

**STATEMENT BY
THE HONOURABLE DATO' SAIFUDDIN ABDULLAH
MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS OF MALAYSIA
AT THE HIGH-LEVEL SEGMENT OF THE 40TH REGULAR SESSION
OF THE UNITED NATIONS HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL**

GENEVA, 26 FEBRUARY 2019

Thank you Madam Vice-President.

Madam High Commissioner for Human Rights

Allow me to congratulate His Excellency Ambassador Coly Seck on his election as President of the Human Rights Council. My congratulations also go to the Members of the Bureau. I wish you and your Bureau the best in spearheading this Council throughout this year 2019. And I assure you of Malaysia's readiness to work with you in fulfilling the Council's mandate.

Malaysia's Commitment to Human Rights Cause

2. Malaysia got his independence in 1957. In May last year, we got our second independence, when for the first time, after 61 years, we have a new Government, we have a new administration in Kuala Lumpur. Since then, major administrative, institutional and legislative reforms are currently being undertaken by the new Malaysian Malaysian Government.
3. There is now greater focus on advancing and mainstreaming human rights; promoting democratic principles, rule of law and justice; as well as instilling integrity and good governance together with the principles of responsibility and accountability, as well as sustainability.
4. Much greater space is now being accorded for more robust human rights discussion including discussing items that were once considered taboo, like freedom of religion or belief and the LGBT issues. Next week, when our Parliament sits beginning of Monday, we will be repealing and amending several of the draconian laws that have been oppressing Malaysians including in human rights realm. New policies are being developed in order to promote all aspects of human rights. From freedom of opinion and expression; to the rights of the child; to empowerment and advancement of women; the rights of persons with disabilities and of the indigenous peoples; the rights to food, safe drinking water, education, health and housing, to mention but a few. The universal suffrage is going to be lowered from 21 years to 18 years old. We have also declared a moratorium on death penalty.
5. Stronger checks and balances in the governance systems are being carried out. Transparency and accountability are now central to the new arrangement. The new Malaysia also embraces multi-stakeholder partnerships in the field of human rights. The Government has strengthened engagements and collaborations with the National Human Rights Institution (SUHAKAM) and many of Malaysia's vibrant civil society organizations.

6. The new Government is more comfortable talking about further democratization, freedom, human rights and the rule of law. We have ratified three of the nine international human rights conventions. We are committed to ratifying the other six. There will be challenges, but we will remain steadfast and we will soldier on and we are looking at some of the low hanging fruits as to ratifying for example the UN CAT and the one on forced disappearance. We have been welcoming the visits of Special Rapporteurs on Human Rights and may I announce we welcome all Rapporteurs of Human Rights to Malaysia anytime you wish to come.
7. We have made some progress, real progress. Perhaps not as much as we want to do it but there is real progress. On Monday next week, I will be announcing another step forward. I am sorry I cannot announce it today for some reasons which is political back home but I promise there will be another major announcement on human rights progress in Malaysia on Monday.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

8. We have also been steadfast in speaking up on the plight of people who have been oppressed around the globe. Among others, the Rohingyas in Myanmar. Together with my colleagues, the Foreign Ministers of ASEAN, we are committed to at least three items when it comes to the plights of the Rohingyas. Number one, we are committed to bringing the prepetaraour to justice. And for Malaysia this would include among others, the issue of giving them citizenship as their right. Number two, we want to ensure that rpatration occurs as quickly as possible. But reparation must be voluntary, must be safe and must be dignified. And number three, we are contributing to humanitarian assistance both outside Malaysia, for example, in Cox's Bazaar, Bangladesh and also helping out the more than 100, 000 Rohingya who are now residing in Malaysia.
9. On the issue of Palestine, for more than half a century now, the Palestinians have been deprived of their rights and their fundamental freedoms. They continue to suffer the gross human rights violations and injustices under the prolonged Israeli occupation and blockade in blatant disregard of international human rights and humanitarian laws.
10. To live up to its mandate and to maintain its credibility, the Human Rights Council should not allow itself to be distracted from addressing the plight of the Palestinians as a result of Israel's obstinacy. Malaysia will always stand in solidarity with and support for the independent state of Palestine.

Madam Vice-President,

11. I wish to reaffirm that the new Malaysia will do more and we will expedite and we would put a sense of urgency in doing more in the aspects of human rights. To this end, I would like to mention here that Malaysia would want to offer ourselves for a seat at the Human Rights Council at an upcoming term to be determined. Human Rights play an increasingly crucial role in our foreign policy and it is in this context that Malaysia is ready to shoulder its responsibilities in fulfilling the Council's mandate.

12. Let me conclude by stating again that Malaysia is fully committed to the cause of human rights both at home and globally, and our firm support for the work of the Human Rights Council.

I thank you, Terima Kasih.