

**Cheque presentation by ExxonMobil to MOE & UNICEF for “Enriching Education for Orang Asli Children Through Community Folklores” project**

Monday, 15 September 2008 • Crown Mutiara Hotel, Kuala Lumpur, MALAYSIA

**SPEECH BY**

**Mr. Youssouf Oomar**

UNICEF Malaysia Representative

**Yang Berbahagia Tan Sri Dr Zulkurnain bin Awang,**  
Secretary-General, Ministry of Education

**Mr Zain C. Willoughby,**  
Financial Director, Exxon Mobil Subsidiaries in Malaysia

**Encik Mokhtar Daud,**  
Public Affairs Manager, ExxonMobil Malaysia

**Encik Mohamed Kasim,**  
Community Relations Advisor, ExxonMobil Malaysia

**Our special guests today:**  
Boys and girls from Sekolah Kebangsaan Tasik Cini  
And their respected principal, teachers and parents

**Distinguished guests,**

**Members of the media,**

**Ladies and Gentlemen, Boys and Girls**

Good Evening, Selamat Petang.

**Education is a human right**

Please allow me to express my gratitude and pleasure at being here this evening.

It warms my heart to see these little faces in front of us, to hear their eager voices and to look into their sparkling eyes as we speak of their right to education.

Yes, education is the **right** of all children in Malaysia, not merely a privilege.

Malaysia agreed to uphold this right when the government ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child and committed themselves to achieving the Millennium Development Goals, as well as the goals of the Dakar Framework for Action.

We speak of education today as a basic human right that will lead to the realisation of other rights for children – the right to be healthy and free of HIV infection, the right to be protected against drugs and violence, and the right to what is best for them.

Education begins with literacy. A child who can read and write is one who can be taught, just like the children here with us today. They can be empowered to claim their rights, change their lives, improve their communities and influence their destinies.

Every child who receives a basic education is on the right path towards increasing the country's capacity in pursuit of national development.

Ladies and gentlemen, boys and girls,

### Ensuring equal access and quality

Education is the Malaysian dream.

This country has made great strides in achieving high education standards. This is due to visionary policies that set in place a number of long-term initiatives, including compulsory primary education and increased enrolment for secondary education.

Today, at least nine out of 10 Malaysian adults can read and write – a number that has risen by 33% in the past 30 years.

2005 figures also show that more than 96% of Malaysian children are enrolled in primary school, with almost 98% of those who enrolled in year 2000 completing Standard Six.

Yet other challenges lie ahead.

We urgently need to address gaps in access, equity and quality of education, especially among vulnerable groups of children, including children living in rural and remote areas, indigenous children and Orang Asli children.

Every child wants to learn, even the child from the most remote village, who requires three modes of transportation just to get to school.

But for this child and other vulnerable children, many socio-economic factors stand as obstacles to their education. Their families may be forced to keep them at home or withdraw them from school because they need the children to help earn a living, because they cannot afford the school materials and transportation, or because they simply do not recognise the long-term benefits of education.

Therefore, simply building schools and providing teachers will not be enough.

As the Ministry of Education has rightly identified, we have to ensure that no child is left behind. This aim dovetails with the strategies laid out in the Ninth Malaysia Plan to provide sufficient opportunities for advancement and capacity-building that will ultimately address socio-economic inequalities.

Simply looking for A's on report cards will not be enough.

We have to ensure educational excellence for all based on a holistic concept. We have to provide lifelong quality education that begins from early childhood and is centred on the development of literacy, numeracy and essential life skills.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

### Education for every child

Although International Literacy Day was yesterday, we should not forget about it today, tomorrow or next week.

Every day should be a day to get another child into school, to teach him or her the ABCs, to make sure he or she recognises the value of education and grows up to be a productive, valuable citizen of Malaysia.

For UNICEF and the Ministry of Education, every day is another day to continue our collaboration in the remedial education programme to enhance literacy skills and reduce dropout rates among Orang Asli children.

Today, we witness the commitment and support of ExxonMobil in implementing the next phase of this programme, which incorporates Orang Asli folklores and legends into teaching aids used in classrooms.

In the days to come, we look forward to working in partnership to inspire even more Orang Asli children to attend school and learn creatively within the context of their cultural heritage.

Together with the government and partners from the private sector, we can reach out to every child, regardless of location, race, ability or ethnic background.

Every child has the potential to learn, whether he or she is from Kuala Lumpur, Tasik Cini, Gerik or Long Pilah. So we must ensure that every child is **given** the right to learn.

*Kanak-kanak sekalian, belajarliah untuk masa depan!*

[All children here tonight, study well for your future!]

Thank you.