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Humanising Education The BOSNIAN Experience in MALAYSIA

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Foreword

By The Constitutional Head



I am delighted to write this foreword for a book that records individual experiences of successful graduates of the International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM) whose engagement in social, economic and political life of Bosnia and Herzegovina clearly demonstrates the effectiveness of education imparted at IIUM. The University is based on the principles laid down in the Quran and the *Sunnah* with English and Arabic as the medium of instruction which promotes its global perspective. Almost all the countries of the world are represented in its student population.

The IIUM has the vision of restoring the dynamic and progressive role of the Muslim *ummah* in all branches of knowledge. The IIUM brings students of all cultures together and showcases the power of the faith in Almighty Allah and inspiring the believers to do the righteous deeds for the benefit of humanity. This book records how the alumni of Bosnia and Herzegovina bear the burden of righting the wrong and helping develop the society.

This is more than a book. It is a tale of friendship and a story of togetherness. It is homage to the power of pursuing knowledge as a community, and the ways and manners that allow the graduates of the IIUM to connect, share and look forward. The IIUM buzzes with students of all cultures laughing, praying and pursuing knowledge to help develop their own societies. As several essays in this book reveal, the students of Bosnia and Herzegovina found themselves in a melting pot of cultures and personalities, who had roots in about more than 100 countries. They felt joy in their company, and they left counting the days to re-visit their alma mater.

The University, from its very inception, has been integrating projects, alumni mentoring, research, community engagement and cross-cultural exchanges with classroom experiences. This programme fosters critical thinking,

effective communication, creativity, teamwork, a strong spiritual and ethical framework, and the resilience and persistence to help societies develop. This is what students need to thrive in today's complex, ever-changing world and this has been well exemplified by IIUM alumni from Bosnia and Herzegovina. The University has been innovative and adaptable, integrating hands-on learning experiences, and exposing students to the technologies that gave the graduates an edge over others. Not well known to many, the University gave the opportunity to students to do major in one field but add a second major in another, thus preparing them to face world challenges better. The alumni of Bosnia and Herzegovina represent a continuum of countless brilliant, morally upright and accomplished alumni whose records are archived in their communities.

The University, *Insha-Allah*, will continue to work innovatively and much more effectively in helping students to graduate from this garden of knowledge and virtue, to change the world for the better. I appreciate the efforts of the editor and contributors of this publication for documenting the achievements of the IIUM and its alumni. I look forward to due recognition of the IIUM from the world community for its efforts in redefining international education for the future.

Her Majesty
Seri Paduka Baginda The Raja Permaisuri Agong
Tunku Hajah Azizah Aminah Maimunah Iskandariah binti
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Constitutional Head, International Islamic University Malaysia

Foreword

A Warm Heart from Bosnia for a Far Land of the Malay Nation

By Grand Mufti Emeritus of Bosnia

By the end of 20th century, Bosnia was not overly known to the world. Indeed, it was covertly hidden by the beauty of her face of Princess and her spirit of Islam. The unveiling of her face shocked the world and the bringing to light her spirit drew the attention of her brothers and friends around the world. Her coming out on the world stage was quite an event which highlighted the end of the 20th century as much as it had marked the beginning of it where the First World War started in Sarajevo in 1914. Once again, the Bosnian city of Sarajevo was recognised as the Jerusalem of Europe and the Muslims of Bosnia earned the title of the champions of freedom. No relevant activist for human rights could stay indifferent to the besieged Sarajevo, which lasted longer than the besiege of Stalingrad from 5 April 1992 to 29 February 1996 (1,425 days).

The Muslim World was stunned by the scenes of genocide against a tiny autochthon Muslim population in Europe. No Muslim cause in the 20th century united the whole Muslim World as the Bosnian cause. The world nations of Islam were competing with each other in extending their sympathy and aid in whatever way they could do. No one thought that the Malay nation of Islam from the far land of Southeast Asia, Malaysia, would be in the front line of the best brothers and the best friends of Bosnia. But they, the Malay Muslims, did so. They spare no effort to be one of the best brotherly hand, one of the best humanly hearts, one of the best friendly hosts for Bosnian students and refugees.

Since the occasion here are the Bosnian (Malaysian) students, I am honoured to have been giving the opportunity to extend my deepest and warmest gratitude to Malaysia for a historic contribution to the enlightening of the spirit and mind of the Bosnian youth who are now occupying prominent places in the Bosnian society and state, thanks to the Malaysian righteous hand and good

heart. It would take a long list of names of good people of Malaysia from the government and university officials to the common people who helped the Bosnian students to achieve their educational goal and their career success in their country as well as who helped the Bosnian refugees to find the safe haven from the persecution of war. Out of fear that we might miss someone who deserves our deep gratitude, we would like to ask them to forgive us for not thanking each and every one by his/her name but to say to all of them from the bottom of our heart one big

THANK YOU - TERIMA KASIH (تریما کاسیه) Malaysia!

As to my fellow Bosnian students of whom I am very proud, I would like to tell them that they should be grateful to Malaysia not in the way of feeling to owe anything to anyone but in the way to extend their righteous Bosnian hand and their good Bosnian heart to the others who might need their help as our Malay brothers and friends have been righteous and good to us from a far land with a warm heart.

If anything, Malaysia is a telling proof that the furthest distance is not a hindrance for the warm hearts to be closest in love and respect.

May Allah Almighty bless Malaysia!

Mustafa Ceric, PhD. Grand Mufti Emeritus of Bosnia

Foreword

By The Rector of IIUM

I have been to Bosnia a number of times before in the effort to forge relationship with universities in Sarajevo. The experience was generally a pleasant and memorable one. Not only in terms of academic collaboration and understanding but also from a historic-cultural perspective. Bosnia then had just recovered from a bloody war experience that left several indelible marks on its physical surroundings as well as on its psychic. Bosnia was almost at a brink of destruction, but managed to miraculously bounce back out of sheer tenacity and the commitment to defend its sovereignty come what may. We left the country full of admiration and lessons learnt as to how fragile a nation can be if the citizens are divided, a case that resonates well to our country, Malaysia.

It was not until 2019, that I had a chance to visit Bosnia again following an invitation to speak at the iconic Sarajevo Business Forum (SBF) then. This time I wore a different hat, as the sixth Rector of the International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM). It was barely a year since I took office in July 2018. The invitation came from one notable Amer Bukvic, the leader of SBF and also an alumnus of IIUM. I thought this was a sheer coincidence but was grossly mistaken. This I found out while attending the Forum and interacting with many more Bosnian brothers and sisters there. Soon I realised that virtually all of them had some sort of relationship with IIUM. The memories that I had from previous visits gave way to different perspectives built around what "internationalisation" is in the context of education. This was affirmed as I shared my "new" thoughts with other luminaries during the remaining days of the Forum.

On coming back home to Malaysia, I immediately sought an appointment with His Excellency the Bosnian Ambassador to Malaysia, who is also an alumnus of IIUM. This cannot be a coincident anymore which led me to suggest the making of this volume. It is intended to be a testimony of what IIUM is to the Bosnians and vice-versa while they were studying at the Garden of Knowledge and Virtue. It has been almost three decades now since

the war in Bosnia broke out in the early 1990s. At least a generation has gone by and it is long enough a period to recall and reflect on the past experiences from various angles and aspects so that it could be better understood, analysed and gleaned from in the search for deeper meaning and interconnectedness in building a better future.

It was precisely with this in mind that I suggested to His Excellency the Bosnian Ambassador in mounting the book project, compiling the writings and thoughts of who's who coming from the IIUM Bosnian fraternity. I am made to understand that there are many of them, and the Ambassador confirmed this when he unanimously agreed to support the project. It will be opened to all IIUM alumni from Bosnia who are keen to take part in this first-time unique programme. It is aimed to clarify three major issues: (a) the experiences at IIUM during the period of stay, (b) what was singularly learnt or striking, and (c) what significant change was brought to the home country, Bosnia. Obviously, there are more that could be shared, but the basic idea is to gauge what is the role of education in general to affect "internationalisation" (within the understanding of IIUM). And more specifically, how does it "humanise education." Both these ideas are central to the raison d'etre of the University which may be able to help more effectively in defining the experiences that students, from other countries in particular, during their period of stay in IIUM in time to come.

The idea of this book is therefore to inspire the same among alumni from other countries. And in this case, it is Indonesia where two titles are now being published. To this end, I am made to understand that a couple of other countries are contemplating to do the same. Collectively, all these first-hand experiences are platforms to provide a richer documentation that not many universities are able to replicate. Indeed, this book hopes to further push the idea of "internationalisation" as an effort to rebuild one's own nation of origin, rather of the host nation, when the alumni decide and give back like the Bosnians have ably exemplified. In fact, Bosnia and Herzegovina could be one of the convincing models based on my initial observations. Thus the tagline "humanising education" that IIUM has adopted to advance further the cause of "internationalisation" by embracing rahmatan lil alamin. It may be just what is needed as IIUM grapples with new and larger issues ahead of the Covid-19 pandemic!

As a parting note, I would like to take this opportunity to thank all those involved in making this book a success. In particular, His Excellency the Ambassador of Bosnia and Herzegovina to Malaysia who unhesitatingly lent his support to do the book, more so to take keen interest in its progress from time to time. I am also grateful to the President of IIUM Alumni Chapter of Bosnia for her commitment towards this project. So too the Alumni Relations Division at IIUM in owning this project and ensuring its fruition despite the difficult time of the coronavirus disruptions. To the IIUM Press, we acknowledge the effort to complete this publication as part of the IIUM contribution to Kuala Lumpur World Book Capital 2020 agenda.

Last but by no means the least, the University's foremost gratitude and utmost thank you to Her Majesty the IIUM Constitutional Head for not only graciously penning the Foreword, but equally significant in officially launching the title on September 30th, 2020. May Allah SWT bless Her Majesty's kind gestures and efforts in taking IIUM to greater heights in its services to realise a better and just world moving forward.

Dzulkifli Abdul Razak Professor Emeritus Tan Sri Dato' Rector, International Islamic University Malaysia 28 September 2020

Preface

Before the year 1992, I had not heard of the country named Bosnia and Herzegovina. Then in April 1992, the media started to report about a war that had erupted there. The ethnically rooted war was between the three ethnic groups – Bosniaks (Bosnian Muslims), Serbs and Croats that lasted until December 1995, killing around 100,000 people and displacing around 2.2 million people. The biggest victims were Bosniaks. Thus, the war is also said to be an aggression against them and the country. The war is said to be the most devastating conflict in Europe after World War II.

As the world mourned over the tragedy, the Malaysian government was among the first countries to provide an emergency relief response by taking in refugees. Young Bosnians were offered to study at the International Islamic University Malaysia. It continued even after the end of the war with the hope that these young people will return to help rebuild their country. Fast forward 25 years, they have returned to Bosnia and are holding good positions in their community. They are playing significant roles in rebuilding their country.

Humanising Education: The Bosnian Experience in Malaysia is a collection of stories and reflections by many Bosnians who have studied at the International Islamic University Malaysia during and after the war. It is a compilation of personal narratives of how they learned to adjust themselves not only to a very different climate and environment but also the culture; how they struggle with fulfilling their responsibilities as students all the while not knowing how their family and friends are doing back in their war-torn home. It is also stories of their journey to expand their horizons and forge a lasting friendship and network with fellow students not only from Malaysia but also from all over the world. As of 2020, IIUM has produced 100,000 alumni from 125 countries. From Bosnia there are 335 alumni.

Though these are reflections of personal experiences, other alumni who read this book will undoubtedly be transported back to their time in IIUM, reminiscing their own memories, like myself. They will find themselves back in the classrooms, *mahallahs* (hostel), the library, the canteens, all those late

nights spent completing assignments, last minute revisions for exams and the bitter-sweet memories of graduating together and parting ways.

On the other hand, non-alumni will be able to discover the lives of IIUM students through generations. The pain of leaving one's home and family behind only to make a new home in IIUM: "home away from home". The warm stories of brotherhood and sisterhood built with students from all around the globe through encounters in and out of classrooms.

This book serves as an excellent source of motivation for today's youth who are going through their own personal struggles with their studies and transition into adulthood. It paints a meaningful picture of the ups and downs of the beautiful journey called life; a true testament of the verse, "Indeed, with every hardship comes ease" (94:6).

IIUM's vision is to provide education that will shape holistic world citizens who will make a difference by contributing to the improvement of not only themselves and their families, but as well their communities and beyond. That is reflected in the size and global character of the University's alumni population and their diverse contributions. Bringing IIUM to the world, our alumni are the University's unofficial ambassadors of hope, advocating IIUM's core values. On the same note, IIUM Alumni Relations Division acts as a bridge between the University and its alumni; effectively advocating, communicating and engaging the latter's involvement in the development of their alma mater and its future alumni.

As such, we hope to get the readers' support in our quest to promote the idea of Humanizing Education which is priceless in getting an education that will shape students to be socially responsible citizens and to contribute towards a sustainable development of the world. We are in this quest for a better sustainable world together. After all, it takes a village to raise a child! Come and join us!

Siti Aisyah Ibrahim Spahic Alumni Relations Division International Islamic University Malaysia

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Humanising Education The BOSNIAN Experience in MALAYSIA

The Bosnian experience in Malaysia is an anecdotal recollection and heartfelt reflections by IIUM Alumni from once war-torn Bosnia. The authors shared their memories in IIUM and reflected on how the knowledge and experience gained have helped them in scaling new heights in their chosen career.

The authors represented different periods spanning pre and post Bosnian war - a few came before the commencement of the war, some during the war, and others joined IIUM after the war ended. At the onset of this project, all have since left to serve their motherland in more ways than one. Falling back on the education gained in IIUM, their contributions to their home country Bosnia range from being teachers and educators; shaping young minds and building personalities, to being industrious corporate figures, cultivating and developing the economy of Bosnia to new heights.

This publication chronicles individual experiences of some of the many successful Bosnian IIUM alumni whose engagement in social, economic, and political existence of Bosnia and Herzegovina has irrevocably demonstrates the essence and core values needed to shape the country anew. When it comes to envisioning the best needed transformational effects and impacts of education in transforming a given country or a society, the long-term vision and foresight of the Malaysian political leadership then is thus correctly justified when the decision to facilitate the enrolments of our Bosnian brothers and sisters was made. This move has simultaneously forged deep and lasting constructive ties between Bosnia and Herzegovina and Malaysia.



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