

ADDRESS BY THE PRIME MINISTER AT THE
OPENING CEREMONY OF THE FIFTH ISLAMIC
CONFERENCE OF FOREIGN MINISTERS, AT
PARLIAMENT HOUSE, KUALA LUMPUR ON
21ST JUNE, 1974

Bismillahi-Rahmanir-Rahim.

Alhamdulillah, syukur kita ke hadrat Tuhan yang maha pemurah dan maha penyayang kerana dengan hidayah dan inayahNya dapat kita mengadakan Persidangan Menteri-menteri Luar Negara-negara Islam di Kuala Lumpur pada hari ini.

Bagi pihak Kerajaan dan rakyat Malaysia, saya dengan sukacita menzahirkan perasaan bangga dan terimakasih yang tidak terhingga di atas kehormatan yang diberi oleh Negara-negara Islam kepada Malaysia dan rakyatnya. Begitu juga kita mengalu-alukan kehadiran Menteri-menteri dan Pembesar-pembesar dari negara-negara tersebut di Persidangan ini dan kita suka menyampaikan, melalui mereka itu, salam muhibbah dan persahabatan kepada rakyat negara-negara yang mereka wakili itu.

Mr Chairman, Your Excellencies, Distinguished Leaders and Members of Delegations and Brother Muslims.

It is with special pride and pleasure that, in the name of the Government and people of Malaysia, I welcome most warmly our distinguished guests—Ministers and leaders of so many Muslim countries throughout the world—to Kuala Lumpur for this Fifth Islamic Conference of Foreign Ministers. The spiritual values and the eternal glories of Islam which we share in common unite us together, transcending national boundaries and vast distances over land and sea. Today, therefore, at this moment of the formal opening of the Conference, the Malaysian people, through you, who are here in this hall, join their hands in friendship and brotherhood with all our Muslim brothers and sisters whom you represent.

This is both a joyful and a solemn occasion for us in Malaysia. We are happy that so many Muslim leaders have come to Kuala Lumpur from all parts of the world. Most of you have come from a long way and have travelled many thousands of miles to be here.

We extend to you our most cordial greetings and will do our best to provide facilities and hospitality within our means to make your stay in Malaysia both pleasant and memorable. At the same time, we are conscious of the heavy responsibilities which are entrusted on you at this Conference, which carries with it the hopes and deeply-felt aspirations of Muslims all over the world.

Today, as we gather together, we can all see the glimmerings of a glorious episode in the history of Islam. Islamic unity, which has long been our cherished aim and which at one time seemed an impossible dream, may finally, at last, be realised. How different it was only five short years ago! We met then in Rabat for the First Islamic Summit, stricken and anguished by the humiliation which our great faith had suffered with the desecration of the Al-Aqsa Mosque. It was then perhaps the lowest point in the history of Islam. But, praise be to Allah, it was also a turning point. From the depths of our sorrow and anger emerged our firm resolve to build once again, after many centuries of turmoil and division, an enduring edifice of Muslim unity.

Brother Muslims.

We have made a good beginning. During the last three decades, we, particularly the Arab world, have been faced with the challenge of Zionism. Recently, because of our unity, and because of the valour and vigour of Arab fighting-men, the military tide has been turned against Israel. Because of our unity, and because of the skill and steadfastness of our Arab brothers, the diplomatic battle has been waged with increasing success. Because of our unity, and because of our desire and determination to co-operate together, we have seen the emergence of a new Islamic force in human affairs, which can have far-reaching consequences on the course of history. The lesson which emerges is clear: in unity lies our strength. As a result of our own dissension and rivalries, we have been divided and exploited for far too long. Now that we have begun to build, stone by stone, the edifice of a World Islamic Community, we must never forget the lesson of the past. It we do, we do so at our own peril.

But, while today we can hope and rejoice, let us also never forget that our success is by no means assured. We can falter so easily and for so many reasons, whether it is from sectional interests, from national rivalries, from a lack of imagination, from

the loss of the political will, above all, from the easy delusion that good intentions or generous words alone give us results.

Let us, therefore, remind ourselves that we can only make progress by our own resolute effort and by steady application to the practical business of co-operation and by turning our words and intentions into concrete results. What you do, or fail to do, at this Conference will have an impact, favourable or otherwise, on the course of Islamic history. We have had a most successful Summit Conference at Lahore, the memory of which still lingers and inspires those of us who were there. In the spirit of that Conference, I, therefore, urge that we must grasp the opportunity which now exists and maintain the momentum of consultation and co-operation among Muslim countries so that a truly united and cohesive world Islamic Community may one day, soon, be realised.

Since the historic First Islamic Summit in Rabat in 1969, we can find satisfaction in the knowledge that we have laid a strong foundation for mutual co-operation. But we cannot sit back on the progress we have made, encouraging though it has been. Five years ago at Rabat, we declared our determination to co-operate with one another, and in the next year at Jeddah, we established the machinery of the Islamic Secretariat. The Islamic Conference must now enter a new phase in its history. The concept of unity and co-operation has been effectively worked out; we must now give it the necessary content and substance. We must enter a period of imaginative consolidation, of building on the foundation already laid, by implementing concrete measures, programmes and projects which will make our aim of Islamic unity a reality.

Let us, therefore, at this Conference explore together effective areas of co-operation. Let us judge ourselves not by what we say but by what we do, not only by what happens here at this Conference but, even more important, by what happens in the days ahead. It is in that spirit that Malaysia for its part approaches this Conference. Islamic unity has brought us the successes we have achieved so far. Let us consolidate that unity in all practical ways we can.

At the political level, foremost in our minds is the question of Baitul-Maqdis. As I said at the Lahore Summit, Israel's persistent attempts to transform the character of Jerusalem, in defiance of all UN resolutions and in utter disregard of world opinion, is a

cause of deep concern and anguish to all Muslims as to other peace-loving peoples throughout the world. The Holy City is the home of three major religions of the world. The Judaization of that city cannot be condoned by anyone with any sense of history or of the spiritual longings of a people. It is a deliberate move by Israel to extinguish the rights of its Arab inhabitants, both Muslim and Christian alike, and deprive them of their ancient freedoms.

Today, despite current favourable developments in the West Asian situation, Israel continues to stand in defiance of world opinion, on the issue of Baitul-Maqdis. The Islamic Conference has declared on several occasions that the continued occupation of the Holy City by Israeli forces is a constant threat to the sacred shrines of Islam and that our peoples are firmly determined to reject any solution of the problem of Palestine which deny Jerusalem the status it had before June 1967. This must remain our stand. The ungodly acts of Israel to annex and Judaize the Holy City must be condemned and resisted with all that we have at our command. Let us therefore mobilise our resources, first of all, our diplomatic resources, to ensure that Israel, the occupying power, forthwith desists from these acts.

Israel's continued defiance and bellicosity is central to the issue of Palestine. In the first Arab-Israel War of 1948/49, three-quarters of Palestine came under Israeli control and its people were driven out to live as refugees. Almost three decades have since passed. Infants have grown to manhood and the Palestinians continue to see their homes and lands forcibly occupied by the invaders who do not even belong to that part of the world. In the two wars that followed, in 1956 and 1967, the Palestinian people became more and more deprived of their inalienable birthright.

In the face of these dangers and difficulties, Islamic unity is more than ever an imperative and after our two summits and four Conferences. I am encouraged that we can clearly discern the reality of this unity. Our unity must serve the cause of justice for the Palestinian people. I am glad that in this City of Kuala Lumpur there is a full-fledged representative of the Palestine Liberation Organisation. His presence is consistent with our reaffirmation in Lahore that the PLO is the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people in its just struggle.

It must be clear to the world that until the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people are restored, the conflict in West Asia

will persist and there will be no lasting peace. It remains an urgent responsibility for us all, in whatever way we can, to press for a just solution to this basic problem.

The problems of West Asia have persisted for nearly three decades. Our Arab brothers have been forced to go to battle on four major occasions and by the grace of Allah, in this long drawn series of Arab/Israeli conflicts, the Arab successes in the Ramadan War have ushered a new spirit which our unity through this Organisation must continue to sustain and nurture.

Since peace with justice is our ultimate aim, I am sure that all of us have been following with the keenest interest the negotiations currently being undertaken by our Arab brothers. We in Malaysia support them in these efforts and we reiterate once more that, in peace as in war, Malaysia stands ready to extend all possible assistance within our means to help our Arab brothers to regain what is morally, historically and legally theirs. Our hearts and prayers go to them in this new phase of the Arab struggle, which is also the Islamic struggle.

Today, as our Arab brothers embark on the road of negotiations to seek peace and justice, we in this Conference must, more than ever, remain solid and united. We must not allow ourselves to become complacent by the current mood of expectancy or to be confused by the machinations of Zionism. Our unity through this Organisation must be clearly demonstrated so that all the world will know that we will not weaken and we will not be divided. I venture to say that the unity that we display at this Kuala Lumpur Conference and beyond can help to bring about the full restoration of Arab and Islamic rights for which we have prayed over these long years. Let our voices ring clear and loud in total united support for the Arab and the Islamic cause in West Asia.

Brother Muslims.

I turn next to the economic field, where I believe there exists vast scope for co-operation among Muslim countries. Furthermore, to my mind, the time is never more opportune than at this juncture when we have the organizational apparatus and the resources to get our plans and projects on the move. In this field, it seems to me, we must lay emphasis not only on questions of economic and technical co-operation but also on trade and investment expansion

among member countries. My country for its part will not be found wanting in these endeavours to make our Organisation an instrument of practical co-operation.

The agenda item before you on the economic situation is of momentous significance because of the world-wide implications and short and long-term effects of current economic problems. In this connection, I am happy to note that the Committee to study the world economic situation, and in particular that obtaining in the Islamic countries, will submit its findings at this Conference. Their report will, I am confident, provide a valuable basis for your very important discussions on this issue.

With regard to economic projects, let me at this juncture, only urge the Conference to come out with concrete proposals that can be implemented in the immediate foreseeable future. Our statements of intent of eradicating poverty, ending exploitation and promoting mutual economic co-operation would sound hollow indeed, if we merely indulge in propounding grandiose plans which look impressive on paper but which will not get off the ground. Instead we must be inspired to plan practical projects which we know can, and will be, carried out. We have much to answer for to future generations if, because we do not apply ourselves earnestly enough, we now falter and fail to grasp the opportunity to work out practical and specific projects of co-operation for the betterment of our peoples. It is in this spirit that Malaysia will submit for the consideration of this Conference certain proposals for economic and technical co-operation which will include provisions for the exchange of expertise within the Muslim World.

I need not touch here in great detail on the Islamic Development Bank except to say that the rapid progress towards its establishment is testimony to Islamic unity and sense of purpose. I for one regard it as the single most important project for co-operation we have so far initiated and I believe it holds great potential for the future if all Member countries work seriously and constructively for its success.

The Islamic Bank clearly indicates the vast scope for co-operative action that exists among us. Through this Bank can emanate important financial resources to complement fundings from other established international institutions with which it shares the common objective of eradicating poverty, hunger and

disease. Malaysia will continue to give every possible support and facility to the Bank and regards it a great honour and privilege to be associated with its formation. To his Excellency Tunku Abdul Rahman who has worked tirelessly for the realization of the Islamic Bank, we offer our warmest congratulations. To His Majesty King Faisal, in whose great country the headquarters of the Bank will be situated, we offer our continued esteem and profound gratitude.

For the first time in this century, Islamic countries with our immense energy and other raw material resources, have a sizeable potential for economic development and co-operation. Let us use this potential for the realization of our economic goals. It is not our intention to turn away from non-Muslim countries. It must be our policy to work with every country for the common good and for peace and stability of the world. However, as the Muslim countries have the resources to achieve our common goals, let us seize this historic opportunity to work together to achieve these goals. The bond that will hold us together, the foundation of the World Islamic Community that we wish to create, will not only be the divine spiritual values of Islam that have kept alive the awareness of our basic unity through centuries of division and darkness, but also the vital moving forces of development and progress which can propel Islamic countries towards a more just and equitable order.

In order to bring about a World Islamic Community, this Fifth Islamic Conference of Foreign Ministers must take measures, both practical and symbolic, to engender greater Islamic solidarity. I suggest these measures could include:

- Establishment of an Islamic economic and technical co-operation scheme;
- Promotion of greater trade and investment between Islamic countries to enable economic complementarity between Islamic countries to be fully taken advantage of;
- Deployment of unused funds of the Islamic Development Bank, as far as possible, within the Muslim world;
- Declaration of an Islamic Charter Day, on whatever day may be agreed upon, to create among Islamic communities throughout the world an awareness of Islam's revival and its promise of a better world through the practical promotion of the objectives of our Charter;

—Facilitation of increased communication among our peoples by easing travel restrictions among member countries through partial abolition of visas for officials and such other categories as can be agreed upon.

I would like finally to turn to one other specific area of co-operation which I believe we can fruitfully explore. This relates to joint study and research on the interpretation of the Holy Koran. In many parts of the world there is still widespread ignorance of the values of Islam and of the teachings of the Koran which is often misinterpreted even by Muslims themselves through misunderstanding and neglect. It is indeed very important to our spiritual as well as our physical development that there should be agreement among us on the interpretation of the Koran in relation to the principles of Islam and our contemporary way of life. The intellectual history of Islam in the days of its glory has seen outstanding achievements in many fields such as science, technology, jurisprudence and philosophy. Surely it is not beyond our scope to day to revive this spirit of Islamic scholarship and to work out a joint programme of study and research in order to reach a better and deeper understanding on the teachings of Islam in the light of contemporary developments.

Islam is a universal religion, the Koran is a living Book, concerned with all aspects of human existence, the teachings of the Prophet is intended for all times: these are the unshakeable rock of our faith. At the same time—and indeed, I venture to say, precisely because of this—we must learn to distinguish the principles and tenets of Islam, which are immutable and permanent, from mere ways of life, which must be relevant and responsive to current conditions, whether they be in Arabia fourteen hundred years ago or in our contemporary world, characterised as it is by complex economic phenomena and by dazzling scientific and technological changes.

It is obvious that the way of life during the time of the Prophet was very different from that which obtains in our world today. We cannot live in the past. We live here and now. To live by the ways of the past is to invite stagnation of our societies and exploitation by others. We must therefore be alive and responsive to contemporary conditions. We must be ready to adjust our ways of life to the needs and demands of the times while strictly adhering to the basic principles and tenets of Islam.

I believe this is a very important, indeed a basic, area of co-operation because what is at issue is the attitude of Muslim peoples throughout the world. After all, it is the attitude of a people, its intellectual and emotional responses, which determines whether it will make progress or stagnate. I urge, therefore, that this Conference initiate some action so that a specific programme of joint-study and research can be worked out and implemented. Islam has often been accused by its detractors of being a hindrance to progress. Let us emphatically repudiate this charge and demonstrate that, on the contrary, Islam is an effective vehicle for progress while at the same time providing basic spiritual values which give life its full meaning spiritually and materially and a true sense of human dignity.

Brother Muslims.

I have spoken at some length, with your kind indulgence, on political questions, on economic co-operation, and on other matters that are of mutual interest to us. This Organization of which we are all proud to be members, must be anchored on strong foundations in order to face successfully the challenges ahead. As we gain in unity and strength, let us reiterate yet again that this growing World Islamic Community and the unity on which it is structured is not a negative force, to divide or to destroy, but a positive force, to create and to uphold the cause of justice.

As we meet today in Kuala Lumpur, let us be conscious of our contributions, limited as all human efforts are, to the glory of Islam. Let us look back on the fourteen hundred years of Islamic history which has seen the height of grandeur and achievement as well as the plain of depression and despair. Let us be conscious of this moment of destiny in the long history of Islam and work together, without malice or arrogance, for the greater glory of Islam so that our great religion will once more be a force for peace, for modernization and for progress, not only for Muslim nations and peoples but for all Humanity for peace and co-operation among all Nations.