

## THE 9TH GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE OF ASIAN POLITICAL PARTIES (ICAPP)

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Distinguished guests,

Ladies and gentlemen,

1. It gives me great pleasure to welcome you all to the ninth General Assembly of the International Conference of Asian Political Parties. On behalf of the government and people of Malaysia I would like to wish you an enjoyable and memorable stay here in Kuala Lumpur.
2. We are proud to be hosting this gathering for the first time. We fully support ICAPP's goals of strengthening cooperation and promoting understanding and friendship in Asia, while using this unique platform of exchanges between political parties, with varying ideologies, to address regional challenges and opportunities.
3. With its theme of "Cooperation to Promote One Asia", this session of the ICAPP is sure to be a great occasion for discussions on building an Asian community, enhancing democratic values, and addressing issues including terrorism, security, corruption, poverty and environmental degradation.

Ladies and gentlemen,

4. The challenges faced by political parties, particularly those in power, are as testing as ever. Given factors such as the sharp drop in crude oil prices - from US \$105 per barrel in June 2014 to US \$ 28 in January 2016 - many sectors and many economies have had to adapt to more difficult circumstances.
5. To remain relevant to the people, it is the duty of governments - and indeed all political parties - not just to preserve democratic principles, but also to help maintain the stability of their economies and security of their people.
6. In the spirit of One Asia, and with our commitment to work together to ensure the economic and political conditions of all countries in Asia remain secure and strong, I believe there are three main issues that we need to address.
7. The first issue is poverty. While huge advances have been made over the last decades, Asia remains the continent with the most hungry people according to the UN World Food Programme, accounting for two thirds of the global total.
8. This is an issue we take very seriously in Malaysia, and we have a long record of making proactive and effective efforts to eradicate poverty. In 1971, when we instituted our New Economic Policy, the incidence of poverty was 49.3 percent. By 2012, we had managed to reduce it to 1.7 percent. And by last year, we had produced a further fall, all the way down to 0.6 percent.
9. In line with the Multidimensional Poverty Index, or MPI, introduced by the United Nations Development Programme, we developed our own national measurement.

10. Our MPI includes income, education, health and standard of living as dimensions that need to be taken into account, and we have always believed that an inclusive growth strategy is the answer to poverty.
  
11. This is why one of our priorities under the 11<sup>th</sup> Malaysia plan is to help households in the bottom 40 percent reach middle income status.
  
12. I am proud to say that since 2009, the income of the bottom 40 percent households has increased by a compound annual growth rate of 12 percent, and through our implementation of minimum wage legislation, we lifted 2.9 million people immediately out of absolute poverty.
  
13. It is crucial that economic growth is shared by all in order for a nation to remain united, and it is incumbent upon governing parties to forge a future for every citizen. No man, woman or child should be left behind.

Ladies and gentlemen,

14. The second issue I would like to raise is terrorism and security.
  
15. According to the Global Terrorism Database, over 140,000 lives were lost to terrorist activities from 2000 to 2014 - that's around the same number of deaths caused by dropping the atomic bomb on Hiroshima in 1945.

16. The economic cost of terrorism in just one year was estimated at US \$ 53 billion - and that doesn't include the far larger sum security agencies around the world have to spend to counter this evil.
  
17. But I don't really need to give you facts and figures to convince you of the seriousness of this threat. We are all too aware of it. Almost every day seems to bring news of fresh atrocities; and across our continent, from Turkey to Thailand, from Syria to the Southern Philippines, none of us is immune.
  
18. Here in Malaysia, we recently suffered the first terrorist attack linked to Daesh, a group whose barbarities are a blasphemy on the name of our religion.
  
19. Let be no confusion about this - there is nothing Islamic about the terror and destruction they inflict. And there can be nothing Islamic about a gang that is increasingly using children as young as six to shoot captives, while they are sending those only a few years older as suicide bombers.
  
20. All of us - and especially political parties from Muslim countries - need to ensure that we are sending that message across loudly and clearly.
  
21. At the same time, governments around the world are realising that the old methods are not enough anymore. This is why for some time we have been taking measures to enhance our ability to counter terrorism with new legislation, including the Prevention of Terrorism Act, the Security Offences (Special Measures) Act, and the National Security Council Act.

22. None of these acts has been passed to restrict civil liberties. But there are no civil liberties for those whose lives have been taken by bombs and guns. Therefore, my government makes no apology for placing the safety and security of Malaysians above all.

Ladies and gentlemen,

23. A key front in this new war lies online and in social media. Malaysia has recently established a Regional Digital Counter-Messaging Communications Centre just outside Kuala Lumpur, which will soon be operational.

24. We would be glad to share our expertise in preventing radicalisation, and in helping to deradicalise men and women who have fallen for the lies of wicked and un-Islamic extremists. For this is a fight we all share and must share, and across our continent we must unite in doing all we can to combat this terrible scourge.

Ladies and gentlemen,

25. The third issue I believe we all need to address is environmental degradation. Here in Southeast Asia, we live in one of the most beautiful regions on Earth, with spectacular urban centres, tropical jungle, stunning beaches, and a huge variety of wildlife.

26. Unfortunately, development has sometimes come at the expense of the local environment. This is true of many countries, but it is particularly acute for Southeast Asian countries, as our tourism sectors depend on pristine land and seascapes.

27. Most of the environmental issues in Southeast Asia are linked, and working to ameliorate one will often have benefits for the others. One of the most crucial we are

facing is air pollution, in particular the “haze” which we suffer from time to time - including this week.

28. This is the result of fires often started intentionally, either by small-scale farmers or by companies trying to clear land of trees.

29. The haze can be transported hundreds of miles by the wind, causing grave health and safety concerns - sometimes so severe that we have had to close hundreds of schools, businesses have been affected, crop yields have been reduced and the economy has suffered.

30. President Joko Widodo of Indonesia and I discussed this only recently, and we are grateful for our neighbour’s efforts to tackle the fires.

31. This is just one example of why protecting our natural habitat and preserving it for generations to come has to be a common endeavour.

32. And I urge all the policymakers present today to encourage their colleagues to join us in placing sustainability at the heart of our decision-making and our relations with one another.

Ladies and gentlemen,

33. This is an international conference of Asian political parties, so it is appropriate for me to reflect on our own experience here in Malaysia. My own party, the United Malays National Organisation, or UMNO, is one of the world’s most successful political parties.

34. We celebrated our 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary recently, and from the first general elections in 1955, two years before independence, UMNO has consistently been given the mandate of the people.
35. We have had determined opponents who have sometimes captured state assemblies - reflective of our status as a true democracy - but at the national level UMNO has always been returned to office.
36. There are many reasons for this. Although UMNO is a Malay party, but it never practise communal politics, we have always extended our hand in friendship to all Malaysians because our concern is for all in this country.
37. We won in 1955 as the Alliance, a partnership with two other parties, and we continued as that until 1973 when our then Prime Minister, Tun Razak, expanded the Alliance to form the Barisan Nasional, or BN.
38. BN went on to win every national election since, and currently comprises 13 parties, representing every part of Malaysia and every faith and ethnicity in our uniquely diverse nation.
39. Unity and solidarity have been our watchwords. We have always put the people's welfare and well-being first; we listen to their concerns; and because we are well-organised at the national and local level we have always been well-placed to understand what our citizens in the different parts of our country need for their development.

40. We have occasional disagreements like in a big family, but we resolve them amicably, through the appropriate channels under the Barisan Nasional spirit. Because we know that if we are divided, Malaysians will pay the price.
41. Being such a diverse country, we are aware that harmony is precious, and so we have always practised moderation.
42. Being a democracy, we treasure the results of the ballot box - not the views of individuals, however famous - as the only legitimate expression of the people's will.
43. And being an open, neighbourly government that believes in building bridges with others, we respect, adhere to and insist on the principle of non-interference in the internal affairs of other sovereign countries - as is stated in ICAPP's charter.
44. Indeed, mutual non-interference is a very important concept that underpins many international bodies as well as ICAPP, from the Non-Aligned Movement, to the Gulf Cooperation Council, the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, ASEAN - the Association of Southeast Asian Nations - and many others.
45. It is a principle respected across Asia, and one close to the hearts of the many countries who suffered colonial conquest and rule in the past.
46. It must be upheld today, and if any of our citizens call for foreign powers to intervene in our own affairs, they are not patriots. They are in fact betraying their peoples. For begging outsiders to overthrow the mandate of the people is not the action of a patriot.

47. We remember our struggles to take control of our own destinies, and we must always fight to protect the sovereignty of the peoples that we represent - as UMNO has done from the beginning, and will continue to do.

Ladies and gentlemen,

48. It is by adhering to these principles - unity, solidarity, putting the people first and good neighbourliness - that we have been able to deliver for the people.

49. I mentioned the figures for the near-eradication of poverty in Malaysia earlier. Let me give you just a few more.

50. Since 2009, our Gross National Income has increased by nearly 50 percent. 1.8 million jobs have been created.

51. We have enjoyed year after year of healthy growth - five percent last year, and we are forecast to grow at a rate 70 percent higher than the world average in 2016, despite the uncertainties in the global economy.

52. These have had real outcomes for Malaysians. A new report by the Khazanah Research Institute notes increased life expectancy and rising monthly household incomes in our country.

53. Five million of our citizens have been touched through rural roads, electricity and water projects. This represents possibly the biggest government expenditure over a five

year period in the history of Malaysia, and has been made possible by the success of our National Transformation Programme.

54. Our approach has been praised by the World Bank and the IMF and many other renowned institutions, and last year we were ranked top of the Global Islamic Economy Indicator List.

Ladies and gentlemen,

55. I believe that Malaysia offers a positive example for the One Asia you will be discussing today and tomorrow, and that everyone here can help contribute to this truly being the second decade of what many have called the “Asian Century”.
56. We represent a large and astonishingly diverse continent. Yet we have so much in common, in terms of historical experience, of shared values, and of shared beliefs about what is right for our peoples, our countries and our relations with each other.
57. That so many individuals and so many political parties are here today is evidence of our potential and our eagerness to cooperate and work for the benefit of all. As the centre of the world’s gravity moves to the East, it is vital that we build on that sense of purpose, and I am sure you are all going to have a very productive and enjoyable two days.
58. With that, I wish this General Assembly every success, and I am happy to declare the conference officially open.

Thank you.

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