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**SPEECH BY**

**HIS EXCELLENCY TUN DATO’ SERI UTAMA**

**AHMAD FUZI BIN HAJI ABDUL RAZAK**

**YANG DI-PERTUA NEGERI PULAU PINANG**

**FOR**

 **10TH FORUM ON CRIME & POLICING THEME : CRIME IS COLOUR BLIND**

 **22ND JUNE 2023 (THURSDAY) 9.30AM**

 **JEN PENANG GEORGE TOWN BY SHANGRI-LA, PENANG**

Bismillahirahmanirahim.

**YBhg Dato’ Dr. P. Sundramoorthy**

Chairman, 10th Forum on Crime & Policing in Malaysia,

**YBhg Dato’ Ong Poh Eng**

Advisor, 10th Forum on Crime & Policing in Malaysia,

**YBhg ACP Dr. S. Parusuraman**

Representing Inspector General of Police, PDRM,

**YBhg SAC Rahim Ra’ais**

Representing Penang Chief Police Officer, PDRM,

**Yang Berusaha Ms. Karen Cheah Yee Lynn**

President, BAR Council Malaysia,

**YBhg Professor Dato’ Dr. Adeeba Kamarulzaman**

Commissioner, Global Commission on Drug Policy,

**YBhg Profesor Dato’ Sr. Dr. Omar Osman**

Vice Chancellor, Chief Executive Director

DRB-HICOM University of Automotive Malaysia,

YBhg Dato’ Seri-Dato’ Seri / YBhg Dato’-Dato’ / Professors / Dr.,

Media,

Ladies and gentlemen.

Assalamualaikum Warahmatullahhi wabarakatuh.

1. I would like to thank the Centre for Policy Research and International Studies (CenPRIS) USM, Penang State Government, Malaysia Crime Prevention Foundation (MCPF Penang), and the Penang State Contingent Police (PDRM) for inviting me to address and officially launch this 10th Forum on Crime and Policing in Penang this morning.

2. I am deeply honoured for the opportunity to speak before such a distinguished assembly of experts dealing with crime and policing present here today.

3. The topic before us and which is also the theme of the Forum, is “Crime is Colour Blind”.

4. Conceptually, the word colour blind in the context of the Forum today, simply means “not prejudiced, discriminating or distinguishing on the basis of colour or race.”

5. This topic is not entirely new and has long ignited passionate debates worldwide and within our own society in Malaysia.

Ladies and gentlemen,

6. While it is important to acknowledge the undeniable disparities that exist between the various criminal justice systems, I am of the firm view that crime itself is colour blind. My understanding of colour blind here is not limited to race and ethnicity alone as mentioned above, or as typically stereotyped and portrayed in society, but also covers social, political and religious beliefs, educational attainment and economic status. Indeed, it is the complex interplay of social factors that contribute to the manifestation of crime in different communities.

7. The notion that crime discriminates on the basis of race and ethnicity perpetuates harmful stereotypes and deepens the divisions within our society. It oversimplifies the multifaceted nature of crime and undermines our ability to address its root causes effectively. We may even risk overlooking the underlying societal issues that drive crimes and divides society. By embracing a colour blind perspective, we can foster a more nuanced understanding of crime and works towards creating a fair and just society for all without fear or favour.

8. I believe it is crucial for us to recognise that crime transcends racial and ethnic boundaries. High crime rates recorded in certain communities are influenced by various socioeconomic factors, not inherent to racial predisposition. These include poverty, lack of education, unemployment, substance abuse and family instability. All these represent just a few examples of the complex web of factors that can contribute to criminal behaviour.

Ladies and gentlemen,

9. To combat crime effectively, it is important that we focus our efforts towards addressing these root causes. By investing in education, creating job opportunities, implementing social welfare programs, addressing substance abuse, providing rehabilitation and treatment programs, amending outdated laws and policies, we can uplift communities that are disproportionately affected by crime. Such measures can help break the cycle of crime and provide the individuals involved with the resources and support they need to make positive choices without resorting to crimes.

10. I believe that the practice of racial and ethnic profiling and discriminatory practices that exist in some societies around the world, should have no place in Malaysia, dedicated as we are, to promoting a fair and unbiased criminal justice system for all in society.

11. It has been advocated by many that whilst crime is colour blind, policing or enforcement should also be colour blind. In this regard, the role of civil societies is crucial. Civil societies can play a positive role towards preventing and eliminating any form of biases that permeate law enforcement agencies and judicial systems in their respective country. Ensuring equal treatment under the law, regardless of race or ethnicity, is not only a matter of fundamental fairness but also a prerequisite for building trust between communities and the criminal justice system. By actively working to eliminate systemic stereotyping within the criminal justice system, civil societies can make a huge contribution towards creating a society where justice is blind to the colour of one's skin, social, political and religious beliefs, educational attainment and economic status.

Ladies and gentlemen,

12. History has shown that some criminal justice systems have been shaped by systemic racism and prejudice. Minorities, particularly people of colour, have often faced disproportionate targeting, harsher sentencing, and limited access to adequate legal representation. Malaysia has been fortunate in being able to withstand and avoid such discriminatory practices. However, knowing human failings, this is not something that we should take for granted. Indeed it is crucial that we prevent at all cost any such negativity from permeating our criminal justice system.

13. In this regard various prudent measures should be strategically implemented to address the possibility of any inequities that may contribute to the perpetuation of unjust disparities within the criminal justice system. Embracing a colour blind perspective would certainly help us challenge the systemic barriers that exist whilst advocating for fairness and equal treatment and opportunities for all.

14. In embracing a colour blind perspective however, it is important that we be mindful of the need to address any symptoms and/or root causes of disparities and social injustices in the criminal justice system and society at large. Recognising that crime is colour blind does not mean dismissing the reality of disparities and inequalities that persist in our society. It is crucial to understand and address the historical and contemporary factors that contribute to these disparities. By promoting equality of opportunity and dismantling systemic barriers, we can create a more inclusive and just society that empowers individuals of diverse background to thrive.

15. Adopting a colour blind perspective would also enable us to focus on the experiences and needs of crime victims, regardless of their racial background. Crime affects individuals indiscriminately and victims come from diverse communities. By recognising the shared vulnerability of victims and providing support and resources to all who have suffered as a result of crime, we may be able to foster empathy and solidarity among diverse populations.

Ladies and gentlemen,

16. Let me now dwell a bit on the so-called white collar and cyber crime. Many myths exist about stereotyping crime and criminality. The perception is that people who commit white collar crimes such as scams, fraud, embezzlement and insider trading are less harmful or dishonest than those who commit street crimes including robbery, snatch theft, and murder. This is indeed a misconception. It is vital for us to recognise that these crimes, motivated more by greed than out of desperation, can lead to serious harm, with often lasting consequences to society as a whole. Some of the largest companies and corporations in the world have been found guilty of committing such crimes which threaten the social fabric of the society just as much, if not more than, any street crime.

17. Cybercrime, which includes hacking, cyber harassment, phishing, identity theft, credit card fraud, scams and cyber porn have emerged as a very lucrative activity, even better than drug trafficking.

Nearly 90% of all business crime cases are now classified as cybercrime with losses totalling RM2.23 billion based on figures for 2019 to June 2021. Almost everyone who goes online is a potential victim, the most vulnerable being the younger tech-savvy generation. Fraud continues to be the most common occurrence and accounted for approximately 70% of all reported cases in 2021. The irreversible trend toward digitalisation and its expansion has provided an ever widening field for the perpetrators of cybercrimes. They are truly colour blind as no one knows who they are. Such perpetrators also do not care who the victims are.

18. In Penang alone, 1285 cases of cybercrime were reported between January and May 2023; this is a 62.3% increase over the same period last year. The majority were females at 52.5%, aged between 21-50 years (78.6%), and engaged mainly in the private sector (72.5%). Chinese accounted for 43% followed by Malays at 39.2%.

Ladies and gentlemen,

19. Environmental crime is yet another crime that deserves our serious consideration. Such crimes which include deforestation, illegal wildlife trade, marine resource depletion, air pollution and hazardous waste dumping have significant consequences for both human and animal life.

20. Environmental crimes are becoming rampant these days and claim the livelihood of many communities around the world. Increasingly, environmental crime is also tied to transnational organised crime networks, thereby making it harder to track, prosecute, and prevent such conduct. It is indeed crucial for us to tackle these crimes so as to ensure that our planet remains safe and sustainable for future generations.

Ladies and gentlemen,

21. In this day and age, the role and content of the media, both mainstream and social, are extremely influential in shaping our perception of crime and offenders. Even the portrayal of criminals in movies including on Netflix can have an impact on our youth. Media representation can at times be biased and sensationalised, leading to prejudice and discrimination.

22. Such representations can even lead to misconceptions about the root causes of crime, making it difficult for us to address them and ultimately only perpetuate harmful stereo types. It is therefore crucial that the media be held more accountable and responsible in undertaking fact-based reporting whilst seeking to investigate the underlying reasons for crime and criminal behaviour.

23. The issue of rehabilitation and treatment of offenders is also an important dimension of the criminal justice system that aims to address the underlying causes of criminal behaviour and provide offenders with the support they need to change their lives. Rehabilitation and treatment programs can include counselling, education, job training, substance abuse and other forms of support aimed at helping offenders reintegrate into society. The goal of rehabilitation and treatment is to create safe communities by reducing recidivism rates, and providing offenders with a second chance to lead productive and fulfilling lives. We need to provide them with a purposeful mission. In this regard, I applaud the useful role played by supportive groups like Alcoholics Anonymous in helping offenders return to the right path.

Ladies and gentlemen,

24. Let me conclude by stating that crime is indeed colour blind. We live in a colourful world and we must not paint it dark nor destroy it, intentionally or otherwise. The beauty of diversity is the essence in making our society unique and colourful. The sanctity of diversity must be protected and defended at all cost to ensure that God’s creation are all equal and treated with dignity, respect and honour. There should be no discrimination based on the colour of one's skin, social, political or religious beliefs, educational attainment or economic status. Only by adopting a colour blind perspective can we move beyond oversimplified narratives and address the underlying socio-economic factors that contribute to crime.

25. I believe that, as the conduct of crimes becomes more sophisticated and transformative, with the government and enforcement agencies struggling hard to catch up with the ever creative minds and endless innovation of technologically minded criminals exposed to AI and the like, it is incumbent upon us to not only appreciate that crime is colour blind but to work towards creating a fair and just society where equality of opportunity is upheld, systemic barriers are dismantled and with every individual having the chance to thrive. Let us therefore strive to develop a society that is not blinded by stereotyping, but instead focus on the adoption of the principles of justice, fairness and compassion in the conduct of our daily lives.

26. With these words, and with Bismillahirahmanirahim, I have great pleasure in officially launching the 10th Forum on Crime and Policing in Malaysia with the theme “Crime is Colour Blind”.

Thank you.

Wabillahitaufik Walhidayah,

Wassalamualaikum Warahmatullahi Wabarakatuh.