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ENHANCING GLOBAL COLLABORATIONS



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Fourteen years ago on the historic date of 11th September, one of mankind's worst tragedies altered the landscape of worldwide global peace, subsequently prompting higher education players to promote ideas on sustainability based on global peace to ensure the continuity of life for mankind. This is a date, which we would prefer to forget, but in fact we need to face it by pooling our knowledge to enhance the spirit of humanity, sense of love and togetherness that transcends borders.

USM views this incident as a catalyst that requires serious focus in defining sustainability, just as our decision to become a sustainability-led university forced us to refine our definition of the concept, viewing it not only within the context of caring for the environment, but also in sustaining the close relationships of global mankind with a view towards maintaining peace and harmony, and co-existing through the strengthening of collaborations.

Only through interaction, communication and enduring relations will we be able to promote knowledge and understanding, and subsequently benefit from our strengths in order to develop knowledge – especially in Science and Technology, Health and Medicine, Engineering as well as in the Arts, Culture, the Humanities, Social Sciences, religion, languages, Education for Peace and other branches of knowledge through the celebration of diversity and mutual enhancement of each others' strengths.

This is the aspiration of USM – to strengthen existing collaborations, which currently reveal USM as having established relations either in the form of Memoranda of Agreement, Memoranda of Understanding as well as relations in academic affairs, research and student mobility encompassing 36 countries of which the largest numbers involve institutions from Indonesia, Japan, Thailand, Australia, India, South Korea, Pakistan and the United States of America.

USM has also succeeded in attracting a sizeable population of international students especially through our postgraduate programmes, with the total approaching 5,000 at one point whereby many of them came from Iran, Indonesia, Iraq, Nigeria, Pakistan, Jordan, Yemen, Libya, India, Saudi Arabia, Thailand, Bangladesh, People's Republic of China, Palestine, Sudan, Syria, Egypt and several other countries.

Our researchers have also embarked on various collaborations to produce academic writings with international academicians of which a large number are from India, Japan, United Kingdom, United States of America, Saudi Arabia, Australia, Iran, Indonesia, Iraq and Bangladesh. They have publications in various areas such as Chemical Sciences, Medical Sciences, Pharmacology, Biochemistry, Material Sciences, Physics, Mathematics, Engineering, Agriculture and Environmental Studies.

This simultaneously reflects our close relationships in the various research areas where our strengths are projected across international boundaries, even as we explore collaborations with institutions from countries with which we have prior to this had no significant relations, such as the Czech Republic, Germany, Kazakhstan, Turkey, France and Russia and some of the Gulf states like Qatar and UAE. We would like USM's researchers and academicians to collaborate with others not only in our established areas of strengths such as the previously-mentioned list which include trans-disciplinary collaborations; but also to embark on new frontiers of knowledge and community engagement programmes within the global context.

Towards this end, USM has become the pioneer in establishing a number of global networks such as the Asia-Pacific University Community Engagement Network (APUCEN), which is currently active in various community engagement programmes within the ASEAN region from Thailand to Indonesia and advancing into the Asia-Pacific region and other countries in the future. The latest effort by APUCEN and its network has provided for a humanitarian relief effort to assist the earthquake victims in Kathmandu, Nepal. We are also working with a university in Thailand to distribute specially modified wheelchairs through local expertise to cater to the specific needs of the physically challenged in Malaysia.

We hope to expand on this effort in the future on a wider context and involve higher educational institutions all over the world, whereby a mechanism can be developed to enable academicians, students and interested individuals to offer voluntary services via the development of knowledge, Science and Technology and even arts and culture. This is in line with the knowledge transfer efforts under the auspices of the Ministry of Higher Education through the CAPS Knowledge Transfer, is expanding knowledge and social networks, including the holistic promotion of green technology. Similarly, we are actively attempting to promote the study of local, indigenous knowledge, which has been practically sidelined by the world at large despite the fact that such knowledge is adopted from lifelong practices and solutions to every day problems which sustained our forefathers for many generations.

USM has also established The South East Asia Sustainability Network (SEASN), which aims to further promote the idea of a sustainable environment through education, befitting the status of USM as an APEX university and a Centre for Education for Sustainable Development, mobilised through our expertise at the Centre for Global Sustainability Studies (CGSS). Other efforts at

promoting sustainability are the Asian Local Knowledge Network (ALKN), Regional Sejahtera Education for Sustainable Development Network (RSEN) and the South East Asia Sustainability Network (SEASN).

Besides this, USM is also currently exploring other opportunities for collaboration with foreign universities in academic programme offerings; for example we have successfully tied up with India to offer a Bachelor's in Medicine (MD) programme, besides collaborating with a French university in offering a twinning postgraduate degree programme in Chemical Sciences. We have also embarked on a Distance Education programme with our Indonesian partners, and have developed programmes with institutions in Japan besides establishing a number of smart partnerships in Turkey, Australia, Indonesia, United Kingdom and Qatar which focus on training programmes. We hope to develop more similar partnerships and future synergies.

These are some examples of the collaborative efforts of USM, in research, academic scholarship, student mobility and academic affairs. We will make every effort to establish new collaborations for the future. We know that there are many other renowned institutions throughout the world, including those in areas such as the Arts, Literature and Culture, Medical Sciences, Health Sciences, Local Knowledge, Education for Peace, Neuroscience, Ageing Sciences and many more which we need to explore. We are also looking for interested parties to collaborate with us in various forms such as by offering a Lecture series, Exhibitions, Arts and Cultural Performances, joint book publications, community engagement, volunteerism, entrepreneurship and also programmes which empower our youth such as the Students' Parliament, Novel Research and Innovation Competition to enhance creativity, innovation and community engagement, World Hockey Tournament and popular sporting events as well as many other programmes which will strengthen existing collaborations without restricting such efforts to academic pursuits.

USM would like to create a global campus here as a meeting point for world scholars and intellectuals, as a meeting point for arts and culture experts, a place where young people can meet to discuss issues of mutual benefit as exemplified by Graduate Studies students at USM, as well as a place for discourse on the future of global higher education in establishing a peaceful, tranquil, harmonious and sustainable world.

In global humanitarian issues, we seek to increase intellectual and voluntary collaboration for solutions to current crises including issues of refugees, humanitarian crises and conflicts, issues of natural disasters and other concerns where we can cooperate and assist to overcome such crises. At USM for example, there is a Research Unit on Education for Peace (REPUSM) where available expertise can be mobilised, along with the Student Volunteers of USM; this can be developed to become a global activity.

Through such networking programmes, we hope that the university can collaborate with the global community to create a sustainable world that is in line with the positioning of USM as the sole APEX university in Malaysia striving to transform higher education for a sustainable tomorrow, and to be a sustainability-led university that is also a global player in issues related to global sustainability. For instance, we can share our experience in dealing with crises related to natural disasters; or how to mobilise resources and talent to provide assistance to victims of humanitarian crises and disasters in various parts of the world through proper channels and recognised institutions without being in conflict with others' efforts.

Let us utilise this meeting to develop and enhance existing collaborations, as well as listen intently to our honoured guests who represent their respective nations, so that we may be aware of the various opportunities, experiences and hopes in realising efforts to enhance existing collaborations. We need to learn how the foreign embassies in Malaysia can work with us for the enhancement of win-win collaborations for USM specifically and Malaysian higher education on the whole.

How can we involve our youth, especially our young researchers, young thinkers and other stakeholders so that they benefit from existing collaborations? We should also not forget our top management including the venerable Pro-Chancellors such as Tan Sri Dr. Jegathesan, a renowned former Asian athlete, Tan Sri Razali Ismail, a distinguished and seasoned former diplomat who commands the respect of all who know him and Tan Sri Datuk Mustafa Mansur, an alumnus of USM and a corporate and industry figure widely-involved in connecting local business figures with their counterparts from other countries especially during his stewardship of the Federation of Malaysia Manufacturers (FMM). Not forgetting our Chairman for the Board of Governors, Tan Sri Datuk Dr. Zulkefli A. Hassan with his vast experience in academics and public administration, as well as other members of the Board of Governors with their varied backgrounds including alumni members who held the position of Malaysian Parliamentary Secretary; assorted corporate figures, academicians as well as others who have collaborated in realising USM's aspirations. All have a role to play in enhancing global collaborations.

Let us engage in heart-to-heart discourse without neglecting our youth, young thinkers, young researchers and all other stakeholders. May our efforts yield the outcomes that we all desire.

* Adapted from the Vice-Chancellor's speech during the opening ceremony of the **USM 2nd Ambassadors Summit 2015** held on Saturday, 12 September 2015 at Dewan Budaya USM, Penang.



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