

**STATEMENT BY
THE HONOURABLE ABDULLAH AHMAD BADAWI
AT THE INFORMAL SUMMIT ON INTER-RELIGIOUS, INTER-CULTURAL
AND INTER-CIVILISATIONAL DIALOGUE AND COOPERATION
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Madam Chair,

Malaysia congratulates you for convening this Informal Summit to promote inter-religious, inter-cultural and inter-civilisational dialogue and cooperation because it is a subject so close to the hearts of our own people. In Malaysia, we live in a national setting which is multi-religious, multi-ethnic and multi-cultural. Our people know very well the meaning of tolerance and moderation in inter-personal relations because it is a way of life we practise constantly, something which we consciously undertook to do in the beginning but which has now become a celebrated national culture. In fact, we view our ethnic and religious diversity as a valuable national asset. It provides for domestic harmony and stability while giving Malaysia a good name internationally.

2. I began by relating the Malaysian experience in order to emphasize the point that there is a national as well as an international dimension to the issue of peaceful and cooperative co-existence between religions, cultures and civilizations. In fact, I do believe that if Governments can succeed in instituting a culture of tolerance and moderation among people at the domestic level, it would become easy for nation states to cooperate in promoting tolerance and moderation among nationalities and cultures at the international level.

3. Indeed, there is urgency in this matter. Individually as citizens of the world, and collectively as member states of the United Nations, we have a critical responsibility to quash the increasing talk about potential clashes between civilizations. We have a particular duty to put a stop to dangerous predictions about the so-called inevitable clash between the Islamic world and the western world. We must not be swayed by the doomsayers. Those who believe in the inevitability of a clash of civilizations are people who have lost trust in the rationality of the human person. In fact, such people belong in the group of the extremists of this world. We must confront them and discredit them fully. We must prevent their idea from becoming a self fulfilling prophesy.

4. Extremism and radicalism have indeed become a scourge in many parts of the globe. It is also true that religion has become an increasingly powerful imperative for people to act. But it is wrong to point fingers at the ascendancy of various religions everywhere as the cause for the rise in extremism and enmity between peoples. No true religion preaches extremism or violence. It is also not justifiable to associate terrorism with any particular race or religion. Throughout history, all religions and races have had their respective share of terrorists.

5. In Malaysia, Islam is respected by all the people as the official religion of the state. The Government which I now lead has embarked on a program to communicate a proper appreciation of Islam as a force for good, for progress, for development. We call the approach Islam Hadhari, which is actually an approach for achieving a progressive Islamic civilization that is compatible with modernity and yet firmly rooted in the noble values and injunctions of Islam. The approach has been accepted by everyone in Malaysia because underlying the whole message of Islam Hadhari is a call for moderation and tolerance towards others irrespective of their faiths. It is God's command in the Holy Quran: "for you your religion, for me my religion".

6. Islam Hadhari is entirely consistent with democracy because it is about living peacefully and respecting each other in the society. Islam Hadhari incorporates good governance because a just and trustworthy government is one of its fundamental principles. The message Malaysia wishes to share with others in the world, with the developing countries in particular, is that it is quite possible to maintain inter-communal and inter-religious peace, stability and prosperity through dialogue and cooperation. We in Malaysia are proud to have succeeded in forging a common national purpose through a system of power sharing in the government. It is a system of governing which upholds the principle of decision making by consensus, so that the representatives of the minority in the government is never marginalized or outvoted. This is perhaps the greatest strength of democracy in Malaysia which has worked ever since we achieved independence in 1957.

7. Returning to the broader issue of inter-religious, inter-cultural and inter-civilisational dialogue and cooperation, I must not fail to state that the teachings of Islam are definitely consistent with the objective of creating a non-confrontational, peaceful and stable international world order.

8. The Muslim ummah, which is a collective term identifying all adherents of the religion of Islam, do have some internal problems to solve. They must renounce extremism, eradicate radicalism and stop all sectarian violence. This can be done because Islam can tap into its own rich intellectual tradition and challenge directly the extremist doctrines which have become linked, quite unjustifiably, to this great religion. Muslim leaders and scholars must succeed in reviving fully the true spirit and the true teachings of Islam. The truth must prevail that Islam abhors and condemns terrorism.

9. However, the Muslim ummah acting alone on its own will not be able to achieve total success. Islamophobia must be removed at the same time. The gulf and misunderstanding between the western world and the Muslim world must be bridged. But it requires both sides to work in tandem to close the chasm.

10. Madam Chair, it is against this background that I wish to commend your initiative as one whose time has come, if not in fact, overdue. Inter-religious, inter-cultural and inter-civilizational dialogue and cooperation can no longer be relegated to the

back burner. Yours and other like-minded initiatives must take centre stage if we are to close all the gaps of misunderstanding between the different faiths and peoples of the world.

11. In the context of the wider quest for establishing global peace and security, we need to adopt an approach that emphasizes multilateralism rather than unilateralism, and dialogue rather than the use of force. Unilateralism is all the more a cause for concern in this age of globalization with its multifarious impact on societies and civilizations. True leadership should be pointing towards the closing of ranks between peoples rather than causing them to drift apart from each other.

12. I have offered the Malaysian experience as a modest working model of renewal, reform, and perhaps, renaissance in the Muslim world. We do not pretend that Malaysia has all the answers to the many problems of other countries and peoples. We are also aware that different societies require different solutions to their situations. I am humbly submitting the Malaysian experience as a contribution to the debate and discussion we are now having on this extremely important international agenda.

Madam Chair, I thank you.