

**OPENING CEREMONY 23RD CONFERENCE OF SPEAKERS AND PRESIDING OFFICERS  
OF THE COMMONWEALTH (CSPOC)**

By : YAB. DATO' SERI DR. AHMAD ZAHID HAMIDI, TIMBALAN PERDANA  
MENTERI MALAYSIA

Venue : KOTA KINABALU, SABAH

Date : 10/01/2016

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Rt. Honourable Datuk Seri Panglima Musa Haji Aman, Chief Minister of Sabah

Honourable Tan Sri Abu Zahar Ujang, President of The Senate, Malaysia;

Honourable Tan Sri Datuk Seri Panglima Pandikar Amin Mulia, Speaker of the House  
of Representatives, Malaysia;

Hon. Datuk Syed Abas Syed Ali, Speaker of the Sabah Legislative Assembly,

Honourable Tan Sri Datuk Seri Panglima Joseph Pairin Kitingan, Deputy Chief  
Minister of Sabah;

Honourable State Ministers; State Deputy Ministers, Members of Parliament,  
Members of the Sabah Legislative Assembly;

Excellencies, Honourable Speakers and Presiding Officers,

Members of the Diplomatic Corps,

Distinguished Delegates and Guests,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great pleasure to be here to participate in this ceremony of the  
23<sup>rd</sup> Conference of Speakers and Presiding Officers of the Commonwealth.

On behalf of The Honourable Prime Minister of Malaysia Dato Sri Mohd Najib bin  
Tun Razak, I would like to extend our warmest welcome to Kota Kinabalu. As we  
herald in the new year, let us begin the year with fresh optimism - as the  
beginning is the most important part of work. Let me begin by wishing you a happy  
new year and a wish for peace, good health and best wishes throughout the world.

It is indeed an honour to address representatives of 2.2 billion people. The Commonwealth is home to a third of the world's population who in many cases share our language and our laws, with whom through history we have a common bond.

The Commonwealth holds a special place in the Malaysian history. The supreme law of the land - the Malaysian Constitution was carved based on recommendations made by the Commonwealth. It is, this system of parliamentary democracy with a bicameral legislature, that helps Malaysia achieved unity and democracy. It is, this system that helps to improve the standard of living of the people. Democratic governance and basic human rights are the pillar of the Commonwealth.

Over time, these fundamental principles of the Commonwealth have not only remained unchanged, but they have been enhanced and strengthened. The Commonwealth Charter has now set 16 shared core principles which Malaysia is committed to uphold.

Committing to good democratic principles; human rights; peace and security; tolerance and respect; freedom of expression; separation of powers; rule of law and good governance are principles already enshrined in our Constitution.

Central to reaffirm these principles is a harmonious relationship and cooperation among the branches of government - executive, legislative and judiciary, as they all derive their authority from the sovereign will of the people and therefore they have to be accountable to them.

When democracy is under threat, it cannot be the responsibility of the executive alone to seek for solutions. Parliaments should respond collectively to seek for solutions as it is an opportunity to renew the abiding faith in the fundamental principles of the Commonwealth.

The executive is receptive to Parliamentarians' opinions as discussions on various concerns in parliamentary are reflective of the national mood, and hence the need for both branches of government to work in partnership.

The Speakers and Presiding Officers are held in high esteem as they are custodian of the parliamentary democracy tradition. It is a position which symbolises the dignity and power of the House over which he or she is presiding.

The Federal Constitution and the Standing Orders of the House provide adequate powers for the Speakers to conduct a smooth parliamentary proceedings while

protecting the independence and impartiality of the House. The Speakers welcome visiting dignitaries and represent Parliament at national events and during official visits abroad.

The responsibilities entrusted to the Speakers are so arduous that he cannot afford to ignore any aspect of parliamentary life. For this reason, the Speakers and Presiding Officer are the figurehead of the institution.

The Speakers and Presiding Officers provide leaderships to enable representation, legislative and oversight functions through the concept of fair and inclusive development.

Through dialogues and consensus-building efforts, Parliaments are able to constructively engage the electorate for their views. This responsiveness and willingness to listen to the voice of the people is one of the great strengths of the parliamentary system.

The voice of 2.2 billion people gives the Commonwealth the legitimacy to articulate on global importance. The strength of the Commonwealth lies in its shared values and diversity. Each member has an equal say, regardless of their size or economic stature. The need to remain cohesive despite the diversity helps to maintain a sense of balance and calm - attain world peace and prevent destruction.

So, how should the legislative enhance its independence and impartiality?

This is where distinguished guests of the Commonwealth can play a role. Conferences like this offer an opportunity to share experiences and best practices across the continents.

There should be no task too difficult to overcome because all of us, be it members of the executive, legislative and the judiciary are involved in governance and together we must strive to improve the standards of living of our people, the promotion of human dignity and equality as well as the strengthening of national institutions that can guarantee fair, accountable and transparent governance.

I am aware that you have a full agenda which entails, inter alia, the independence, security, privileges and developments of Parliament which will be discussed and shared during the conference. I welcome the recognition of parliamentarians to address them critically as the process of governance.

The separation of powers between the three branches of government is clear, especially with the endorsement of the Latimer House Guidelines by the Heads of Government of the Commonwealth. The principle underlying the guidelines aims to ensure that Parliament manages its state of affairs and provide oversight function without undue interference from the executive.

We need to find new approaches, to rise above the political divide and place the needs and aspirations of the people first. Traditions are proving to be inadequate to the challenges we face today.

Taking it a step further and on account the increasing constituency demands upon Members of Parliament, the Parliament of Malaysia has proposed Parliamentary reforms to ensure that the House conducts its business more efficiently and effectively.

In keeping with this reform, the executive fully support this effort and will continue to build a harmonious relationship through new mechanisms to uphold the stateliness of Parliament. We firmly believe the more balance the legislative - executive relation is, the more effective the parliamentary democracy system will become. It is the recipe for good governance and progression towards a maturing democracy.

Let me conclude by reiterating the fact that this is an important conference and that in your deliberations you will be inspired by the spirit of the Commonwealth.

It is an important occasion which we can draw lessons from past experiences, thus making it possible to improve and reinforce the foundations of our Parliaments which cherish and stand for protection of the rights, peace, respect, rule of law and good governance but above all the pursuit of parliamentary democracy.

I therefore wish you fruitful deliberations, as well as an enjoyable and memorable visit with us.

Thank you.

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