is an academic institution, a platform

to gather scholars who come from different countries and universities. Now, the IIFA appointed me as Secretary General. To move the organisation forward, at least during my tenure, I plan to structure the relationship between the scholars in all institutions and the IIFA. This collaboration may include scholars from diverse backgrounds such as economics, engineering, as well as experts in areas such as medicine and physics. I believe that the MOU will facilitate the link between the IIFA task force and the scholars at IIUM through activities such as the gathering of scholars in conferences hosted by the IIFA. So given the IIUM's track record and the fact that it has produced talented scholars and intellectuals, this collaboration will definitely benefit both institutions and the ummah at large.

Dr Maulana: How can one apply to become a member of IIFA? Does he need to go through you as the Secretary General of IIFA?

HE Prof Sano: No, an individual cannot be the member of IIFA. The person must be a representative of that country with a solid qualification. A special committee selects representatives for a country and verify their credentials and authority.

Dr. Maulana: Being in the OIC yourself and addressing issues on Fiqh and the challenges of the Ummah, what advice can you give to Muslims in countries who do not have their representatives in the OIC, such as the Muslim minority in Myanmar and the Philippines? Who can they refer to for Fiqh issues? What role can you play in their situation?

HE Prof. Sano: My proposal to the University is to provide scholarships for students from these countries. We have to adopt a long-term approach, which is by educating the community. Educational qualification not only helps them gain respect from their community, but their knowledge and skill allow them to participate in building their nation. Thus, this will prevent them from being marginalized. So, education is key to these issues and success. I can help allocate the fund to IIUM, and IIUM can help sponsor more international students.

Dr. Maulana: We are going to celebrate our 40th Anniversary of IIUM. In your view, what are the IIUM's achievements that you have seen so far? And what is your suggestion for IIUM to achieve its maximum potential?

HE Prof. Sano: One obvious success is the presence of a large number of IIUM students, including international students, especially during



the tenure of Prof. AbdulHamid AbuSulayman. Allahyarham had managed to increase the number of international students and established various Kulliyah. Many of them have become successful in their respective countries. A number of the alumni are now, for example, ministers and successful businessmen. I believe that the main factor of the success of our graduates is their adherence to Islamic values and their strong faith. Furthermore, IIUM provides a unique and high-quality education. Students have the option to pursue double degrees with a unique system of education. This is not practiced in many Muslim countries. IIUM must be credited for its ability to maintain the quality of its education and da'wah activities. I believe that our students will be very useful for the Ummah if we mould them as good professionals and train them as experts in various fields of knowledge. They will be an asset for the Ummah and humanity as a whole.

Dr. Maulana: IIUM has certainly produced many local and international academicians over the years. Do you see any difference in the scholars during your time and now?

HE Prof. Sano: From my observation, there seems to be a smaller number of renowned academicians and international students. The reputation of the universities depends a lot on the quality of academicians. I think we must maintain 30% of international academic staff and students. The more international students we have, the more international recognition we will receive.

This is why, I think we need to open more seats for international students. When we sponsor international students' education, we actually

help to raise the educational status of the Ummah and affect global change. If the Malaysian government, for example, provides scholarships for international students, I believe this will be valued and remembered, as well as repaid in a multitude of ways.

Dr. Maulana: what advice can you give to the younger generation?

HE Prof. Sano: First, we must understand that we are living in a challenging age with a lack of Islamic values. In facing this reality, we have to apply wisdom or hikmah, not confrontation and violence. That is the tradition and heritage left by our Prophet. We need to have unshakeable conviction to our faith, to the truth of our religion, our values and Islamic identity.

Dr. Maulana: What is your message to IIUM alumni around the world?

HE Prof. Sano: Don't forget IIUM, especially the values, the ethos of IIUM, the vision and mission of IIUM that has been inculcated in you. Remember the lessons you acquired at IIUM. Remember that IIUM does not teach extremism, and IIUM is looking forward to your achievement and your story of success and finally, remember Allah for His blessings and kindness. Also, remember your friends for being with you, this country, Malaysia as your host. Remember your teachers for sacrificing their time to guide you and your parents who always make du'a for you.

Dr. Maulana: Thank you, your Excellency, for sharing your wisdom and we wish you the best in your work.