

Varsities the place to promote harmony

By **PROFESSOR DATUK DR AHMAD IBRAHIM** - March 1, 2018 @ 8:50am

WE live in trying times. Conflicts occur constantly. Some fight for autonomy, while others go to war over resources.

Trade conflicts are more common. There have been attempts by countries to renegotiate trade agreements.

Conflicts have arisen in some countries because of ethno-religious differences.

The United Nations, which was established to deal with conflicts, appears helpless and almost dysfunctional.

There is disharmony not only between nations but also within nations. Creating harmony must be one of the world's most difficult challenges.

Prosperity is a struggle without harmony. Malaysia is said to be a harmonious country, and it is, but more can be done to boost that harmony.

Despite the many efforts by the government to promote harmony, there are still voices of dissent.

Fortunately, the prosperity of the nation has not been affected. We attract many migrant workers hoping for a share of the nation's prosperity. Foreign direct investments are pouring in.

But, we should not be complacent. This is the reason why the government looks for new ideas to boost harmony.

New thinking suggests that universities can contribute to this goal. This idea came up at the UCSI University discussion on the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

A new initiative to make SDGs an important aspect of the university's agenda was started.

The initiative was centred around programmes to create greater awareness among staff and students, as well as undertake practices that reflect the 17 SDGs.

Two awareness talks have been organised. The first talk by a UCSI council member, Professor Emeritus Tan Sri Dr Omar Abdul Rahman, explored how SDGs could be used to promote harmony and prosperity.

He proposed a framework linking different SDGs to building harmony and prosperity for the nation.

SDGs were grouped into those catering to basic needs, wealth creation and quality of life.

The proposed action plans included all the elements.

The resulting framework stipulates what the universities of the new era should be.

These include industry linkage, community outreach, building international stature, policy advisory and governance.

The framework is to be the essence of a transformational university concept.

In fact, any ranking exercise of universities is best undertaken using the proposed transformational university framework.

UCSI has since adopted the framework to develop faculty action plans of SDGs that support the university's strategic plan.

Admittedly, the involvement of students is a key success factor in such a plan.

Few would disagree that harmony is a prerequisite for prosperity.

It would be difficult to achieve prosperity in a nation that is mired in disharmony.

And harmony is best nurtured through common goals. Many a time, we have witnessed how sports galvanised and promoted harmony.

SDGs can be the goals that bring people together in a common mission.

These goals would also be in line with the national agenda of sustainable development.

It is clear that there is much universities can do to boost a nation's harmony.

A university is a good place to stop disharmonious feelings among the nation's future leaders.

As articulated in the concept of transformational university proposed by Omar, SDGs can be turned into a powerful instrument to invigorate harmony and prosperity among industry, community, academics and government.

Universities should be encouraged to experiment with such a concept to promote harmony.

It is time to rethink the strategy for our universities to be recognised as among the best in the world.

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