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Y. Bhg. Tan Sri William Cheng, Presiden Dewan Perniagaan dan Perindustrian Cina Kuala Lumpur dan Selangor (KLSCCCI);

Yang Berusaha Encik Michael Chai, Pengerusi Jawatankuasa Penganjur, Expo Cintai Malaysia 2004 (ECM 2004);

YB Menteri-Menteri, Menteri-menteri Besar, Timbalan-timbunan Menteri, dan Setiausaha-setiausaha Parlimen;

Duta-duta Besar dan Pesuruhjaya-pesuruhjaya Tinggi;

Pengarah-pengarah KLSCCCI;

Para peserta pameran;

Dif-dif jemputan;

Tuan-tuan dan Puan-puan yang saya hormati sekalian.

Assalamualaikum dan Salam sejahtera.

Terlebih dahulu saya ingin mengucapkan berbilang-banyak terima kasih kepada pihak penganjur yang telah sudi menjemput saya untuk merasmikan Expo Cintai Malaysia ke-5 pada tahun ini. Bagi pihak Kerajaan, saya ingin merakamkan ucapan syabas dan tahniah kepada Dewan Perniagaan dan Perindustrian Cina, Kuala Lumpur dan Selangor yang telah sekali lagi berjaya menganjurkan Expo ini. Usaha ini menggambarkan dengan jelas kesungguhan Dewan Perniagaan Cina untuk membantu peniaga-peniaga Malaysia untuk terus melangkah ke hadapan dan memantapkan perniagaan mereka bukan sahaja di dalam negara malah di persada antarabangsa.

Ladies and gentlemen,

I am delighted to be here with all of you today to officially launch the "Cintai Malaysia" Expo - the 5th Malaysia International Trade and Consumer Fair. Indeed the theme of the Expo, which is "Enjoy Prosperity Via Regional Market Integration", is most suitable to reflect the

current realities of the global business environment. If not too long ago Malaysian businesses could be content with doing business the traditional way and establishing themselves in the domestic market, today the situation is very different.

Today, Malaysian businesses, particularly SMEs must contemplate their survival from a starkly different perspective, and in a significantly larger context. Globalisation is the new order of the day and liberalisation is no longer just a catchphrase. It has become the new reality of international trade. Protective barriers are increasingly being dismantled to allow for free and open competition.

The merits and demerits of an open market economy is of course still very much open to debate, but this is not what we are concerned with here today. What is important for the business community in Malaysia is the fact that liberalization is inevitable. With the advent of AFTA and because Malaysia is a member of the WTO, like it or not we will soon have to liberalize and open up our markets to goods and services coming from beyond our shores. What this means is that Malaysian businesses, service providers and even professionals will not only have to compete amongst themselves, but rather with their counterparts from all over the world.

It's all well and good if the competition is equal and all players are starting at the same level. Unfortunately there is no guarantee that this will be the situation, for more often than not in an open market economy, local businesses will find themselves competing against gigantic and powerful multinationals with almost unlimited capital and resources. In such a scenario the question to ask ourselves is: are we ready?

Today the world is witness to the rise of China as a new economic powerhouse. The sheer size of China's economy, with all its advantages - such as low costs and an abundance of cost-effective skilled workforce, -is enough to cause significant changes in the global economic landscape, with its ability to re-direct investment and siphon off a huge chunk of those investments away from other nations in the region and other parts of the world into its own grasp. China's high productivity levels and the relatively low cost of doing business makes it the

location of choice for manufacturers and investors the world over.

And China is but one of the many other nations competing for a piece of the economic action. We also face competition from other burgeoning economies like India, South Korea, Taiwan, not to mention Singapore and Thailand, all of which have their own sets of advantages and uniqueness. This is the kind of competition that Malaysian businesses have to face today. Although we do not view China or any other country as a threat to us, the fact remains that we must make adequate preparations to cope with ever intensifying global competition.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Clearly Malaysian businesses have much to do to prepare themselves for globalization. Fortunately the situation is not all that bad. In fact, a positive side of globalisation is that while we have to open our markets to foreign products, other countries too will be open to our products and it is in this context that the theme for this year's Expo is most relevant. Currently Malaysia is the 17th biggest trading nation in the world with its external trade twice the size of its GDP. Whilst the USA remains Malaysia's largest trading partner, Singapore and the rest of ASEAN are also major partners, with Singapore counting for 13% of Malaysia's total trade (2nd largest) and the rest of ASEAN counting for over 11 %.

Malaysian businesses should be encouraged by this robustness of Malaysia's external trade and they must be ready to expand and become international players. Already Malaysia trades with over 200 nations whilst there is an on-going effort to expand into non-traditional markets such as West Asia and Central and Eastern Europe. Malaysian businesses should take full advantage of the country's good standing in international trade and maximize their opportunities. They must be ready to go where no others have gone, and they must be ready to tackle new challenges head on.

Regional and global markets are there and ready for us to tap, provided we are willing to go the extra mile to and expand our business horizons. We must re-examine the way we do businesses and the kind of products that we produce. We must be highly attuned to the ever changing needs and

demands of the global market so that we can quickly adapt and cater to those demands.

In order for Malaysian products to successfully penetrate foreign markets, those products must be of high quality and must be priced competitively. In addition, we must begin to look at new areas in the production of our goods and services which will give us the competitive edge. A stronger emphasis should be placed on the value added to enable us to move up the value chain.

At the same time, Malaysian businesses would also do well to continue to look at the abundance of natural resources that Malaysia has, to explore new avenues for business. We have been very successful in the palm oil sector as well as in the production of timber based products and there is no reason why we cannot repeat the same success in other areas as well. With the government's move to enhance the agriculture sector and to encourage the growth of the biotechnology industry in Malaysia, Malaysian businesses should spare no effort in exploring opportunities in those areas. I am certain that with time and given the right focus and determination, Malaysia and Malaysian companies can become leaders in those sectors as well. We just need to be brave and serious enough to try.

Ladies and gentlemen,

I understand that this Expo includes a significant participation of exhibitors and business delegates from China India, Indonesia, The Philippines, Myanmar, Vietnam and other ASEAN countries. I believe this would be a wonderful opportunity for all Malaysian businesses participating in this Expo, not only to showcase their products and services to our foreign friends but also to lay the foundation towards the formation of smart partnerships with them that would potentially generate significant long-term mutual benefits.

At the same time I would encourage our foreign friends to take advantage of their visit here to take a closer look at Malaysian products and services and also to look at the abundance of opportunities for business and investment that are available here. We are delighted that you are able to experience first hand the peace and stability with which Malaysia is blessed.

In the course of your visit here I am certain that you will discover that Malaysia is extremely business friendly, with the government and the private sector working hand in hand to ensure a conducive business environment. We are certain that this will enforce your confidence in our economy that has not only shown much resilience and dynamism over the years but one which also continues to be on a positive growth trajectory.

Ladies and gentlemen,

I would like to once again congratulate the Chinese Chambers Of Commerce (KLSCCCI) and Industry of Kuala Lumpur and Selangor for successfully convening this Expo. Indeed this is an excellent opportunity for Malaysian businesses to showcase their products and I hope that the KLSCCCI would be able to continue to organize this annual expo for many years to come. In addition I encourage the Chambers to organize more such events which are specifically tailored for the Malaysian business community, especially with regard to preparing them better for the many challenges that lie ahead in the future.

I do hope that all the participants at this expo would take full advantage of this week-long event not only to find new markets for their products, but also to establish new partnerships and to strengthen existing business networks for the benefit of the entire Malaysian business community. I am confident that this endeavor will contribute significantly towards sustaining a thriving and robust economy for the benefit of all of us. On that note I wish all participants at this Expo all the very best and I hereby officially declare the **EXPO CINTAI MALAYSIA 2004 - THE 5TH MALAYSIA INTERNATIONAL TRADE AND CONSUMER FAIR** officially opened.

Thank you.

PEJABAT TIMBALAN PERDANA MENTERI
Putrajaya