

**SPEECH BY  
THE HONOURABLE DATO' SERI ABDULLAH AHMAD BADAWI  
AT THE OPENING OF THE GLOBAL CIVIL SOCIETY INTERNATIONAL  
CONFERENCE ON PEACE IN PALESTINE AT PICC, PUTRAJAYA  
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Excellencies, Distinguished Guests, Participants, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like, on behalf of the Government and people of Malaysia, to welcome all of you, distinguished participants, to Putrajaya and to this important Conference on PEACE IN PALESTINE. I would also like to welcome Their Excellencies, members of the Diplomatic Corps, and all of you, Ladies and Gentlemen, to this gathering, this morning.

2. I wish to congratulate and warmly commend PEACE MALAYSIA, its Patron Dato' Seri Hishamuddin Tun Hussein, Coordinator Dato' Mukhriz Mahathir, and Chairman of the Conference Dr. Chandra Muzaffar, for organising this important and timely Global Civil Society International Conference on PEACE IN PALESTINE.

3. I am particularly pleased that Malaysia's civil society organisations have galvanised themselves to organise this Conference, the first of its kind in this country. No doubt, they have always sympathised with the plight of the Palestinian people and consistently supported the Malaysian Government's principled position on the issue of Palestine.

4. I welcome the participation of so many distinguished and well-known personalities and experts on the Palestine issue at this gathering. I am very encouraged to know that you have come from far and near, with the common purpose of exchanging views and exploring ways in which members of global civil society can play a more meaningful and constructive role in supporting the Palestinian cause. Indeed, your action is needed at this critical juncture of their struggle.

5. I am especially delighted that PEACE MALAYSIA has taken up the challenge that I had posed to civil society not too long ago. I recall the suggestion I had made on two separate occasions in the recent past on the need to co-opt civil society in the international efforts for a peaceful resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. I remember in particular the call I made in May last year, on the occasion of the Ministerial Meeting of the Committee on Palestine of the Non-Aligned Countries, here in Putrajaya, on the desirability of manifesting our continued solidarity with Palestine by launching a global, people-based campaign in support of the continuing struggle of the Palestinian people. I thought it would be quite possible to bring into being a global movement akin to the global campaign against apartheid in South Africa which led to the freeing of Nelson Mandela from incarceration and, eventually, to the crumbling of that racist system. I am therefore very pleased and gratified that the call that I made at that meeting has not gone unheeded. I am doubly proud that a

Malaysian civil society organisation, dedicated to global peace, has once again showed its pro-active stance, and responded to that call in such a remarkable manner.

6. I had made the suggestion for two main reasons.

7. Firstly, I felt that the peace process was becoming stalemated, and that international fatigue had begun to set in on the issue. There was a real risk of the Question of Palestine being sidelined. This is especially possible as the world turns its attention to other pressing global issues, such as on-going regional conflicts, the fight against international terrorism, H.I.V-AIDS, SARs, the Bird Flu, to name just a few. I hold the view that, notwithstanding the importance of these and other issues, the global community cannot afford to lose sight of the Palestine issue. The world needs to be continuously reminded of the terrible plight of the Palestinian people and their longing for peace. As responsible members of the international community, we cannot let the Palestinians down. We must continue to stand by them in their valiant struggle for independence and statehood until that goal is attained.

8. Secondly, I felt that there was a compelling need to invigorate the search for peace in Palestine by turning to the citizens of the world. This is taking into account the constraints and limitations of the inter-governmental process. We have time and again witnessed how efforts for peace for Palestine invariably got stymied in the UN Security Council, for reasons which are equally familiar to us. Furthermore, I have been keenly aware that in the last two decades global civil society has emerged as an important actor in the international arena. The activist role of civil society is widely acknowledged and has left a distinct and indelible mark on a number of global campaigns. For instance, its efforts, allied with those of Governments, have contributed towards the eventual dismantling of the structure of apartheid in South Africa. It helped mobilise public opinion in support of a number of significant international agreements in recent years, such as the Anti-landmines Treaty, the Kyoto Accord and the Rome Statute which established the International Criminal Court. Civil society has also played a prominent role in respect of the opposition to the war in Iraq.

9. On the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, civil society groups have, in fact, been showing deep concern about the issue ever since the early nineteen seventies. More recently, they adopted an unequivocal position on behalf of the Palestinian cause at the N.G.O forum in conjunction with the U.N Summit on Racism held in Durban, South Africa in 2001. In recognition of its role, the United Nations has in fact launched an initiative to encourage civil society groups to promote the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people. This has helped create public awareness of the plight of the hapless people of Palestine. The efforts should continue and be further intensified.

10. Like the struggle against apartheid, the struggle of the Palestinian people against Israeli occupation of their country enjoys enormous support from the global community. Therefore, a more concrete expression of this support by global society through this campaign is timely and fitting. It is my earnest hope that through this campaign, global society will succeed in galvanising world public opinion and

mobilising popular support for the Palestinian cause. We have an obligation to help ensure a just and lasting peace in the region, which is the wish and desire, not only of the Palestinian people but also that of all people of conscience everywhere.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

11. The struggle of the Palestinians has been a long and arduous one. It has many dimensions. It is a political struggle for an independent, sovereign State of Palestine. It is resistance against foreign occupation. It is opposition to the harsh and oppressive policies and practices of the Occupying Power on the basis of human rights. It is also a socio-economic struggle for sheer survival amid the harsh reality of life under occupation. It is even a constant tussle for the right to worship at the holy places, particularly in Jerusalem. The conflict has gone for far too long. The costs on both sides have been enormous, particularly for the Palestinians. Many thousands of people have paid with their lives, while many thousands more with their limbs, many of them permanently. Many have lost their worldly possessions and livelihood. Countless others have left the Territories in order to escape the unbearable toll of the debilitating conflict.

12. Ever since 1948 the international community has grappled with the problem but to no avail thus far. Aside from the United Nations, various international and regional organisations, including the Non-Aligned Movement and the Organisation of the Islamic Conference, have strongly supported the international efforts for peace in the region. In its current capacity both as Chairman of NAM and of the OIC, Malaysia has initiated a dialogue process with members of the International Quartet in an effort to urge them to do their utmost to bring the Road Map back on track. We intend to remain engaged with the Quartet and to assist in whatever way we can in the process. We are monitoring the situation closely before deciding on further efforts that could be made in this regard.

13. The global community certainly desires an early and lasting resolution of the conflict based on the relevant resolutions of the United Nations. These resolutions can provide the basis and guiding principles for a permanent settlement of the problem. It is time for the United Nations, specifically the Security Council, to play a pivotal and pro-active role in resolving the conflict. Debates in the U.N Security Council and the General Assembly by themselves are not enough. Resolutions passed by the two UN organs must be followed up and acted upon, not ignored with impunity. The UN Security Council must assert its right to assume its legitimate role in the search for peace, thereby reversing the marginalisation of the United Nations in this matter. In fact, the marginalization of the United Nations all these years is one of the reasons why the conflict has persisted to this day. The United Nations must act decisively and authoritatively. Its prestige and credibility are very much at stake on this issue.

14. The global community supports a two-state solution - an independent, sovereign Palestinian State, alongside Israel. This is by no means without a monumental sacrifice on the part of the Palestinians. They would have to give up 78% of historical Palestine - a point that Israel and its supporters should not fail to appreciate. This

two-state solution must include East Jerusalem as the capital of an independent and sovereign Palestine. The state of Palestine should comprise no less than Gaza and the West Bank. The principle of the right of return for Palestinians must be respected. There will be no just and enduring solution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict unless the two central issues, namely East Jerusalem and right of return, are satisfactorily resolved.

15. Since April 2003 all hopes have been pinned on the Road Map to a permanent two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The Roadmap, under the sponsorship of the International Quartet, comprising the United States, European Union, Russian Federation and United Nations, is intended to be a "performance-based" and "goal-driven" plan, the destination of which is a final and comprehensive settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict by 2005. Regrettably, there has been little progress in its implementation and the deadline has virtually run out.

16. It is our hope that the positive outcome of the recent Summit Meeting at Sharm El-Sheikh between President Mahmoud Abbas of Palestine and Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon would lead to increased confidence between the two sides. Let us hope also that it will pave the way for really serious talks on the systematic implementation of the Road Map in all its aspects.

17. Should the impasse continue or should the situation get worse, we should be bold enough to look at other possibilities of a breakthrough besides the inter-governmental process, which has not produced the desired results so far. In looking for a creative way out of this stalemate, I am not at all suggesting that we abandon the inter-governmental process because, at the end of the day, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict must be solved through that process. No doubt, the solution to this international problem of historic dimensions would also require the imprimatur of the United Nations. But at a time when that process is stalled indeterminately, and runs the risk of being buried altogether, I thought there is a unique role for civil society to play in ways that the inter-governmental process might not be able to do.

18. It seems to me appropriate for global society to assert its moral authority and assume a more active role and a higher profile and contribute to the peace efforts. You are well placed to explore new ideas, approaches and processes that could assist in the search for a peaceful solution to this long and protracted conflict. I am convinced that through an effective global campaign, involving global society at large, and a synergic partnership with governments, that goal would eventually be attained. This is, indeed, a great challenge for civil society, as well as governments, a challenge, which I hope would be taken up with all the seriousness it deserves, in the interest of regional and world peace.

19. The Malaysian Government and people are committed to a just and peaceful resolution of the conflict. We are deeply anguished by the thousands of deaths and the unending cycle of violence, which have become a characteristic feature of the conflict. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is the one most outstanding international issue that has created an ever-widening chasm of misunderstanding between the

Muslim world and the West in general. This is particularly the case with reference to those who are perceived to have given Israel unquestioning support.

20. The underlying causes of the conflict - the dispossession of the Palestinian people and the suppression of their rights - are a tragic travesty of justice which has few parallels in the annals of human history. But it is a conflict that cannot be resolved through violence; for violence only begets violence. I believe that with the continued understanding and support of the international community, and through peaceful resistance to the occupation, a just solution to the conflict would ultimately be found.

21. As a small nation situated in Southeast Asia, thousands of kilometres away from the cockpit of conflict, Malaysia may not be able to make a significant contribution to the resolution of a conflict that has impacted upon the entire human family. Nonetheless, Malaysia has a friendly message to offer to the Israelis and Palestinians, Jews and Arabs, Christians and Muslims trapped in the web of violence and animosity in the area. It is a message from a multi-religious, multi-cultural nation whose diverse ethnic communities have lived in relative peace and harmony for generations. It may be worthy of their notice that we in Malaysia have evolved a political system based on the principle of power sharing, an economic system which seeks growth with equity, and a cultural ethos which celebrates diversity and yet cherishes unity. It would indeed be our contribution if our humble experience in creating and sustaining a peaceful multi-religious and multi-cultural nation could provide inspiration to the people of Israel and Palestine in finding solutions to their own problems.

22. It is my earnest hope that, beginning today in Putrajaya, civil society will be able to play an active, indeed, pro-active role in galvanising international efforts for an early, lasting and just resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. I hope the initiative launched here in Putrajaya will be carried forward and further sustained by civil society organisations in other regions of the world, thereby establishing a global network of activists working together and in tandem with Governments and pushing the peace process forward through its various stages.

23. Each and every international participant at this conference can effectively spread the word if - as soon as possible upon their return - they could initiate the convening of a national level, civil society conference on Peace in Palestine in their respective countries.

24. Of course, the future of this people-based campaign will depend, in large measure, on the response of civil society organisations to this initiative. It will certainly be contingent upon political developments, namely the success of the Road Map and the resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. If the conflict is resolved soon - which is our earnest hope - the whole world will rejoice and there may be no longer any need for this campaign to go beyond a certain stage, except, perhaps, to help monitor the full and faithful implementation of the peace agreement that would be arrived at by the two sides.

25. However, if the impasse continues then this global campaign, which you have initiated here in Putrajaya, can and should play an active role in helping to keep the issue on the “radar screen” of the international community. You can manifest solidarity with the Palestinian people and galvanise popular support for the Palestinian cause. You can exert pressure whenever necessary on governments, particularly those that have close ties with Israel. You can insist that they be more serious and forthcoming in promoting international efforts to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

26. In formally declaring open this Global Civil Society International Conference on PEACE IN PALESTINE, I wish you every success in your deliberations. I would also like to extend best wishes to PEACE MALAYSIA in its future efforts in this enormously challenging undertaking, with the assurance that that it can count on the continuing encouragement and support of the Malaysian Government. I say this in the expectation of the synergy and partnership that I hope will be established between the Malaysian Government and its civil society on this important issue affecting international peace and security.

Thank you.