

**SPEECH BY THE DIRECTOR GENERAL OF IDFR
AT THE
DIPLOMA IN DIPLOMACY 2022 GRADUATION CEREMONY
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(Salutations)

As I look around the room, and at the fresh young faces of the graduating class of 1/2022 and 2/2022, I cannot help but be proud of you. Cohort 1/2022 was the first full cohort that I presided over; the cohort before you I shared with my predecessor and had only a month with them before they graduated.

2. But Cohort 1 of 2022 – ah, this was the first cohort which I was able to truly meddle with. And oh, how we meddled with your syllabus!

3. Norli Muadza, Nurul Adni and I took pains to go through the syllabus with a fine-tooth comb, understanding full well that we had to make the changes not because the previous syllabus was no good, but because the changes in the world's contemporary geopolitical landscape necessitated changes to the course that you were about to undergo. The world had changed, and we had changed with it. Diplomacy was no longer the diplomatic practice of old, but a different, newer, faster version of connecting with people, influencing others, and managing our national interests. It was life in the fast lane but at breakneck speed, as the world not only embraced

the Digital Age but also sought to recover whatever ground it had lost through the dark period that was the pandemic.

4. His Royal Highness Sultan Nazrin of Perak told an audience at IDFR of how diplomacy is the second oldest profession in the world. Diplomacy has been around for as long as anyone can remember, and the diplomatic service in Malaysia has predated even Malaysia's independence, precisely because it is agile and adaptable. As custodians of the training arm of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, every single Director General of the Institute has brought something new to the table, has added on to the work of his or her predecessor. The DiD syllabus is a case in point. Your syllabus is totally distinct, so unrecognizable from the syllabus that I went through so many moons ago.

Ladies and gentlemen, honoured guests,

5. For cohort 1, IDFR added a few new elements to ensure that the graduating class would be given the tools necessary for their career. We introduced Morning Prayers, where the participants were grilled on their subject matter to the point of tears. It was not enough for them to know the basic facts about climate change for example – they had to argue (rightly or wrongly) about mitigation and adaptation efforts, AND they had to provide an opinion on how best we could position ourselves to retake centre stage.

6. IDFR also introduced Cohort 1 to the world of live recording – exposing them to a studio environment where they arranged a live taping of a roundtable dialogue under the Let’s Talk series. Those recordings are on Youtube, by the way, so we’ll see how many will look back in 5 years’ time and cringe.

7. Cohort 2 was also subjected to changes in their syllabus. Again, borne out of the necessity to equip our young diplomats with as many tools in their arsenal as possible. Since IDFR was the very first government agency to run its own serial podcasts – we’re now at Episode 18 and still going strong – we decided to let Cohort 2 try their hand at producing podcasts.

8. Podcasts are an audio tool that can reach many people at once, at the most minimum of costs. But they are not easy to produce, as Cohort 2 found out. I am disappointed that of the 7 groups that were given the chance, only two of the podcasts could be used.

9. Cohort 2 came to IDFR a bit more bookwormish than most. It’s not necessarily a bad thing, mind you, to be a bookworm, and we appreciated their academically-inclined side. But to produce a more wholistic diplomat, we introduced an arts and culture component. So Cohort 2 ended up at Istana Budaya learning to play the gamelan and at the art galleries to appreciate Malaysian art.

10. There were commonalities in both syllabi. The much dreaded Defending Your National Interest, in which the young officers were put on a stage and had to field difficult questions from a very difficult media, was successfully retained. The Case Study component, the Analytical Papers, the Public Speaking sessions, the sharing of experience by well-known personalities – all of these were continued in both Cohorts.

11. But the two Cohorts were also collectively introduced to new activities. Cohort 1 learnt the social problem of being homeless or living on the streets of a capital city; Cohort 2 had the complexity of the refugee problem to understand and ingest. Both cohorts learnt how to defend an undefendable truth in their Fiction of a Premise, and both cohorts were able to utilize the social media for their foreign policy narratives more than adequately.

Members of Cohort 1 and 2 of 2022,

12. I know that many of you found it taxing to undergo the Diploma in Diplomacy course. We asked a lot of you, and from you, and challenged you to think outside the box. Many of you thought I was off my rocker when I told you at the opening of your course that IDFR was the space where every opinion is equally valid and every idea as equally hairbrained. As my favourite writer Maya Angelou once wrote, “if you’re always trying to be normal, you’ll never know how amazing you can be”, and we saw how amazing you were, and hopefully still are.

13. The mantra we have in Wisma Putra – of service to King and country, and of memikul amanah untuk rakyat – these are not merely slogans. Malaysia is not a Great Power; it might never be a superpower, and in the last decade we cannot even be classified as a middle power, so your power of networking must never be underestimated. It is your job to get us friends with benefits, it is your job to look out for the interests of the country, it is your job to ensure we don't falter.

14. We at IDFR see – in each and every one of the cohort of 1 and 2 of 2022 - that potential to be great, that spark that has the ability to raise Malaysia up again. Only you can ignite that spark, only YOU can be the best that you are meant to be.

15. We were truly privileged to see you grow from wide-eyed diplomatic doe to the confident, capable, multi-tasking officers we challenged you to be in the four months that you were with us at the Institute. I hope that you never lose that sense of confidence, that feeling that you can do anything you set your mind to doing, and that exhilaration of a job well done.

Yang Berbahagia Dato' Sri KSU, seniors and colleagues of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs,

16. The Diploma in Diplomacy programme would not have been possible without your support, encouragement, feedback and yes, suggestions. The

Institute would not have been able to carry out its programme without the assistance of the many consultants, trainers, ex ambassadors and lecturers who were kind enough to avail their time and knowledge in shaping the future generation of Malaysian diplomats. If it is on these young shoulders that our country's continued survival rests, then we have very little to be worried about.

17. I would like to especially thank the Undersecretaries of seniors of the Ministries who personally came all the way from Putrajaya to interact with the juniors during the DiD programme. Their insights and frank discussions were very welcomed. In no other ministry are the seniors as invested in the next generation of officers. Some of the seniors had more than 1 session with the juniors, but one had an extremely extended time with them to the point that we very nearly had to switch off the lights so that we could all go home. But all these sessions were very much appreciated, right?

18. The Institute of Diplomacy and Foreign Relations is the training arm of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. One of our most important mandates was to equip the younger diplomats with the right tools before the Ministry sends them out into the world. To paraphrase Steve Jobs, who pioneered a whole new revolutionary way of connecting with people, we have to have faith – we have to have faith that people are basically good and smart, and that if you give them the tools, they'll do wonderful things with them.

So, to the graduating class of 2022, go out and do wonderful things!