

**SPEECH BY THE HONOURABLE ATTORNEY GENERAL OF MALAYSIA AT THE  
11th UUM INTERNATIONAL LEGAL CONFERENCE 2021: “LAW AND SOCIETY:  
EMBRACING THE NEW NORMS”**

**SALUTATION**

Honourable Chairman;

Eminent Scholars and Practitioners;

Distinguished Guests and Participants;

Ladies and Gentlemen,

1. It is an honour to deliver an opening speech for this 11th UUM International Legal Conference 2021.
2. Let me begin my speech by quoting a distinguished American jurist, Oliver Wendell Holmes Jr. (1809 –1894):

..The life of the (common) law has not been logic: it has been experience. The felt necessities of the time, the prevalent moral and political theories, intuitions of public policy, avowed or unconscious...The law embodies the story of a nation's development through many centuries, and it cannot be dealt with as if it contained only the axioms and corollaries of a book of mathematics.

3. Law reflects a society and its principles and normative values. It evolves organically in accordance with societal needs and experiences. Law, which is often shaped by how the society perceives, must responds to contemporary phenomena and exceptional occurrences. Such events, which may be domestic and global in nature, emerge from human social, political and economic activities as well as the 'act of nature'.
4. Wars are examples on how political happenings can affect the society and law at national and international levels. Similarly, natural disasters and pandemics have capability to change the society and its law, in both positive and negative ways.

5. Coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic has indeed brought profound impacts to society in various areas and levels. In the aftermath of Covid-19, governments are pushed to re-evaluate and adjust their policies in order to embrace the emerging 'new norms'.
6. This challenging task perceptibly involves various considerations, as well as diverse stakeholders. Also, any adaptations must be carried out with caution and comprehensive investigation, and not just for sake of responding. New or altered approaches must not only reactive, but also effective, appropriate and responsive to current or potential predicaments. Further, it is vital for experts and policy makers to examine how far the society has to compromise its accepted values and established principles while adapting the 'new norms'.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

7. In the context of Malaysia, the impacts of the pandemic can be seen in many fields and spectrums, including political, economic, as well as legal affairs.
8. One should bear in mind that the formulation of legal responses to overcome the pandemic and its impacts requires jurisprudential deliberation, scientific calculation, sufficient information and political consideration. At this point, established legal principles play a vital role. Raja Azlan Shah enlightened us:

Legal principles and rules help convert our knowledge of what needs to be done...into binding rules that govern human behaviour...Law is the bridge between scientific knowledge and political action.

This intricate act of balancing in consequence may entail controversies. Newly imposed measures may be perceived differently by diverse factions of our society. The reactions are heavily influenced by individual backgrounds and interests. As explained by Lord Denning:

Those whose training lies towards order, put certainty before justice; whereas those whose training lies toward the redress of grievances, put justice before certainty. The right solution lies in keeping the balance between the two.

9. In the domain of legal practice, necessary adjustments and proactive measures have been introduced in order to ensure the administration of justice is effectively and fairly dispensed during this unprecedented period.
10. For example, the Courts of Judicature (Amendment) Act 2020, Subordinate Courts (Amendment) Act 2020 And Subordinate Courts Rules (Amendment) Act 2020 have been amended in order to ensure access to justice remains vibrant to the public, despite the ongoing pandemic. The amendments push legal fraternities to maximise the use of communication technologies and improve necessary digital skills.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

11. Apart from the law, the 'new norms' dictate the lawyers, either in public and private sectors, to improvise their advocacy skills and embrace different work culture. The very fact that we are having today's conference online, using a remarkable platform which actually replicates a conference room by putting us on tables and moving us around, is an immediate demonstration of how the pandemic can transform the way we work
12. It is clear that innovation is more important now than ever before. Nevertheless, it also imperative to remind ourselves that we must ensure the established principles and fundamental values of administration of justice, such as the right to fair trial and to be heard, remain intact, as the maxim goes, *Fiat justitia ruat caelum*. Let justice be done though the heavens fall.
13. The COVID-19 pandemic has brought unprecedented challenges both for people and society. The threat of the disease and increasing casualties are destabilising our communities. Our legal community too suffers during this difficult time. Practitioners in the civil sphere have also been adversely affected by the unprecedented downturn in economic activities. Similarly, criminal practitioners appear to be particularly at risk.
14. There is also serious concern about our young lawyers, who recently graduated. The pandemic has reduced the opportunities for them to develop their careers in the traditional way. Pupillage opportunities have been seriously disrupted, as some senior lawyers can no longer afford to supervise pupils.

15. We must therefore bear in mind about these difficulties caused by the pandemic when better times return and must act accordingly to ensure that there is not lasting detriment.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

16. There is always a blessing in disguise. Recent restrictions to daily life have forced us to quickly adopt different ways of working, learning and connecting with each other. At this juncture, all factions should move together with in overcoming the pandemic and its impacts. Whilst this crisis has brought unprecedented challenges both for people and society, we have been humbled by the wave of inspiring new ideas developed in response. The last few months have demonstrated the power of human creativity and collaboration.

17. And such positivity reflects in this 11th University Utara Malaysia International Legal Conference ILC 2021, with its timely theme “Law and Society: Embracing the New Norms”. Hopefully, it will provide collaborative environment to scholars, academics, researchers, practitioners and students to exchange their ideas and experiences and research results on all aspects of law with specific emphasis on issues of legal diversity in the post-Covid- 19. Congratulation to the organiser, UUM School of Law. It is indeed a great pleasure to officiate this excellent event. Let’s pray and hope that it will not be long before things starts to return to normal, and all meaningful lessons that we gain from ‘new norms’ will benefit us in the future.