



# *A University for the 21st Century – Graduates for the 21st Century*

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*The Open University Malaysia, 7th Convocation, 14 November 2009 (Return Speech on the occasion of the conferment of the Honorary Doctorate of Education)*

*Sir John Daniel, President, Commonwealth of Learning*

## Transcript

Chancellor, Vice-Chancellor, Academic Colleagues, Graduands and Guests:

You do me a great honour and I am deeply grateful. To become an honorary doctor of the Open University Malaysia gives me great personal pleasure. During the 1990s, when I was Vice-Chancellor of the UK Open University, I came to Malaysia regularly and was involved in many of the discussions that preceded the establishment of the Open University Malaysia. I therefore feel a paternal interest – a proud paternal interest – in OUM.

I feel pride in my association with your University for three reasons in particular.

First, OUM has pioneered a new and very intelligent corporate structure. You are a private university yet the public universities of Malaysia are your main shareholders. This is a brilliant way of creating a vibrant open university that works in harmony with the other leading universities.

Second, the dynamic development of OUM, particularly the way that it has embraced the latest technology in all aspects of its work, is a model for newly created universities everywhere.

Third, you have heard that 15 years ago I wrote a book entitled *Mega-Universities and Knowledge Media: Technology Strategies for Higher Education*. I defined a



**Sir John Daniel with Open University of Malaysia Chancellor, YABhg Tun Jeanne Abdullah**

mega-university as a distance-teaching university with over 100,000 students enrolled. The book forecast that much of the global expansion of higher education would take place through distance learning, so I have taken great satisfaction in seeing the number of mega-universities multiply over the last decade. I understand the Open University Malaysia is on track to achieve mega-university status next year and that will give me special pleasure. You have grown in a spectacular way while maintaining excellent standards.

I now have another book in press, whose title is *Mega-Schools, Technology and Teachers: Achieving Education for All*. In it I argue that the world will not achieve Education for All, and will certainly not achieve Universal Secondary Education, without much greater recourse to distance learning. The book promotes the development of open schooling and also the use of distance learning to train many of the millions of new teachers that will be needed around the world in the next ten years. That part of the book includes a profile of the teacher education programmes here at the Open University Malaysia.

I am most grateful to the Dean of the Faculty of Education and Languages, Associate Professor Dr. Widad binti Othman for working with me on that section. I hope that when the book is published it will bring the great achievements of the OUM to the notice of a worldwide audience.

I have mentioned the personal reasons why this honour gives me such pleasure but I must also mention important links between Malaysia, OUM and institutions I have worked for. I already mentioned that the UK Open University was closely involved in the discussions that preceded the creation of OUM. Malaysia has also made very important contributions to the Commonwealth of Learning. Our third Board Chairman, Mr Lewis Perinbam, was a native of this country, as was our second President – my predecessor Tan Sri Dato' Professor Raj Dhanarajan.

Professor Dhanarajan made an inestimable contribution to establishing COL's reputation as a highly credible intergovernmental actor in the field of educational technology, so we were not surprised when his so-called retirement to Malaysia in 2004 lasted only a few days before he was pressed into service as founder Vice-Chancellor of your sister institution, Wawasan Open University, a post from which he has just retired..

The whole Commonwealth community is most grateful to the Government of Malaysia for the brilliant way in which it hosted the memorable 17th Conference of Commonwealth Education Ministers that was held here in June. It was a privilege to take part in that event. Last year Malaysia hosted a meeting of COL's focal points from all over Asia and the Pacific. We are most grateful for your consistent support for our work.

In making those comments about the excellent work of the Open University Malaysia and the good support that the Commonwealth of Learning gets from the Government of Malaysia I fear that I am neglecting the principal task of an honorary graduate. That is to congratulate the graduates on the degrees that they have earned by their hard work and to thank their families for supporting them.

In a conventional university I might have thanked your parents for supporting you but I know that in an Open University the support comes from children and even grandchildren as well as parents and spouses.

Studying at a distance is a difficult way of getting a degree. Family support was essential to you and I congratulate you on earning your degrees and diplomas the hard way.

You are now ambassadors for the Open University Malaysia. I commented earlier that OUM is a very significant and successful university in global terms. It is truly a University for the 21st century and you are graduates for the 21st century. I wish you well in all that you undertake and I am deeply grateful for the honour of sharing this celebration with you. Thank you.