

**Statement by the D-8 Secretary-General
Ambassador Dato' Ku Jaafar Ku Shaari
for 'Current Trends in the Middle East: Virtual International Joint Conference
on COVID-19 Global Impacts'
Hosted by the University Technology Malaysia
09-10 March, 2021**

In the Name of Allah, the Most Compassionate, the Most Merciful.

Excellencies,

Esteemed Scholars and intellectuals,

Distinguished Participants,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

As-salamu alaikum wa rahamt Allah wa barakaatuh!

I would like to start by expressing my sincere appreciation to the International Conference on Clinical Technology and Medical Engineering (ICCTME) and the University Technology Malaysia for holding this timely conference. I would like to thank you for bringing such an issue of utmost importance to our attention and would, in particular, want to express my sincere gratitude to the Chairperson of ICCTME and Head of West Asia Civilization Research Group, Prof. Dr. Kamaruzzaman Yusoff for the kind invitation. I also would like to thank esteemed Speakers and Intellectuals for their kind and valuable participation and wish them brilliant success in their deliberations. It is my fervent belief that this endeavour will bring some rays of hope and guide us to the right path in this “New Normal” situation.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Permit me to say that I am humbled to be given the opportunity to speak amongst such a scholarly crowd, with cerebral men of such depth of knowledge and fame. Yet, I believe that, on my part, I can make some modest contribution to the topic under discussion. My organization,

the D-8 Organization for Economic Cooperation, is an intergovernmental organization founded in 1997 by eight developing countries namely, Bangladesh, Egypt, Indonesia, Iran, Malaysia, Nigeria, Pakistan and Turkey. This Organization aims at increasing economic cooperation among the Member States in order to boost economic growth and sustainable development and promote the well-being of our citizens. Currently, D-8 commands a combined GDP of **about 4 trillion US dollars** and a total population of **1.16 billion**. D-8 is a prominent economic organization accounting for **almost 5 per cent of the global GDP**. The total trade volume of the D-8 member states is **USD 1.6 trillion**, which entails **4.5 per cent** of the total trade volume of the whole world. Almost **50% of OIC's** total trade comes from the D-8 member states. In the last 20 years, D-8 intra-trade has increased **more than seven-folds from USD 15 billion in 1997 to about USD 111 billion in 2018**. Member states are lucrative investment hubs for foreign investors as they host a **share of 10 per cent** of the total foreign investments in the world. There is no gainsaying that the macroeconomic indicators have clearly depicted our Organization as the next **“Economic Powerhouse”**.

Distinguished Participants,

The world is going through an unprecedented human and economic crisis occasioned by the Covid-19 pandemic. This virus has spread to almost all the countries of the world with huge fatalities. As of 25 February 2021, there have been **112.2 million confirmed cases** of COVID-19, including **2.5 million deaths** as reported by the WHO. There is no doubt that it's the deadliest catastrophe in recent times, apart from the two World Wars that were fought in the last century. Amid this hardest time, it is a matter of great hope and joy that scientists have been able to develop some effective vaccines and many countries have already started rolling out vaccination programmes. I would like to extend my immense gratitude to those who have worked relentlessly in order to develop those effective vaccines and those who are making strenuous effort to make them available to the world community. As an optimistic person, I always believe in the words of *Martin Luther King* who said-

“We must accept finite disappointment but we must never lose infinite hope.”

Ladies and Gentlemen,

As almost all the countries of the world have been affected by concomitant adversities of this deadly virus, the D-8 member states are no exception. The D-8 is monitoring live COVID-19 data of the member states through the D-8 Covid-19 visualizer map developed in collaboration with the Islamic World Science Citation Centre (ISC). According to this portal, as of 25 February, the total **confirmed cases are 7.28 million** and the **death toll stands at 157 thousand**.

Country	Confirmed	Deaths	Recovered	Outcome	Active	Fatality	Recovery
Bangladesh	2,655,633	28,213	2,534,996	2,563,209	92,424	1.06%	95.46%
Egypt	1,590,605	59,663	1,358,541	1,418,204	172,401	3.75%	85.41%
Iran	1,298,608	35,014	1,104,990	1,140,004	158,604	2.70%	85.09%
Indonesia	574,580	12,708	538,207	550,915	23,665	2.21%	93.67%
Malaysia	544,116	8,374	492,887	501,261	42,855	1.54%	90.58%
Nigeria	288,229	1,076	256,678	257,754	30,475	0.37%	89.05%
Pakistan	179,407	10,443	138,683	149,126	30,281	5.82%	77.30%
Turkey	153,187	1,874	129,943	131,817	21,370	1.22%	84.83%
Total	7,284,365	157,365	6,554,925	6,712,290	572,075	2.33%	87.67%

I would like to emphasize that the negative impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic are not restricted to the health sector only. Its economic and social implications are also enormous. The COVID-19 recession has seen the fastest and steepest downgrades in consensus growth projections among all global recessions since 1990. A study conducted by OECD ‘**OECD Economic outlook, December 2020**’ showed that the world GDP growth has **contracted by 4.2% last year**. The latest analysis of the World Bank warns that COVID-19 has pushed an additional **88 million people** into extreme poverty this year. The aggregate loss of income worldwide amounts to **almost \$3.4 trillion**.

As you are aware, the D-8 comprises emerging and developing economies. The outlook for emerging markets and developing economies has been forecast to **contract by 2.5 percent** as a result of the domestic outbreaks of the virus. Industries, production and exports and imports of the D-8 member states were seriously affected. The tourism arrivals and receipts of these states

have already reached the lowest point. This crisis is expected to raise the unemployment rate of the Member States astronomically.

Distinguished Participants,

An American writer, Doe Zantamata, wrote that;

“It is only in our darkest hours that we may discover the true strength of the brilliant light within ourselves that can never, ever, be dimmed.”

This pandemic has made the Member States to deepen their cooperation and work together hand in hand in order to fight the pandemic. Even before the pandemic, realizing the vulnerability of our health systems, we took the initiative of establishing the D-8 Health and Social Protection Programme (HSP) which aims at enhancing the resilience of the health systems of the Member States through resource mobilization, technical assistance and peer review mechanisms. It prioritizes Universal Health Coverage as well as accelerating progress towards the attainment of the SDGs for the D-8’s over one billion people. The D-8, through its HSP Programme office, established two working groups- **Implementation Working Group (IMWG)** and **Resource Mobilization Working Group (RMWG)** for emergency pandemic response. The working groups have met regularly. The Resource Mobilization Working Group is also working on a COVID-19 financing facility which will mobilize resources for mainly 3 areas,

- ✓ emergency pandemic response;
- ✓ public health system strengthening and shaping health markets;
- ✓ enhancing development financing in health.

The D-8 successfully started a Programme office in Abuja, Nigeria amidst Covid-19 global pandemic to coordinate and support the HSP activities through providing strategic policy advice and catalyzing public health and sustainable health economic trades among member countries. In addition to the steps taken, the D-8 is about to start a project with the Islamic Development Bank (IsDB), in order to revitalize the health markets for regional cooperation and trade within the Member States as well as build more sustainable and integrated health systems that are accessible and affordable.

Very recently we signed an **MOU with Chatham House** which aims to establish a strategic and technical collaboration focused on increasing the capacity and capability of the D-8 HSP in global health. Through this instrument, the Centre on Global Health Security at Chatham House will advise the Developing-8 Organization on matters of Universal Health Coverage and Global Health Security. These two organizations will exchange information, research findings, reports, and global health policy insights and will meet and/or discuss regularly with a view to deepening their collaborations in this important sector.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

You are not unaware that due to the recent Pandemic, the global foreign direct investment plunged **almost 40 per cent in 2020**, according to UNCTAD Investment Report. The D-8 in cooperation with UNCTAD organized a joint webinar on 30 June 2020 titled “**International Investment policies and COVID-19**”. It discussed trade and Investment beyond COVID 19 Pandemic with the senior officials from the D-8 Member states and several regional and International Organizations. This webinar was a follow-up of the UNCTAD -D-8 Workshop on "International Investment Agreements reform for Sustainable Development" which was crowned by a joint document “**the Guiding Principles for Investment Policy-Making** ". Most of these principles proved to be significantly important in dealing with the circumstances resulting from the COVID 19 Pandemic. For instance- stressing the importance of regulations related to public health and environment and also stressing the rights and obligations of the states and the investors as well as highlighting the principle of corporate governance and social responsibility.

Esteemed Participants,

To fight this deadly pandemic, countries all over the world are being compelled to impose flight restrictions and travel ban in this era of globalization and connectivity. People have restricted their movements and international travels are embarked upon mostly on emergency cases. The tourism industry is one of the worst victims of this pandemic and it is facing ruinous havoc. According to the UN World Tourism Organization (UNWTO):

- **Loss of international tourists is around 1.1 billion people.**

- **Loss of export revenues from tourism is between US\$ 910 billion and US\$ 1.2 trillion**
- **Approximately 120 million jobs are at risk**

We are working closely to revive this industry in the post-covid era. In the last Ministerial Meeting on Tourism held in Malaysia in November 2019, we came up with two operational documents-

- **The D-8 Tourism Strategy**
- **The Crescent Moon Initiative.**

During this pandemic, the D-8 signed a **Letter of Intent (LOI)** with the World Tourism Forum Institute (WTFI) to reshape the economies by supporting the tourism sector across the D-8 Member States. We thereby set our joint overarching goal to create travel and tourism products for the Member States. This partnership aims at promoting tourism, cultural and social activities as well as boosting people-to-people, business-to-business contacts and integrating the state and private institutions of the Member States. We believe that this partnership will serve as the key to fulfilling the lofty objectives laid out in the Crescent Moon Initiative.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

COVID-19 has spurred a seismic shift in the business model as well as the global value chains. It has meaningfully changed the buying behavior of the consumers as they avoid stores and resort to shopping online, thereby causing e-commerce sales to skyrocket. According to the U.S. Commerce Department data released in December 2020, consumer spending through non-store channels **grew 31.3 per cent** over November 2019. This crisis presents opportunities to firms for digitalization and essentiality of products and services combined with information intensity.

There is no gainsaying that technology is the key driver of the business strategy and global value chains in this new normal environment. Therefore, Technological collaboration in the developing world is necessary for the functional survival and meaningful participation of the developing economies in the global value chains. To this end, we established the '**D-8 Network of Pioneers for Research and Innovation (D-8 NPRI)**'. This aims to bring D-8 Member States researchers, government and semi-government research institutes, industrial research institutes and research

in D-8 universities under one umbrella. Through this network, D-8 will expand the level of innovation in the D-8 Member States to enable the economic growth essential for sustainable development in the D-8 Member States, identify research and development capabilities, conduct joint research and exchange the research results with industries in the Member States. It will also facilitate research fellow exchange programs among universities in the D-8 Member States and the D-8 International University.

Furthermore, the D-8 Secretariat entered into partnership with **KOMEPS Fintech** of Malaysia in order to develop a **Digital Payment Card** that will allow the Member States to transact business with local currency. This project also envisaged the development of a new arrangement that would offer the citizens, business community of the D-8 in particular, a better choice to make financial transactions.

In conclusion, I would like to add-

“Action and adaptability create opportunity.” – Garrison Wynn (Author & Motivational Speaker)

No matter how hard the situation is, we have to adapt ourselves; we have to overcome the unprecedented challenges posed by the COVID-19 Pandemic. We have to act wisely in such a way that could turn the adversities into opportunities. Together we will find a much better world for prosperity inshallah.

I thank you for your kind attention.
