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Message of hope rings loud and clear as Ezulwini dialogue ends

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"NGIYA jabula (I'm happy)... because this is a dream fulfilled - one year after Global 2002 in Langkawi when His Majesty (King Mswati III) offered to host Global 2003 and also to be global Patron of our Club '29.

"One year on, here we are in Ezulwini Valley, the Valley of Heaven, as it would be in SiSwati but in a world which seems far from heavenly and which, since we last met, has been scarred with war in Iraq, civil strife in Liberia and other atrocities that dishonour humankind.

"Ezulwini, the heavenly valley, exists in a world which is intimidated by global insecurity, shamed by persistent inequality and disease, constrained by the digital divide.

"Likhona litsemba (But there is hope)...in our movement we have a saying that nothing is done until it is done.

"But here - in the heavenly valley - we know that this is only one step, one rung on the Jacob's ladder."

These were extracts from the message issued by the smart partners as the curtain fell on the sixth Southern Africa International Dialogue (SAID) on Saturday.

Certainly, there is hope. From Malaysia to almost all parts of Africa, from the Caribbean to the Mediterranean, bringing in business people and government leaders, trade union heads and cultural icons all saying together asibambane (let us be one).

As the World Trade Organisation Ministerial Meeting in Cancun draws closer, threats from the developed world is looming at the doorstep of the developing world.

The outcome of this year's SAID is testimony to the fact developing countries have accepted the reality that no country can solve the issues of global security alone.

Never have the countries participating in the dialogue been so united as in Ezulwini. The Ezulwini Statement on a Just Regime in Global Trade Through Smart Partnership was evidence of that.

Their message to the World Trade Organisation (WTO) and developed countries could not have been stronger - that the developing world can no longer stand the bullying by the rich nations.

The developing countries want the WTO to be fair, demand that the organisation be reformed to give the small countries a secure role in the dialogue.

So urgent is the situation that the Ezulwini dialogue was dominated by discussions on threats to developing countries.

They share a common view that multilateralism "died" after the United States occupied Iraq, but suggested devices that could revive it.

The countries acknowledge that the unipolar geo-political system reflects the distorted architecture of the international economic system which does not serve the interests of developing countries. At the dialogue, they were advised to pursue "smart collective" options to address the imbalance.

And they believe that Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, who has never been an advocate of globalisation in its current form, and African Union chairman President Joaquim Chissano of Mozambique, are able spokesmen to make out a case for the developing countries.

Obviously, Malaysia is their reference point.

Dr Mahathir detailed Malaysia's stand on seven issues which was later

accepted and became the thrust of the Ezulwini Statement to the WTO.

The Smart partnership dialogue has gone beyond a mere dialogue. The Ezulwini dialogue proves that it has emerged as a fora for developing countries to reach a common stand.

Swaziland and the Swazis have been gracious hosts and they deserve to reap the benefits of the dialogue.

"They benefit the most. They tapped the thoughts and experience and learned new things from every country which would be useful to devise solutions to national issues," said a minister.

The tangible results of the dialogue might not be immediate. But it has built the confidence of other developing countries in Malaysia.

Namibia, Sudan, Swaziland, to name a few, have invited Malaysian businessmen to help them develop their countries.

Countries in Africa are in a condition Malaysia was 20 years ago.

"Africa is rich but the people are poor," said Ezulwini joint chairman Martin Laing.

Impressed with Malaysia's economic achievement, some countries are thinking of adopting its policies to change their social, economic and political landscapes.

Dr Mahathir declines the compliments for being the reason for the dialogue's success.

He just had this to say: "I am happy...I have done my job for Malaysia..."

His attendance at the Ezulwini dialogue will be his last as Prime Minister. But his articulation is needed. Not a single day passed without him being invited to give a speech.

And he has promised to attend the Langkawi International Dialogue in his capacity as the Commonwealth Partnership for Technology Management Emeritus Fellow next year.