

ADDRESS
BY THE HONOURABLE ABDULLAH AHMAD BADAWI
AT THE OPENING OF THE SPECIAL MEETING ON THE MIDDLE EAST
AT PUTRAJAYA, MALAYSIA,
22 APRIL 2004

Bismillahirrahmanirrahim,

Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Assalamualaikum Warahmatullahi Wabarakatuh.

Alhamdulillah, All Praise be to Allah, by whose Grace and Blessings, we are able to gather here this morning.

2. On behalf of the Government and people of Malaysia, may I extend to everyone a very warm welcome to this "Special Meeting on the Middle East", in Putrajaya our Administrative Capital of Malaysia.

3. Malaysia, as the current Chairman of the Tenth Session of the Islamic Summit Conference, felt duty-bound to convene urgently this Special Meeting at this crucial juncture to take stock of the saga of conflict and violence in the Middle East. The situation in the region, particularly in Palestine and in Iraq, has become extremely alarming. The latest developments are threatening the stability and integrity of both as well as the peace and security of its neighbouring countries.

4. As host, Malaysia is gratified with the prompt response from the invited OIC member countries, at very short notice. What is happening to Palestine and Iraq are indeed issues of common concern to all of us assembled at this special meeting. We draw satisfaction from your display of commitment to address this matter jointly and urgently. Your abiding faith in our common cause is certainly a source of inspiration for all of us.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

5. The state of affairs concerning Palestine has never been more precarious. Israeli aggression is continuing without check. Daily, many Palestinian civilians including women and children continue to suffer and die at the hands of Israeli soldiers. The Israel military might is being unleashed with impunity against them. The blockade imposed by Israel is oppressive. The "apartheid wall" restricts more and more the freedom of movement of the Palestinian people including their leadership.

6. The hardship, pressure and extreme humiliation suffered by the Palestinians is now compounded by Israel's ill conceived decision to carry out targeted killings and assassinations of Palestinian leaders. Having cruelly assassinated Sheikh Ahmed Yassin, the Israeli armed forces took out Abdul Aziz Al Rantissi as its next victim. In fact, the life of President Yasser Arafat himself is under threat by Prime Minister Ariel Sharon.

7. As Chairman of the Tenth Summit of the OIC, and reflecting its own national stand, Malaysia wishes to reiterate its strong condemnation of Israeli actions involving the killing of civilians through targeted killings and assassinations, collective punishments, ceaseless invasions, the occupation of Palestinian towns, villages and camps, the demolition of the Palestinian National Authority (PNA) and the destruction of the Palestinian national economy.

8. Lately, even the sanctity of the Al-Aqsa Mosque had been violated by Israeli forces. It was indeed a blatant act of provocation without regard for the feelings and sensitivities of Muslims world wide.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

9. The international community cannot stand by and watch in silence the fast deteriorating Israeli - Palestinian conflict. Indeed the circumstances are becoming more complex. But it is important for us not to forget the core issues. The question of Palestine is not a religious conflict between Muslims and Jews. It is about state terrorism. It is about Israeli aggression and occupation of Palestinian land by force. It is all about the legitimate and courageous struggle of the Palestinian people for their right to decide and be masters of their own destiny, to rid the yoke of Israeli occupation and to live freely in their own sovereign and independent State of Palestine, with Al-Quds Sharif as its capital.

10. The prevailing cycle of violence, repression and intimidation must stop. Suicide-bombings are unnecessary sacrifices of human lives and would not achieve the desired results. Any action causing the loss of innocent lives of civilians including women and children cannot be justified. Of course, the state terrorism conducted by Israel, with even more severe consequences on Palestinian lives, must be unreservedly condemned. Indeed the terror inflicted on the Palestinians by Israel is beginning to assume the characteristics of atrocities once encountered by the Jews themselves.

11. A comprehensive, just and durable solution is the only way forward to attaining peace and stability in the Middle East. It is important that the International Quartet continue to work towards achieving this objective on the basis of the Arab Peace Initiative, the Quartet's own Road Map, relevant United Nations Security Council (UNSC) Resolutions and other pertinent agreements among the parties.

12. Malaysia joins others in rejecting Israel's unilateral disengagement plan as contradicting the essence of the way to peace. That plan ignores and endangers fundamental issues that are central to the conflict between them and the Palestinians. Indeed, if forced upon the Palestinians, the Israeli plan can literally wreck the entire peace process in the Middle East.

13. It is most unfortunate that the United States Administration has deemed it proper to support Israel's unilateral disengagement plan. The "Letter of Guarantee" provided by the United States to Israel is clearly in breach of the norms of international fair play and it puts at risk any and all confidence built thus far among the parties to the conflict. The Israeli plan contradicts the provisions stipulated in the Quartet's own Road Map for peace in the Middle East.

14. In finding a resolution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the rules of international justice and fair play call for and require all parties concerned to be involved in the process of finding that resolution. Acts of unilateralism by Israel, emboldened by its military and economic might and supported, as it were, by outside powers, would guarantee no peace to the region. It is essential that the Palestinians be given the full right to have a say on matters that directly affect them. The United States in particular would be failing the international community if it distanced itself from assuming the role of honest broker in finding a resolution to the conflict. It is only proper for the United States to commit the full weight of its diplomatic capabilities to secure a comprehensive, just and enduring solution for the Palestinians.

15. Our duty is to ensure that the issue of Palestine remains at the centre stage of international conscience. If governments seem incapable of delivering justice for the Palestinians, perhaps it is time to take the case of Palestine to the court of public opinion. May be the people of the world can achieve success where governments have failed. Could there be a people-based global movement to carry the flag for Palestine? I would like to urge the participants at this meeting to put on their thinking caps and think hard about what can and needs to be done.

16. I hope therefore that this meeting of ours here in Putrajaya would find it expedient to deal with the burning issues surrounding Palestine with speed and determination. Let us resolve to take a collective stand on this and other matters which definitely concerns not only the people of Palestine but also the Islamic Ummah as a whole. Indeed we are all stake holders in this matter.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

17. The situation in Iraq too is turning for the worse. To put it bluntly, the existing situation can only be described as "messy". The hopes and expectations of the international community which followed the ending of the war against Iraq on 1 May

2003 have not been met. Iraqi civilians continue to lose their lives daily. Soldiers of the Coalition forces also continue to get killed unnecessarily.

18. It would appear that those who decided to invade Iraq, take part or support the invasion had no appreciation of what they would encounter in Iraq. The rationale for the invasion has already proven to be without foundation. Gone are the joy and jubilation of some Iraqis with the collapse of the regime of Saddam Hussein. What we see today is nothing less than the fierce resistance of people against what is increasingly seen as an occupation force. The situation in Iraq is indeed dangerous.

19. It is tragic that the evolving situation is bringing back bad memories of colonialism in an era long gone. Clearly, the Iraqis are not going to accept much longer the dictates of outsiders regarding what is right and what is good for them. Obviously, the occupying forces have failed to win the hearts and minds of the Iraqi people. What was billed as a historic mission to liberate Iraq is evidently not appreciated. In fact, it is now being strongly resisted.

20. Malaysia's position on the invasion of Iraq is well known. We have no desire to go through the debate again. What is important now is to help ensure that the situation in Iraq would begin to get better, and evolve in the best interest of all Iraqis. The people of Iraq have suffered long enough. It is crucial that that historic country and its great people not be completely ruined by an unending political, economic and security turmoil. This would be a complete negation of the very objective set out following the invasion and regime change inside the country. The war has not changed anything but certainly peace has not been achieved in Iraq. Of course, regime change imposed upon sovereign states by outside powers remains abhorrent conceptually and diplomatically.

22. Malaysia welcomes the precise schedules established by the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) for returning the powers of government to the people of Iraq by 30 June 2004. Malaysia also welcomes the deadlines set by the CPA to enable Iraqis to regain their full sovereignty. We earnestly hope that nothing will be allowed to harm the plan that is already in place. And we particularly welcome President Bush's assurance that the CPA would abide by the 30th June 2004 deadline for the transfer of power.

23. Malaysia also believes that it is important to contain the anti-occupation sentiments currently running high amongst the Iraqi people as testified by the recent uprisings against the occupying forces. All hostilities should cease so that peace and stability could be reestablished in all parts of Iraq. It is only through security and stability that the process of rehabilitation and reconstruction could begin in earnest for the benefit of the people.

24. Given the latest developments in the country, the time has indeed arrived for the international community to give serious consideration to giving the United Nations a central role in the affairs of Iraq. Such a role is attainable only through a meaningful and adequate expansion of the mandate currently provided by the UNSC Resolution

1511 (2003). As a leading member of the Coalition it is appropriate for the United States Administration to initiate the tabling of a resolution in the UN Security Council to effect this change. I am confident that all members of the international community would support this move as the best way forward for bringing about peace and stability in Iraq.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

25. Malaysia hopes that this Special Meeting of relevant OIC members would be able to productively address the two issues pertaining to Palestine and Iraq. It is important that we strengthen the international voice of reason in dealing with the two issues now confronting all of us. Cooperation, unity and solidarity are crucial if our collective views are to be heard and respected internationally. It is my sincere hope that reason will prevail, and that the powers that be will give due regard and deserving consideration to the outcome of this important Meeting.

26. I wish your deliberations every success.

27. With this prayer, Bismillahirrahmanirrahim, I hereby officially declare open the Special Meeting on the Middle East.