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## The Islamic Worldview, Knowledge and Civilization

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The International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM) is a public university. Its main campus is located in Gombak, Selangor with its Center for Foundation Studies situated in Petaling Jaya and its medical-center branch in Kuantan, Pahang. The university was established in 23 May 1983.

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### Implementing the Vision and Mission of International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM)

The International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM) was established in 1983. Its vision is “to become a leading international centre of educational excellence which seeks to restore the dynamic and progressive role of the Muslim Ummah in all branches of knowledge and intellectual discourse”. Its mission is abridged in the notions and values

of integration, Islamization, internationalization and comprehensive excellence.

As a philosophy, system and physical reality, IIUM is to be turned into a garden of knowledge and virtue.

The creation of IIUM was envisioned as a turning point in the evolution of the Muslim postcolonial consciousness and maturity. Throughout the twentieth century, the Muslims were quick to try every existing development model so as to stand on their own feet and become active protagonists in civilization making processes worldwide.

However, nothing seemed to genuinely work. The efforts were continuously hindered, both from inside and outside, as a result of which little authentic headway was effected.

The predicament was most evident and disturbing in the realm of knowledge and education. Therein the Muslims were still extolling others and other people's histories, cultures and traditions. The systems and personnel were carefully enacted and employed from within and without for the projected agendas.

It was perfectly clear that the colonial masters knew what they were doing. Colonization, in fact, never ceased to exist. It was only moved to another level and its *modi operandi* diversified. The dynamics of colonialism as a thought and ideology, and colonization as a phenomenon and process, functioned unabated.

Knowledge as power ("*scientia potentia est*", an aphorism commonly attributed to Sir Francis Bacon), and education as the fundamental precondition for political development, empowerment, democracy and social justice, were targeted and manipulated most.

Education as the most powerful weapon which can be used to change the world – to paraphrase Nelson Mandela's assertion – had to be divested from the Muslims' domain if colonization was to be perpetuated and its latest forms adequately operationalized.

Thus, educational institutions with a local and international character, mushroomed across the Muslim world to serve the purpose. Myriads of

servants and collaborators were engaged to accomplish and sustain the crusade.

Consequently, the biggest Muslim dilemma was that of ideas, and the most devastating crisis that of the mind and thought.

The Muslim religious and civilizational at once identity and well-being were at stake. The Muslims were increasingly alienated from their beliefs, values, culture, history and traditions. More tragically, they were estranged from each other and their own selves.

Ignorance in the name of knowledge and education was propagated, as was backwardness in the name of progress, and inhibition and subdual in the name of empowerment and freedom.

Hence, the creation of IIUM was meant to signify the beginning of a new era and a new intellectual and educational paradigm in the Muslim world. It was to be the inauguration of a new culture, which together with several similar institutional initiatives elsewhere in the Muslim world, was intended to become the prime mover behind a Muslim renaissance.

Some of the greatest minds, institutions and even governments of the Muslim world, representing a wide spectrum of the Muslim civilizing and enlightening reality, stood behind the IIUM project.

It's no wonder, therefore, that the original plan to establish IIUM was revealed by no one else but Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad, then 4<sup>th</sup> (currently 7<sup>th</sup>) Prime Minister of Malaysia on 12 January 1982 after deliberating with the country's Education Minister, senior government officers and senior academics from local universities.

Nor is it a surprise that the University's presidency is sometimes headed by the country's Education Minister (currently, such is the case for the third time). Certainly, there can be no conflict of interest in those appointments, nor do they violate university autonomy. Some issues may arise only with such people as fail to see the big picture – as it is happening nowadays following the appointment of the incumbent Education Minister, Dr Maszlee Malik, as the University's seventh president

(<https://www.thestar.com.my/news/nation/2018/09/13/group-gives->

maszlee-seven-days-to-quit-activist-leave-iium-post-or-face-firmer-resistance/).

The philosophy and mission of IIUM was inspired by the outcomes of the 1977 First World Conference on Muslim Education in Makkah where over three hundred Muslim educationists from forty different countries participated, and where the true meaning, significance, challenges and prospects of Islamic education were deliberated.

IIUM, it goes without saying, is the undertaking of Malaysia as a nation, and as an increasingly influential player in Muslim affairs. IIUM is its gift to the Muslim world. It is one of the country's many contributions to Islamic awakening. All Malaysians, therefore, should be proud about it, and the Muslims worldwide grateful and appreciative.

That is why the University proudly calls itself "International" and "Islamic", and does everything it can to justify both its nomenclature and the people's expectations, locally and abroad. It is a calling and responsibility whose load weighs heavily on the shoulders of the members of the IIUM community.

The IIUM identity is unique. It is like no other local and international institution of higher learning. It was meant to lead and inspire, to be a benchmark, rather than to benchmark itself against others. It was planned to be in a league of its own, to be an exceptional and exemplary centre of teaching, learning, research and publication, rather than just another university.

This by no means is a sign of bragging. It is but a hint of how difficult challenges lie ahead and how massive responsibilities everyone involved must bear. The matter is not about privileges, but duties and accountability.

Hence, persistently and impetuously bracketing IIUM together with any educational and institutional model, either in the East or the West, is not a healthy trend. On account of the significance of its existential mission and purpose, IIUM should always adopt a policy of "neither eastern nor western (*la sharqiyyatin wa la gharbiyyah*)" ([al-Nur, 35](#))

(<http://www.ipsnews.net/1996/06/education-religion-malaysia-boasts-a->

[harvard-of-the-east/](#); also: <https://www.thestartv.com/v/dr-maszlee-i-ii-stay-as-iium-president-until-it-becomes-oxford-of-muslim-nations>).

The subject of rankings, which as an obsession is reaching a fever pitch – albeit predominantly in developing countries – should also be reconsidered. Closer scrutiny shows that after all these years, all things considered, it brought the University little or no actual benefit.

Deliberately localizing, de-spiritualizing, de-relevantizing and constricting IIUM in any way is a crime against its honourable history, soul and identity. Such is the quintessence of IIUM that it should rule and not be ruled. It should not be associated with individuals, institutions and political parties, for it is bigger than all of them.

IIUM should exist and operate above the level of relative dimensions of life, in that what it personifies and strives for is universal, timeless and transcendent. Everyone from the top to the bottom in the complex academic and administrative hierarchy – including students and alumni – should possess the feeling of a proud servant.

One of IIUM's ways to fulfill its demanding mission and purpose is the introduction of a set of university required courses. Chief among them is a Course titled "The Islamic worldview, knowledge and civilization", UNGS 2090. The Course is a requirement for all undergraduate students regardless of their academic fields of study.

The objectives of the Course are to explain the meaning and practical significance of the Islamic and other worldviews; to describe the theories of knowledge and civilization in the Islamic scholarship; to identify and respond to the epistemological and civilizational challenges confronting the Muslim Ummah in the light of the Islamic monotheistic worldview; and to provide a blueprint for Islamic civilizational awakening.

The Course aims to furnish students with the appropriate fundamental cognitive orientation rooted in the Islamic vision of life and reality. It gives students a comprehensive Islamic framework of concepts and outlooks as regards the world, existence, man, universe and religion.

Thus equipped, students can delve into the orb of knowledge, which is to discover and fully come to terms with the true nature and disposition of things, events and experiences. Knowledge surpasses the bounds of a

quantifiable understanding, familiarity with and experiencing of corporeal facts and information.

Indeed, knowledge is about discovering, comprehending and living the truth at the physical and metaphysical planes. It is about discovering, knowing and appreciating the creation and its Creator. Ultimately, it is about knowing one's self. However, this can be possible only when it is done on the basis of the bona fide and trustworthy spiritual as well as mental model of life and its ontological reality (worldview).

Finally, with an understanding of the authentic worldview and epistemology on board, students should be able to find themselves in the grand scheme of things. They should also be able to start thinking of subsequently genuinely contributing to the civilization making processes. The worldview and knowledge, undeniably, are two most pivotal ingredients in such processes. Accordingly, comprehension, values and creative thinking are the main outcomes of the Course in question.

That is so because civilization is not to be perceived as any complex society that is characterized by a number of socio-politico-economic qualities and features. Nor is it a material advanced state of human society alone. As a net result of man's stay on earth, civilization ought to be more than that.

Islam views the idea of civilization along the lines of its spirituality. No wonder that Islamic civilization, both as a concept and sensory reality, differs fundamentally from other civilizations. This is especially so with reference to modern Western civilization which is based on, and whose trajectory is charted, principally, by the philosophical notions of materialism, humanism, naturalism, hedonism and agnosticism, all of which stand at the diametrically opposite point of what Islam as a universal code of life propagates.

Islamic civilization deifies neither man nor nature. It exalts and glorifies Almighty Allah alone. It regards everything in its proper light and gives everything its proper due. Hence, some of the main characteristics of Islamic civilization are universalism, comprehensiveness, pragmatism, balance and divine origin as well as purpose.

Islamic civilization honors greatly man and respects the capacities of nature. However, it sees inappropriate and plain wrong elevating them beyond the parameters of their respective humanness and naturality.

The Muslims must avoid the trap of de-spiritualizing, distorting and even anthropomorphising the concept of Almighty God, and venerating and deifying either man or nature, in the name of civilization and science, as it is the case today especially with the modern Western civilization.

In Islam, civilization is a means, rather than an end. It exists in order to foster and facilitate the people's earthly vicegerency (*khilafah*) mission, promoting all human interests related thereto. It also testifies most assuredly to the extent of the people's successes, or failures, in their life undertakings.

As a means and carrier of the spiritual, Islamic civilization serves a higher order of things, meanings and experiences. It subsists for the sake of man and his noble mission and aim. It is not that man exists for the sake of civilization, though it is man and his multiple abilities and talents that generate it.

It follows that the main ingredients of Islamic civilization -- as highlighted and elaborated by al-Maududi -- are the concept of worldly life, the aim of life, the fundamental thoughts and beliefs, the training of individuals, and the collective system.

As a widespread misconception, "people think that science and manners, arts and crafts, ways of social life, style of culture and conduct of politics, or a conglomeration of these things, is called 'civilization'. In fact, this is not civilization, these are the results and facades of a civilization. In other words, these are not the roots of civilization, they are branches and leaves. The value of a civilization cannot be determined by its external appearances and its fancy dresses" (al-Maududi).

Thus, IIUM students are encouraged, guided and taught to recognize themselves as the servants of the ultimate truth and the agents of a constructive change. Their respective professional spheres are nothing else but avenues for contributing goodness to the world. They connote the physical contexts wherein most notable otherworldly concerns are attended to as well.

The aspect of the Islamic worldview in the referred to University's core Course enlightens students' minds and souls and expands their spiritual and mental vistas, the knowledge aspect motivates, guides and enriches them, while the civilization aspect stimulates them to become a productive force and asset, rather than liability, in any subsequent milieu that they may find themselves in.

The subtle interconnection between the worldview, knowledge and civilization attests to the verity that the constituents of civilization, as the goals of all individual and collective meaningful and visionary enterprises, cannot be bought, nor copied. They must be produced by long-term comprehensive and synchronized visions and programs, which in turn must be based on, and permeated with, a sound spiritual and intellectual underpinning. Without a doubt, civilization production procedures entertain no mediocrity, shortcuts, haste, short-sightedness and lethargy.

Students are likewise educated and so, anticipated to become not only excellent professionals, but also excellent and accountable men and women. The latter is more comprehensive and gratifying. It is an anomaly that a good educated man, or woman, becomes a bad professional. Whereas a great many good professionals are proven to be at the same time bad spouses, bad parents, bad neighbors, bad friends, bad colleagues and bad citizens. The most consequential man-generated catastrophes and crimes in the world are ascribable to educated – often highly – professionals and experts. In the past, people were wary of the ignorant; today, they are wary of the “educated” and “knowledgeable”.

Certainly, there is more to life than being a professional. The aim of education should thus be the preparing and training of the young minds and souls for life and its numerous dimensions and challenges. The outcome of educational systems should be the creation of holistic and complete personalities with correspondingly matured minds and purified souls.

Doing otherwise denotes a betrayal of the highest order. People totally surrender between a third and a quarter of their precious lifespans to the prevalent educational systems. It is therefore grossly unfair and unjust if

they emerge therefrom one-dimensional and ill-equipped for what awaits them in life, and if they emerge misguided, delusional and incompetent.

The human past and present reality is a witness that such takes place when educational systems are designed to serve people and their often hidden political and economic agendas. In that case, the systems aim to sustain themselves by producing generations of brainwashed, simple-minded and superficial servants. The true knowledge and education, steeped in actual wisdom, ingenuity, dynamism, creative and critical thinking, are not welcome in such environments. The truth is not welcome either.

By means of diverse theoretical and practical measures, IIUM students are made cognizant of what all that entails as far as being fully immersed in their professional lives is concerned. The question that persistently hovers over the spiritual and intellectual being of students and lecturers is how to integrate the principles and values of Islam pertaining to its epistemological “trinity”, namely the worldview, knowledge and civilization, into the various scientific disciplines.

That, surely, is the threshold of the ideas of Islamization and integration of knowledge as two cornerstones of IIUM’s identity. At the core of such a comprehensive strategy reside the mentioned university required courses in general, and the Course on the Islamic worldview, knowledge and civilization in particular, as one of the University’s affirmative measures aimed at achieving its noble objectives and purpose.

The Course is a microcosm of the whole set of the University’s mandatory core courses and, by extension, of its pursuit of the Islamization and integration of knowledge mission.

The entire process culminates in students’ application and integration of the knowledge acquired into the rest of their courses and activities in their respective Kulliyyahs (Faculties). This is done in harmony with other theoretical and practical steps designed and implemented at the Kulliyyah level.

The efforts of the university required courses and the Islamization and integration efforts of the Kulliyyahs complement each other. Both are indispensable. Neither can succeed without the other.

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