

**OPENING STATEMENT BY
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MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND TRADE II OF
BRUNEI DARUSSALAM**

**AT THE 19TH SESSION OF THE WORKING GROUP ON THE
UNIVERSAL PERIODIC REVIEW**

PALAIS DES NATIONS, GENEVA

2 MAY 2014

Mr President,
Excellencies,
Distinguished delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

A very good morning to all of you.

It is an honour once again for me to deliver the opening statement of Brunei Darussalam to the Working Group for the second cycle of the Universal Periodic Review.

We appreciate your able leadership, Mr President, as well as the work of the Secretariat and the Bureau in ensuring the success of the meeting.

Last January, we submitted our Report, which highlighted our ongoing work in improving the welfare of our people and also in protecting the rights of vulnerable groups, such as women, children, persons with disabilities, and the elderly. It also included our responses to the 33 recommendations that were tabled during the first cycle.

Mr President,

In my last statement to this august body, I elaborated on the historical, social, and cultural background of Brunei Darussalam so as to give a clearer picture of how the core policy of the Government of His Majesty remains to be people-centred in all aspects, both in terms of material as well as spiritual needs. We are very blessed as our people continue to enjoy living in a peaceful and harmonious environment. This has been the hallmark of the 30 years of our full independence and will continue to be so as we strive to realise our National Vision by 2035 to become a nation with highly educated, skilled and successful citizens, who will attain a high quality of life in a dynamic, and sustainable economy.

Mr President,

His Majesty's deep dedication towards the welfare of his people has ensured the provision of a first class education system; quality health services, as well as adequate housing. Citizens and residents alike, continue to enjoy the generous subsidies granted by our Government for several essential commodities such as fuel, gas, water, rice, and sugar.

Allow me now, Mr President, to elaborate on the work of His Majesty's Government in achieving this.

On education, it remains one of the top priorities of His Majesty's Government. Nearly 13 per cent of Brunei's national budget has been allocated to it. We have further enhanced the provision of free, quality education from early childhood to tertiary-level, equally accessible to both boys and girls. Scholarships to study in the country and abroad are granted to eligible students. All these are aimed at nurturing our young people to reach their fullest potential and contribute to the nation as a whole. Today, Brunei has one of the highest literacy rates in the region.

In addition, technical and vocational qualification opportunities are provided to our people for them to gain the necessary skills required to increase their competitiveness and improve their self-development. This is all in line with the goals of UNESCO's 'Education for All', of which the country ranked 34 out of 127 countries in its most recent Development Index. We have also worked with UNICEF and UNESCO to complement the nine-year compulsory education legislation currently in place through enhancing the Early Childhood Care and Education Programme.

As a small nation, the health of its people is vital to its development. His Majesty's Government therefore places great importance to the provision of a comprehensive health care system. Free for children, medical healthcare fees are charged at less than one U.S. dollar for adult citizens. For others, medical treatment and medicine are equally accessible at a very affordable fee. With this, I am proud to say that Brunei has achieved many of the targets set by the World Health Organization.

And to provide a healthy environment for all, the Government of His Majesty has adopted an environmental policy direction and strategies in implementing our National Development Plan. I am pleased to say that one of the most valuable assets of Brunei is clean air. Brunei is home to well-preserved pristine rainforests with a rich biodiversity and this is our national pride for future generations. Together with the international community, Brunei shares the responsibility to save the Earth from global warming. We are also cooperating with our neighbours, Malaysia and Indonesia through our 'Heart of Borneo' project, whereby about 58 per cent of our lands have been reserved in our efforts to preserving our planet.

Mr President,

Another basic need that the Government of His Majesty emphasises is adequate housing. Being one of the main agendas in our current national development plans, major housing development projects have been completed and new ones are being planned to ensure that every family has their own home. Over the past six decades, more than 19,000 houses have been built under this scheme whereby His Majesty and the Crown Prince would personally present house keys to the awarded families.

Mr President, His Majesty's strong commitment to his people is apparent during good times and also in times of need. One example of His Majesty's continuous concern for the well-being of his people is during the occurrence of flash floods in some parts of the country earlier this year. Our caring Monarch had personally visited the affected areas to ensure that the authorities responded immediately and efficiently to secure the safety of those concerned. A considerable amount of resources have been allocated to relief and repair efforts and a budget of about US\$55 million has been earmarked for flood mitigation measures.

All that I have mentioned thus far are just some of the efforts Brunei has made in promoting and protecting human rights and these are in fact in line with the Millennium Development Goals. We are progressing very well and have achieved almost all of its targets set forth, especially in eradicating extreme poverty. According to the Human Development Report 2013, Brunei ranked 30 out of 187 countries in the Human Development Index. We continue to strive towards accelerating development and look forward to supporting the post-2015 development agenda.

Mr President,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would also like to highlight the efforts of His Majesty's Government in protecting the vulnerable groups in the country. A number of measures have been put in place, such as introducing new legislations, amending existing ones, and setting up Special Committees to further ensure their rights.

These include the Children & Young Persons Act, which led to the establishment of a juvenile justice system in 2010 to ensure appropriate judicial procedures for young offenders.

We also provide support for the less privileged children through benefits, proper care, and guidance. Several welfare programmes have been initiated including provision of shelter homes; education allowance; as well as various funds for orphans, such as the Crown Prince Fund for Orphans (DANA).

Mr President,

Women constitute over half of our workforce, and this can be seen in most of our Ministries. They have actively contributed to the development of the country as well as the maintenance of peace and security. We continue to see an increasing number of women as professionals in defence, medical, education, legal, engineering, and commerce, among others. Many of them have attained high level positions in the public and private sector, such as the Ambassador-At-Large; Attorney General; Deputy Minister; members of the Legislative Council; Senior Officials in the respective Ministries; and Entrepreneurs, to name a few. Just two months ago, His Majesty also appointed a woman Judicial Commissioner.

Our Government's commitment to promote gender equality is clearly evident through national policies applicable to all community sectors. As a result of this, we have reached a remarkable literacy rate of over 95 per cent for girls. In 2013, the World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Report put Brunei Darussalam in 6th place in terms of estimated earned income; 12th place in terms of enrolment in tertiary education; and 17th place for wage equality. The rights of women are further protected through legislations such as the Islamic Family Law Act and the Married Women Act.

For our elderly population, we continue to safeguard their welfare through maintaining strong family and cultural values. The sense of love, care, and responsibility, which has been instilled in us since a young age ensures that our elderly family members continue to receive sufficient care. A significant social safety net for the elderly is the monthly pension for all citizens and permanent residents who have reached the age of 60. This pension is non-contributory and non-means tested.

For persons with disabilities, our Government continues to protect their rights through efforts which are also supported and complemented by various NGOs concerned with the welfare of specific disability causes. These include, among others, the provision of monthly allowances.

Mr President,

Brunei Darussalam, as a Monarchy and Islamic State, continues to uphold the family institution as the dominant aspect of the country. The concept of the large extended family has long been established and become the social safety net. Since 2012, the first Sunday of May has been declared National Family Day to commemorate the importance of the family unit in Brunei. And this coming Sunday we will once again celebrate this auspicious day.

Brunei has a close-knit society that is distinctly communal and cohesive. Festive occasions such as "Eid", Chinese New Year, and Christmas, are celebrated by all members of our diverse community. During these festive seasons, relatives and friends visit each other, offer well-wishes, and exchange gifts. These traditions encourage the tolerance of ethnic and religious groups in the country, and have further strengthened our social harmony and, most importantly, the bonds of family and friendship.

Religious tolerance and understanding is indeed very important. In support of the Alliance of Civilisation, Brunei became a member of the UNAOC Group of Friends in 2012, and we have participated in several inter-faith dialogues.

Mr President,

Under the Constitution, Islam is the official religion of Brunei Darussalam, and its values and teachings continue to be the way of life for its people. As such, the activities of the society revolve around its Malay culture and Islamic faith. Non-Muslims may practise their religions in peace and harmony, as written in our Constitution.

Syariah law has been in existence in Brunei Darussalam since the 14th century during the reign of Sultan Muhammad Shah, our first Monarch. The objective of Syariah law is to create a society where religion, life, intellect, property and lineage are preserved and protected.

With a strong sense of responsibility as an Islamic nation, the country has introduced the Syariah Penal Code Order, which will work in parallel with the existing law. The Order will be enforced in phases, and the first phase commenced on 1 May 2014.

Mr President,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

At the regional level, Brunei Darussalam is proud to have held the Chairmanship of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) in 2013 under the theme "Our People, Our Future Together". This theme stressed the role of the people in ASEAN Member States in advancing cooperation in political-security, economic and socio-cultural areas. It also asserted that the region's future is dependent on how the people of ASEAN move and work together to ensure progress for the development of the whole region.

Under its chairmanship, Brunei Darussalam initiated the implementation of the ASEAN Human Rights Declaration, adopted in 2012. This included the publication of the book on the Declaration and its translation into all the ASEAN languages. The Declaration was acknowledged by the ASEAN Leaders as a milestone in ASEAN's efforts in the promotion and protection of human rights in the region.

In addition, the 23rd ASEAN Summit last October adopted an ASEAN declaration on the elimination of violence against women and children and a declaration to strengthen social protection.

Furthermore, Brunei Darussalam continues to support the work of the relevant ASEAN bodies related to human rights.

The good progress ASEAN has made over the past year has demonstrated Brunei's commitment in working together with its neighbours and partners especially in the field of human rights. Such collaboration enabled Brunei to successfully carry out its task as the Chairman of ASEAN for the benefit of the region. We will continue our active engagement towards the establishment of an ASEAN Community in 2015 and beyond.

Mr President,

At international level, I would like to reiterate Brunei's firm commitment to its obligations. I am pleased to say that Brunei will be ratifying the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in the near future.

Apart from this, we continue to be committed to the CEDAW and CRC, and we are pleased that in 2012 we submitted our combined initial and second periodic reports to the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women; and combined second and third periodic reports to the Committee on the Rights of the Child in 2013.

With regard to the CRC, we will be withdrawing our reservations on paragraphs 1 and 2 of Article 20 of the CRC relating to the protection of a child without a family, as well as paragraph (a) of Article 21 pertaining to the law on adoption. In addition, we are working towards ratifying the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict.

Relating to the question of child protection, I am pleased to say that our children and young persons in Brunei are well protected by numerous measures, including the provision of compulsory education. Furthermore, we have shown our support for global efforts towards abolishing child labour by ratifying the ILO Minimum Age Convention three years ago, as recommended during the first cycle.

Mr President,

As a member of the international community, Brunei appreciates the values of peaceful co-existence, mutual respect and cooperation. We will continue to welcome technical assistance offered by our international partners and at the same time, we also play our part in providing external assistance through various means such as the Commonwealth Fund for Technical Cooperation; the Initiative for ASEAN Integration; and Enrichment Projects for ASEAN. This ranges from financial support to capacity building and technical cooperation. Brunei has also offered scholarships to foreign students in order to pursue higher level education in various academic institutions in the country. To date, nearly 400 scholarships have been awarded to students from over 63 countries. This has also contributed to promoting understanding and enhancing cultural exchanges.

Brunei has actively contributed to the initiatives of several UN bodies such as the WHO, UNICEF, UN Women, and UNRWA. And we stand ready to continue to lend our support in the best way we can.

Mr President,

I am pleased to have shared with you Brunei's perspective to promote and protect human rights. It is His Majesty's wish to look after the welfare of his people and to provide them a peaceful and stable environment as we move towards our National Vision 2035.

I would like to conclude by acknowledging all the distinguished delegations who have submitted their advance questions and we look forward to hearing the views and comments from everyone here with us today.

Thank you.