

**SPEECH BY  
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AT THE SPECIAL ASEAN MINISTERIAL MEETING ON TERRORISM  
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Firstly, allow me to welcome my friends and counterparts from ASEAN to Kuala Lumpur for this very important meeting. I would like to thank them for their friendship and cooperation, and I hope that together we will forge a strong commitment to address the issue of terrorism.

2. Today we gather primarily to forge a political consensus on the issue of terrorism. We are here to agree on joint action plans, coordinated responses and increased information sharing in our common fight against terror. We may not be able to agree on a definition of what terrorism is, but I hope this will not stop or derail our efforts to fight terror wherever it lurks. It is timely that we come together today to discuss the issue of terrorism. There is much that we still do not know about the root causes of terror, the extent of the terror network and the modus operandi of terrorist groups. There is also much more that we can do to track down those who we suspect of planning or perpetrating acts of terror. But we cannot and must not do this alone. We must work in concert - united against terror.

3. Many of our countries have experienced terrorist attacks or insurgencies. Whether they have been in the form of ideological warfare, separatist movements or religious extremists, the experience of terrorism is not new to this region. For the most part we have been able to contain and defeat these threats. Our respective governments have acted swiftly and decisively. Not only have our actions benefited our own citizens, but I believe our common, uncompromising stand against terror has benefited the entire Asean region tremendously. Our containment, capture and defeat of terrorist groups within our borders has prevented major regional terror networks from proliferating. We have been able for the most part, to identify threats in their infancy before they are allowed to spread through our region in search for sympathizers and supporters. We must ensure that this vigilance continues to prevent cross-border terror networks from taking root in this region.

4. In my own country, we had to protect our citizens against a communist insurgency that began even before independence and lasted until a decade ago. Today, Malaysia and some of our other neighbours are confronted by religious-based terrorists. Who - like the communists - want a systemic overhaul of the sociopolitical structures of our countries. The communists who began their insurgency against a colonial power, continued their campaign post- independence because they then wanted to replace a democratic, capitalist economy with a communist society. Today the religious extremists want to replace democratic, moderate and participatory governance with their skewed interpretations of a theocratic state. We know that there were attempts by some of these groups to create a regional cellular structure with franchised terror operatives and groups stationed in different countries. These groups have domestic as well as regional objectives - both which involve a threat to our way of life. It has therefore been imperative that we move in a coordinated manner where sharing rather than secrecy, and regional stability rather than national interests were paramount concerns.

5. It is for this reason that I hope we can find common ground during this gathering. We will be looking at many areas of common concern in the fight against terror. We will want to strengthen the cooperation among our front-line law enforcement agencies; we will want to ensure that Asean agencies are given the necessary support to find ways in which we can continue to fight terror together. We will want to develop capacity building initiatives to ensure that member states have the capabilities to detect, monitor and report suspected terrorist activities. And we will want to strengthen regional and international cooperation in combating terrorism in a comprehensive manner. However, before we go into these important details, we must understand what we are confronted with, why we are confronted with it and how it confronts us.

6. It continues to be a great irony that the world still cannot define one of the greatest enemies of humankind today, terrorism. We all, know it exists, and we are all engaged in a fight against it, but we will not commit to a definition of what it is. Different countries have different definitions. Even different agencies within the same government have differing definitions. The politics of language dictates that this stalemate persists. There are definitions of terrorism that will implicate perpetrators of state terror such as the Israeli regime. This is politically unacceptable to some. There are also definitions that will identify Freedom fighters and heroes of wars of liberation as terrorists. This, too, is politically unacceptable to some.

7. Malaysia has put forward a balanced definition of terrorism to include armed and other forms of attacks against civilians, regardless of whether the attacks were perpetrated by individuals, subnational groups or sovereign state entities. Just as we view the Israeli regime as having committed acts of terror against the Palestinian people, we also view the attacks of September 11th, the genocides in the Balkans and the human bombs in Palestine and Sri Lanka as acts of terror. We believe we must be consistent. It will be most politically expedient for Malaysia - as strong supporters of the Palestinian people - to not identify Palestinian suicide bombers as terrorists. We can say that they are freedom fighters and are justified in what they do. But this would depart from our definition. Which is why, while we support the struggle for liberation fought by the Palestinian people through legitimate means, we cannot condone the indiscriminate slaughter of innocent civilians.

8. As much as we empathise with the plight of the Palestinian people who continue to endure repression, occupation and the denial of their fundamental rights to self-determination, the end cannot justify the means. Liberation delivered through terror will be a pyrrhic victory. Terror invites terror, violence begets violence and the cycle will never end.

9. Notwithstanding the problem of definition, I believe Asean member countries are still able to cooperate effectively against terror. There are, for example, more clear cut cases of terrorist threats that are jointly identified by all countries in Asean compared to ambiguous cases for which a common definition is elusive. It is in these areas that we must work together. We are, for example, in agreement that groups intending to overthrow governments through extra-constitutional means or introduce a new system of governance through militant attacks are terrorists. We should also agree that groups and individuals that have assisted and abetted terrorist activities such as the September 11 attacks are terrorists. Such a consensus gives us clear focus of who the enemy is and how we must fight them.

10. If we are to successfully root out terror in this region we must also look beyond joint action plans and strengthened enforcement and monitoring mechanisms. We must also understand the root causes of terror. If we are blind to the causes of terror, we cannot understand the motivation that drives terrorists and we will never be able to address the latent causes that may still linger even when terrorists themselves are caught and brought to justice.

11. Terrorism is a symptom of some form of dissatisfaction, discontentment and self-perceived dispossession. Therefore, a comprehensive victory against terrorists must not merely treat the symptom, but also prevent the disease from spreading and, ultimately, cure the disease. Sometimes terrorists have no other avenues to justice left open to them. They become angry, frustrated and see terror as the only way out of their despair. On the other hand, sometimes legal avenues are open to them to mobilize for change, but they choose to resort to terror because they know that the majority of their fellow countrymen reject their ideology. But in both of these cases the root cause is a perceived feeling of being marginalized and dispossessed. In some cases they are justified in feeling that way, in other cases they are not.

12. Again I would like to draw lessons from Malaysia's experience of the communist insurgency which aimed for a systemic overhaul of the political and economic system of our country. Although, the majority of Malaysians did not accept communism, the communist party survived independence and continued to pose a threat to our newly independent country. Our government was quick to prevent feelings of alienation and marginalisation to fester in our country. We abandoned military might, and launched a campaign to win the hearts and minds of our people, especially those who may have been attracted by the ideological alternative offered by communism. Strategies were meticulously drawn up to address their grievances; among them the granting of citizenship to the Chinese minority that formed the majority of communist sympathizers. We provided for equal participation in the political and economic activities of our country for all Malaysians. We promised a prosperous, tolerant and united nation. Ultimately, it was this strategy that worked because we were able to prevent the root causes of terror from taking hold in our country.

13. Similarly, we must not allow the religious extremists who terrorise us today from fuelling any sense of perceived injustice in order to enlist support for their cause. These groups are a symptom of the anger felt by a small minority of fanatics who are dissatisfied with the society in which they live in. They want to establish their interpretation of an Islamic state through violent means. In order to do this, they feed into the insecurities of some of our citizens. They convince them that there is injustice and oppression. Their target audience are usually people who already have some degree of dissatisfaction towards the government. The terrorists will magnify these grievances and enlist the support of such susceptible individuals. We must, therefore, once again, win the hearts and minds of our people to reduce the number of sympathizers for their cause. We must demonstrate to our people, especially the Muslims, that Malaysia is truly a modern Islamic state that is moderate, successful and peaceful. By doing so, we prevent the root causes of anger felt by a small minority from multiplying until its ugly symptoms are manifested in the form of terrorist activities.

14. It is for this reason that Malaysia has always promoted a 'prosperity-neighbour' policy in Asean. We believe that one of the most important determinants of stability and peace is human development. When we are able to ensure development and opportunities for the majority of our people, when we are able to

respect their inalienable rights to political participation, when we are able to educate their children and take care of their elderly, the disease that spawns terrorism will find it difficult to take foot and infect our people. When the majority are not attracted by such causes we are able to isolate and decisively defeat the very small minority at the fringes for whom nothing is ever good enough. We must be uncompromising with such groups and ensure that they are permanently crippled, lest they are resurrected to poison the minds of our people again.

15. Let us also work at the international level to address the feelings of discontentment and dispossession that gives rise to terrorism. If we understand that human development and dignity is an important deterrent of terror, we must take a common stand to reduce instances where these fundamental rights are denied. Many of us are from countries that were once subjected to colonial rule. We can, therefore, sympathise with those who fight for their right to call themselves a people with their own flag and their own government. The Palestinian problem, which has been rightly identified as one of the causes of terrorism, is not just a Muslim problem. It is an issue that merits universal concern. The denial of self-determination and basic human rights is not exclusively a Muslim concern. Neither are the oppressed all Muslims. There are Palestinian Christians and Jews who are also the victims of tyranny. They deserve the attention and support of the whole world. If this support is not forthcoming, the symptoms of the disease will become more and more evident.

16. Similarly, we must seriously look at the process of globalisation. We are all aware - especially as developing countries - that we live in an increasingly inequitable world where the rich become richer and the poor become poorer. Do we merely pay lip service to this state of affairs or do we act in a concerted manner to ensure a more just and equitable world. We have already seen the backlash created by globalisation - riots in Seattle, Davos and London. These are the early symptoms. I fear to think of what the full blown symptoms of discontentment with the current world economic order will look like. In addressing this issue, we return once again to a perennial problem confronting developing countries who stand to lose out most from this present form of globalisation: The Absence of Unison. We can all see the early symptoms of a deteriorating disease, and yet we are unable to take a common stand that can alleviate the injustice that will continue to get worse.

17. Although these concerns may not be discussed in great detail at this conference, I urge fellow Asean members to turn their attention to these underlying feelings of oppression and marginalisation. We must act preventively before it becomes too late.

18. Apart from arresting terror at its root, we must also be more effective in fighting terrorist activities. It has been said again and again that we are not fighting a conventional war in which we know the enemy. When fighting terror we often do not know who we are fighting. Even if we know their names, we do not know where they hide, how they will attack us and how they support themselves. The fight against terror is a long drawn out war against an unseen enemy. We are fighting a war of attrition in the dark. The increasingly free movement of goods, capital and people has resulted in porous borders that are easily penetrable by terrorist organizations. Money that funds terrorist activities can be transferred without leaving any trace; guns and bombs are smuggled through unpatrolled border areas providing terrorists with weapons; and terrorists quite easily move in and out of countries because of relaxed and streamlined immigration requirements. The internet provides a safe passage for the transfer of encrypted messages. It also represents a vulnerable

target for Cyberterrorism. Other new forms of terrorism are also becoming new threats. Bioterrorism threatens to use scientific advancement for evil objectives. Underworld crime is also abetting the cause of terrorists. Arms smugglers and drug cartels provide militant groups with weapons and funds in return for protection. All of this happens without our knowledge, hidden from our view.

19. It has therefore become increasingly crucial that we focus on eliminating these support services of terror as well. We must jointly fight drug trafficking, human smuggling, money laundering and the illegal arms trade. We must step up efforts towards crippling the terrorists' financial network by freezing assets, we must condemn countries that sponsor terror and we must put in place preventive and monitoring mechanisms that can prevent the proliferation of cybercrimes and bioterrorism. In this regard Malaysia hopes that Asean members will jointly develop multilateral and bilateral agreements that will counter such crimes. We must harmonise certain laws within Asean countries to make it easy to go after terrorist networks. At the same time, each member country should also strengthen their own legal framework and corpus of laws to ensure that the same degree of efficacy is found in all member countries in dealing with terrorist crimes. We also welcome Asean and Aseanpol playing a greater role in coordinating our efforts and facilitating the sharing of information. Only through a concerted and comprehensive strategy of crippling terror and its support services will we succeed against an elusive, and sometimes invisible, enemy.

20. As the host of this conference, I urge all member states to be focused on the task that confronts us. We may not be able to agree on a definition for terrorism, but we must have a common understanding of the threat that it poses. We must also free ourselves from the prevailing stereotype of terrorists which identifies them with a particular religion or group of people. Terror can arise anywhere and in many different manifestations. If we make the mistake of stereotyping terror, we risk formulating strategies that are not comprehensive and effective.

21. I also urge you to remember that prevention is better than cure. Providing for human security within our respective countries, taking a common stand on global issues of discontentment and dispossession, debilitating the terror support structure and promoting better cooperation in early detection must be given equal, if not greater, attention than the modus operandi of fighting terrorism itself.

22. We are gathered to discuss something very important to all of us, something that can protect the lives of our people, their way of life and the prosperity that we have all worked so hard to achieve. I hope we will be able to discuss these issues in the spirit of Asean solidarity and renew our joint commitment to eliminating terror from our region of peace and prosperity. It is with great honour that I declare the special Asean Ministerial Meeting on Terrorism Open.