WELCOMING SPEECH BY FAZIL IRWAN SOM, ISI EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Assalamualaikum and good morning ladies and gentlemen, fellow panellists and especially our esteemed representatives from the Ministry of Education; Dr. Ihsan Ismail, Head of National STEM Centre and Dr. Mohamed bin Abu Bakar, Director of Curriculum Development Division (BPK).

Welcome to the Disruptive Education Roundtable organised by the International Strategy Institute (ISI). I would like to first convey sincere apologies by the Chairman of ISI, Mr. Cheah Chyuan Yong, who will not be with us today due to some pre-planned matters that he needs to attend to.

For those of you who just got to know ISI today, allow me to give you a brief introduction. ISI is a not-for-profit organization established to create 3 essential things:

1. A curated platform for dialogue and knowledge between the government and the general public, consisting of the private sector, academia, media and civil society.
2. A networking platform for the private sector between Asia and the rest of the world.
3. A clearing house for new startup ventures and venture capital within Asia and beyond

We believe that the world will be a much better place when there is honest and intense dialogue between different sectors of society, addressing burning issues that affect us all. We believe that new businesses should be given a chance to succeed in this highly fluid and uncertain times as a result of the digital revolution. We believe Asia will be the next centre of gravity in the next 5 years. This is what sums of everything that we do here at ISI.

Now why are doing this Disruptive Education Roundtable, you may ask? We often talk about leaving a better planet for our children, but why can't we talk about leaving better children for our planet?

The world is changing ever so rapidly. Education is supposed to make us better human beings, to contribute to society and build a healthy nation. But today, we become the most selfish version of society than we ever was. All we care about, all our education system cares about, is how to maximise our industry worth, and how we are placed in pigeon holes of prescribed professions that we are stuck with for the rest of our lives.

This is the education system that we have inherited after the second world war. It is therefore baffling that after societies have vastly changed since then, our education system is still stuck in the post-war mode. We are still practising rote learning, left brain teaching, top-down, at a time when science and technological discoveries have way surpassed our education system.

Post-war education teaches us to be self-centric, every man for himself, in the race for industrialization. That period is no more. We are entering the digital age, the age of the sharing economy. The only way to survive is to collaborate, to work and live in communities. So why are investing millions in TVET? Why are we still not creating secure pathways for intelligences other than academic? How do we bring back the spirit of community in an individualistic education system? What roles can mosques, churches, temples play in the healthy growth of our children? These are the hard questions we need to ask in this uncertain times.

So what I hope for in this 3 hour discussion, is for us to be a bit more critical, and really drive down the key points that we can list down and form a report that we can hopefully convey to the parties involved in creating our education policy. Forget gradual changes, we need disruptive change in education. Let's start now. Thank you.