

**SPEECH BY
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Your Majesty, Your Royal Highness,

Honourable Ministers, Distinguished Guests,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

First and foremost, let me extend a very warm welcome to all of you to Malaysia and in particular to Putrajaya. I feel very honoured by your presence. I wish to sincerely thank you and your governments for accepting my invitation at short notice to participate in this meeting. We have a duty to respond to the urgent pleas from our brothers, sisters and their children in Lebanon and in Palestine. We must address their plight and help bring about an end to the conflict raging in the area. I sincerely believe that as responsible leaders of the international community, especially in our capacities as leaders of the Islamic world, we have a political and moral obligation to do something, and be seen to do something urgent, to bring an end to the madness, bloodshed and devastation currently going on in Lebanon and in Palestine. Israel cannot be allowed to continue with impunity its aggression against those two countries.

2. It has been more than three weeks since Israel's warplanes first dropped bombs on Beirut airport and other targets in Lebanon. This initial action was ostensibly in reaction to Hizbollah's capture of two Israeli soldiers. But now we see the continuation of a relentless Israeli assault against Lebanon from the air and sea as well as on the ground. As we speak, Israeli soldiers are moving deeper into Lebanese territory. While the whole world is asking for the hostilities to be brought to an immediate end, the Israeli leaders are saying that they expect their military action to last for weeks more.

3. It should be clear to all of us that this war is not just about two captured soldiers. Israel and some others have been talking about not returning to the status quo ante, bringing into Lebanon a robust multinational force to supervise a sustainable ceasefire to keep Israel safe from Hizbollah. This war has been labeled as part of the global war on terror. Reference has been made to an arc of extremism stretching across the Middle East and beyond and the need for the western world to boldly confront that. Hizbollah has been branded an extremist terrorist organization. Certain countries have been blamed for supporting Hezbollah. We also hear some western leaders talking about bringing into being a new Middle East. We know what that means.

4. To me, all these signal a grave situation which can bring about even graver consequences. In the meantime, large parts of Lebanon have been, and continue to be, destroyed. Men, women and children continue to die. While the media focuses most on the situation in Lebanon, Palestinians suffer in Gaza and the West Bank. This is because Israeli actions to kill people and destroy houses and property continues unabated in Palestine as well. At the same time, the sanctions being imposed by certain countries on the present government of Palestine remains in place. The humanitarian situation in both Lebanon and Palestine have deteriorated sharply.

5. Let us be clear. What is happening to Lebanon and Palestine cannot be tolerated and should be condemned. Clearly, Israel has a bigger objective other than freeing their captured soldiers. Clearly, Israel is being supported by some others in pursuing their secret design. But the war cannot, and must not, be allowed to go on. There has to be an immediate and unconditional ceasefire. We cannot be equivocal in our demand for all this violence and suffering to end.

6. Until now, unfortunately, the international community is in paralysis. The United Nations has not been able to do much except to try organizing the distribution of humanitarian aid. Even this effort has met with resistance and hindrance by Israel. We see ministers and diplomats shuttling in the region. Yet no end seems to be in sight. The Security Council could not even muster the moral courage to condemn Israel for the attack on Qana or the killing of U.N observers at Khiam.

7. The fresh news we receive on the air waves and television screens contain nothing but more bombardments and more casualties. We see gruesome pictures of children, women and the elderly injured, dead or dying. We cannot ignore these facts. We cannot be indifferent to the sufferings. We should mourn the death of all civilians in conflict. We must feel the pain suffered by their families. Let us find ways and means to end this tragedy.

8. The western media have been constantly reporting Israel's side of the story and broadcasting pictures of Israeli families being forced to leave their homes or to seek shelter from Hizbollah's rockets. Stories and pictures concerning Lebanese and Palestinian women and children being bombed or driven from their homes have not received their equal share of air-time. Let us counsel the national media in our own countries to play a proactive role and make sure stories from all sides are told. The world must see with their own eyes the atrocities and inhumanity in Lebanon and in Palestine, where children constitute the majority of the dead, maimed or left homeless.

9. Every state and all people of the world have a moral obligation to stop this war. Let us take a moment to recollect the attack on Qana last Sunday. Over 50 innocent civilians, mostly women and children, seeking refuge from the bombardments, were bombed to death while trying to hide. The carelessness shown by Israel is an indictment on Israel's disregard for the sanctity of human lives. Israel continues to disregard urgent calls for restraint. Israel must be made to understand that pursuing their objective through indiscriminate killing and wanton destruction will only breed

greater hatred and bigger contempt. I fear the consequences these Israeli actions will have on peace in the long run.

10. As leaders of Islamic countries, we must deliberate on and address the issues in its totality. This is no longer any religious or sectarian issue. It is an issue about humanity. The situation in Lebanon and Palestine does not only affect Sunnis or Shiites, Muslims or non-Muslims. The carnage affects all Lebanese and Palestinians, of all religions and sects, and of all ages and cultures. We cannot continue issuing mere statements of condemnation for the violence. It is insufficient to express sympathy for the victims. Let us resolve to come up with a practical plan of action to stop the war and bring back the peace. We must help to rebuild Lebanon and Palestine. We must address the humanitarian situation.

11. We must play a more proactive role in the present conflict. We must show preparedness to contribute forces for peacekeeping operations under the United Nations banner. Malaysia is ready to do that. We must also request a role for the O.I.C to play in building the peace after the ceasefire is in place.

12. Let us begin our discussions by exploring concrete and practicable actions. Let us conclude our deliberations with the satisfaction that we have reached agreement to act further and do it together. The world is looking at us. Our own people are watching us and waiting for us to make the right decisions. The Muslim Ummah, whose compassion and sympathy for Lebanon and Palestine remain strong, want us to act. Let us not disappoint them. Let us not disappoint ourselves.

I thank you.