

**STATEMENT BY
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THE SPECIAL ASEAN LEADERS' MEETING ON THE AFTERMATH
OF EARTHQUAKE AND TSUNAMI AT JAKARTA
6 JANUARY 2005**

1. The Malaysian Delegation wishes to express its appreciation and gratitude to His Excellency President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono and the Government of the Republic of Indonesia for hosting this urgent and critical Meeting to discuss and coordinate international relief and rehabilitation efforts for the victims of the recent tsunami disaster. Malaysia believes that advantage should also be taken of this high level gathering to exchange views on the modalities for future international cooperation, especially at the regional level, so as to be more prepared for similar disasters in the future and to mitigate their negative impacts on the countries at risk especially in lessening the loss of human lives.

2. The Malaysian delegation also wishes to express its appreciation to the Prime Minister of Singapore, His Excellency Lee Hsien Loong, for taking the first initiative to suggest to ASEAN Leaders to join forces and take the lead to address various aspects of the natural disaster which had befallen on the region.

3. The Malaysian Delegation further wishes to express its appreciation to other Leaders and Heads of international organizations for coming to this Meeting as a show of solidarity to the affected countries, a demonstration of willingness to participate in relief and reconstruction as well as in future cooperation.

4. The Government and the people of Malaysia extend deepest sympathy and condolences to the Governments and peoples of Indonesia, India, Maldives, Myanmar, Sri Lanka and Thailand and other affected countries for the tragic loss of lives and the devastation caused by the earthquake and the resulting tidal waves that struck these countries on the fateful day of 26 December 2004.

5. The Malaysian Delegation would also like to take this opportunity, on behalf of the Government and people of Malaysia, to express sincere appreciation and gratitude to countries that have sent messages of sympathy and condolences to Malaysia or which have offered assistance during this traumatic time.

6. Until the latest natural disaster, Malaysia has actually never had any experience of earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, typhoons, hurricanes or other severe natural calamities. Therefore, when the tsunami struck recently, the whole country was in shock. Although the damage and destruction in Malaysia was relatively, and mercifully, much less than those experienced elsewhere, the expectation of the people of Malaysia is very high that the Government should act and be better prepared to face future eventualities.

7. The immediate priority of the Malaysian Government is to restore normalcy to the affected areas and provide assistance in all appropriate ways to help the victims who survive the tsunami to rebuild their lives. On record, 68 victims lost their lives; 276 people were hurt; 6750 persons had to be relocated and 5997 fishermen lost their means of livelihood. The financial burden to the Malaysian Government in terms of rehabilitation and reconstruction will be quite heavy. Damage has been done not only to the physical but also social infrastructure. Nevertheless, Malaysia feels that on the question of emergency international assistance in cash or in kind, most of the other affected countries deserve immediate attention more than Malaysia does.

8. As a show of solidarity and compassion, Malaysia has provided some assistance to other affected countries on a bilateral basis. Malaysia has dispatched search and rescue as well as medical teams including some equipment to Aceh in Sumatra. We are now offering to send some 250 police personnel to the same area for post disaster duties. We have agreed for the use of airports in Malaysia as staging points for the delivery of material assistance to the affected countries, especially Indonesia.

9. Malaysia has also set up an "Asian Tsunami Disaster Fund - MFA" to enable members of the Malaysian public and corporate sector to contribute money for the relief of tsunami victims in other countries. The Malaysian Government has contributed Malaysian Ringgit 5 million to this Fund.

10. All countries at risk must possess the capacity to respond swiftly and adequately when disaster strikes. We could have done better to reduce the scale of the tragedy which struck certain countries surrounding the Indian Ocean on 26 December 2004 if we had an early warning system in place. For now, Malaysia and many other countries do not have such alert systems. We are ready to extend cooperation and take part in any initiative aimed at providing the necessary capabilities in this matter. However, it is important not to focus exclusively on the threat of tsunamis. We must not lose sight of other equally destructive dangers.

11. Malaysia looks forward to learning and working closely with countries such as the United States and Japan or international bodies which have the expertise in early-warning systems. Malaysia is fully aware of the high costs in setting up such infrastructure. It may in fact be prohibitive to many developing countries. Only the United Nations has the resources, expertise and capacity to undertake this massive endeavor in the region. As such, Malaysia is of the view that the UN must be fully involved if any such initiative is to succeed.

12. Malaysia is very gratified to see the United Nations coming in a big way to coordinate relief, rehabilitation and reconstruction in the countries affected by the recent tsunami. Malaysia takes note of the unprecedented pledges of financial aid by various Governments and the World Bank which now stands at more than US Dollars 2 billion. It is sobering to note that when countries and governments do summon the necessary will, international cooperation can indeed move from the realm of the conceptual to the domain of reality.

13. Malaysia hopes that the United Nations and other donor countries will show equal commitment to cooperate to mitigate the effects of natural disasters in the future, in particular the need of to establish an effective regional natural disaster monitoring system.

14. There are certainly many ways of alleviating the hardships of the tsunami affected countries and assisting them in their gigantic tasks of reconstruction. One concrete proposal relates to the cancellation or review of their international debts. Malaysia hopes the countries in a position to do so should seriously consider taking this far reaching step of noble statesmanship in the name of humanitarianism.

15. I believe the Prime Minister of Japan has proposed that a special session on the subject of tsunamis be convened at the United Nations World Conference on Disaster Reduction to be held from 18 to 22 January 2005 in Kobe, Japan. Malaysia has no problems with this proposal.

16. The Malaysian Delegation is ready to endorse the proposals which our Senior Officials have deliberated upon, and which this Meeting shall issue as a Declaration. We are particularly pleased to support the proposal to establish an ASEAN Disaster Information Sharing and Communications Network. In the same way, we are supportive of the specific proposal to establish a Regional Tsunami Early Warning Center in the Indian Ocean.

17. While it is not possible to prevent the forces of nature from operating, a lot can be done to mitigate their devastating effects. Let us therefore commit ourselves to make this special and unprecedented gathering in Jakarta the beginning of a novel and creative international endeavor in the service of humankind.