

THE SUN

DATE: 11/09/2007

# Malaysia's success and Palestine's dream

The Sun - 11/9/2007

by **Tan Sri Ahmad Al Farra**

**CONGRATULATIONS** Malaysia. I witnessed your lovely silver jubilee and now I witness you turn golden. Congratulations Malaysia, as you sit on the throne of democracy, civilisation and development. And congratulations Malaysia as you march proudly to freedom, peace, progress and stability.

## July 1982

I arrived in Kuala Lumpur as Ambassador of the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO). My office was on top of a hill, opposite of the Ministry of Public Works. Around the corner was the residence of Tunku Abdul Rahman and the office of Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad, then Malaysia's prime minister.

I requested Wisma Putra to arrange my courtesy call on Tunku Abdul Rahman. The Tunku was highly regarded in our region and well known, not only as the first prime minister of Malaysia but also as the first secretary-general of the Organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC). The OIC summit convened in Rabat, Morocco in 1969. It was in reaction to an arson attack against the Al-Aqsa Mosque in Palestine. I was a fourth year student at Alexandria University in Egypt at the time. It never crossed my mind there would come a day where I would have the honour of meeting the Father of Malaysian Independence.

Wisma Putra arranged the meeting and I was advised to maintain the rules of protocol. In other words, it would

be a short visit and political issues were not to be brought up. I found the Tunku living a very humble lifestyle. I introduced myself, made a couple of comments about the weather and praised our bilateral brotherly relations.

Then the Tunku brought up Palestine. He explained that the Arab countries must unify themselves. The Arabs have so far failed in fighting Israel and have thus been unsuccessful in liberating Palestine.

The Arabs must be practical – they have to unify their stances to consider recognising the right of Israel to exist as a reality. He went on to say that the Arab-Israeli conflict could not be solved by military means.

I was furious, because in those days, whenever we referred to Israel, we insisted on calling it the "so called" Israel or the "Zionist entity." As our brief encounter came to an end, I remember leaving with a sour taste in my mouth.

Fast forward twenty five years, and I now see that the Arabs and the Palestinians are still trying to implement Tunku's vision.

## October 20, 1991

It was the aftermath of the Gulf War. The government of Spain was hosting the Madrid conference – an early attempt by the international community to start a peace process. The negotiations involved Israel and the Arab countries including Syria, Lebanon, Jordan and a joint Palestinian-Jordanian delegation (due to Israel's objection of a separate Palestinian delegation).

I was called by the Prime Minister's Office and told that Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad wanted to see me immediately. I was not told why.

Soon after my arrival, the prime minister started by saying, "I talk to you as a sincere Malaysian man. I want you to convey to President Yasser Arafat that he does not need to be directly involved in the Madrid Conference. The clever fighter is the one who retreats one step back in order to throw a strong blow against his rival; otherwise Arafat would be forced to accept a deal without Al Quds (Jerusalem)." He continued, "I say this because of my personal deep concern with the Palestinian cause. I do hope that President Arafat will not misunderstand me."

I conveyed the prime minister's message to President Arafat but it was to no avail. Arafat insisted he would be directly involved in every peace process, from Madrid to Oslo to Cairo to the White House.

## November 2004

President Yasser Arafat pays with his life for rejecting the deal brokered between American President Bill Clinton and Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak at Camp David on July 2000. This deal did not solve the issue of Jerusalem or the issue of the refugees.

## March 2006

I resigned as Ambassador of Palestine to Malaysia. The ongoing conflict between Fatah and Hamas has become too extreme. I went for my farewell

call on the Prime Minister of Malaysia, Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi.

He received me at his residence. He looked a little indisposed, and as I asked him about his health he explained, "I have a bad cold and for this reason I am at home. I cancelled all my appointments for today, but when I saw your name, I decided to receive you in my house because, I also have a few things to say." The prime minister talked about the problems and challenges facing the Islamic ummah and added, "I have to find the proper solutions as Chairman of OIC." Then, he started talking about the situation in Palestine. He said, "Hamas was democratically elected. Fatah has to admit its defeat and reorganise itself to regain the confidence of the people. Fatah must not undermine the government of Hamas. If this happens both Fatah and Hamas will lose and it is the people who will suffer the most. Israel will rejoice and will be the winner."

## Aug 31, 2007

There is no need for me to go any further about the situation in Palestine as everybody knows the result of the clashes between Fatah and Hamas. Israel and USA spare no effort in deepening the rift between these two main factions. The Gaza Strip is controlled by Hamas but completely blockaded by Israel and boycotted by the international community. The people are living miserably. And of course, USA and Israel show their concern by now supporting President Abbas as if they did not know that he has been the president for the last three years.

We need pioneers and visionary leaders. We need to learn from Malaysia's experience. Fifty years is not too long in the history of countries, but what Malaysia has achieved during this short time is remarkable. It deserves to be a model and an example for all countries that dream of freedom, development and progress.

Selamat Hari Merdeka.

*The writer is a Senior Fellow at the Institute of Strategic and International Studies and the former Ambassador of Palestine to Malaysia. The opinions in this article are entirely his and do not necessarily reflect the views of Isis.*