

**SPEECH BY
YAB DATO' SERI ABDULLAH BIN HAJI AHMAD BADAWI
AT THE C-100 SESSION ON "WEST – ISLAMIC DIALOGUE" WORLD
ECONOMIC FORUM ON THE MIDDLE EAST AT SHARM
EL SHEIKH, EGYPT
20 MAY 2006**

LORD CAREY OF CLIFTON;

HIS ROYAL HIGHNESS PRINCE TURKI AL FAISAL;

MR KLAUS SCHWAB;

DISTINGUISHED GUESTS;

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN,

1. I AM GREATLY HONOURED TO BE GIVEN THIS OPPORTUNITY TO SAY A FEW WORDS AT THE C-100 SESSION OF THE WORLD ECONOMIC FORUM ON THE MIDDLE EAST. I AM AWARE THAT THE C-100 REPRESENTS A GROUP OF EMINENT PERSONALITIES WHO HAVE DEDICATED THEIR TIME AND EFFORT TOWARDS BRIDGING THE DIFFERENCES THAT EXISTS BETWEEN THE MUSLIM WORLD AND THE WEST.

2. AS SUCH, YOU WILL NO DOUBT BE AWARE THAT FOUR AND A HALF YEARS AFTER THE TRAGEDY OF SEPTEMBER 11, 2001, WE ARE STILL SEPARATED BY A WIDE GULF OF DISTRUST, SUSPICION, IGNORANCE AND EVEN HATRED. EVENTS THAT CONTINUE TO UNFOLD IN AN UNSTABLE IRAQ, THE ARDUOUS SEARCH FOR LASTING PEACE IN AFGHANISTAN, AN ESCALATING SHOWDOWN BETWEEN IRAN AND THE UNITED STATES AND AN ALL BUT DEAD MIDDLE EAST PEACE PROCESS ARE GLOBAL EVENTS THAT WIDEN THE CLEAVAGE BETWEEN THE TWO CIVILISATIONS EVEN MORE.

3. AND SINCE ALL OF US HERE TODAY BELIEVE THAT DIALOGUE SHOULD BE THE FIRST OPTION IN ADDRESSING ANY DISPUTE, A DIALOGUE BETWEEN THE MUSLIM WORLD AND THE WEST IS AS URGENT TODAY AS IT WAS IN THE IMMEDIATE AFTERMATH OF SEPTEMBER 11. BUT DOES THE FACT THAT THE DIVIDE HAS NOT BEEN BRIDGED COMPLETELY MEAN THAT OUR DIALOGUE OVER THE PAST FEW YEARS HAS BEEN FUTILE?. HAVE WE WASTED OUR TIME TALKING TO EACH OTHER ONLY TO BE LED AND OVERTAKEN BY POLITICAL DECISIONS THAT DEFINE SOME OF THE GLOBAL EVENTS THAT CONTINUE TO DRIVE A WEDGE BETWEEN US?.

4. I DO NOT BELIEVE THAT IS THE CASE. BY SPEAKING TO ONE ANOTHER, WE HAVE CLEARLY BEEN ABLE TO LEAP OVER THE FIRST HURDLE. WE HAVE MADE EACH OTHER FAMILIAR WITH OUR OWN RESPECTIVE FAITHS AND CIVILISATION.

WE HAVE ALSO, HOPEFULLY, BEEN ABLE TO CONVINCED ONE ANOTHER THAT THOSE WHO SOMETIMES SPEAK THE LOUDEST AMONG US IN A LANGUAGE OF HATRED, INCITEMENT, AND SIMPLE EVIL ARE IN FACT A SMALL MINORITY WHO SEEK TO MISREPRESENT US.

5. HAVING GONE PAST THIS INITIAL MILESTONE, HOWEVER, WE HAVE YET TO PROGRESS ANY FURTHER. DIALOGUE, TO ME, MUST NOT END WITH GENERALITIES OR ICE BREAKERS. THE WHOLE POINT OF DIALOGUE, ESPECIALLY BETWEEN CIVILISATIONS IS TO CREATE A FRAMEWORK FOR ACTION THAT CAN BE IMPLEMENTED TO ADDRESS THE REAL PROBLEMS THAT ARE CAUSING THE RIFT. WE ALL KNOW THAT WE CANNOT SIMPLY TALK AWAY PROBLEMS. WE NEED TO TALK ABOUT HOW WE ARE GOING TO WORK TOGETHER TO SOLVE THESE PROBLEMS IN VERY REAL TERMS. THIS IS WHAT I CALL ENHANCED DIALOGUE AND THIS IS WHERE WE SHOULD MOVE OUR RESPECTIVE CIVILISATIONS TOWARDS.

6. ENHANCED DIALOGUE DOES NOT NECESSARILY MEAN HAVING MORE DIALOGUE. ENHANCED DIALOGUE MEANS HAVING MORE EFFECTIVE, PRODUCTIVE AND FOCUSED DIALOGUE. CERTAINLY IN THE DIALOGUE BETWEEN THE WESTERN AND MUSLIM WORLDS, THE NEED IS NOT FOR MORE DIALOGUE. THERE ARE ANY NUMBER OF DIALOGUES BEING HELD IN SO MANY PLACES. WHAT IS SADLY LACKING IS MORE FRUITFUL DIALOGUE CAPABLE OF YIELDING REAL PROGRESS.

7. THE DISCOURSE BETWEEN THE MUSLIM AND WESTERN WORLDS WOULD BE MORE PRODUCTIVE IF THE TWO SIDES ARE NOT IN DENIAL. SADLY, WE OFTEN ARE. ANY DISCUSSION OF THE REAL ROOT CAUSES OF PROBLEMS ARE AVOIDED, BECAUSE THAT WOULD EXPOSE THE CULPABILITY OF SOME OF US. SOME DO NOT WANT TO ACCEPT MORAL RESPONSIBILITY, AND TAKE THE TOUGH REMEDIAL ACTIONS THAT ARE NECESSARY. THE DIALOGUE THUS BECOMES FUTILE.

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN

8. IN MORE AND MORE NATIONS TODAY, RELIGION IS AN IMPORTANT AND POWERFUL FORCE IN SHAPING PUBLIC PERCEPTION. THIS IS ESPECIALLY TRUE IN THE ISLAMIC WORLD, IN PART BECAUSE ISLAMIC PRINCIPLES REQUIRE SOCIAL JUSTICE, EQUITY TO THE PEOPLE, AND PROTECTING AND EXPANDING PEOPLE'S RIGHTS. THE CAPACITY TO DEPLOY RELIGIOUS ARGUMENTS IS THEREFORE AN ESSENTIAL TOOL IN COMBATING RELIGIOUS EXTREMISM, AND IN FURTHERING DEVELOPMENT ON ALL FRONTS IN THE MUSLIM WORLD.

9. WHEN I BECAME PRIME MINISTER IN OCTOBER 2003, AND SIMULTANEOUSLY ASSUMED THE CHAIR OF THE ORGANIZATION OF ISLAMIC CONFERENCE, ONE QUESTION THAT PRESENTED ITSELF TO ME IN FULL FORCE WAS: WHAT IS, AND WHAT SHOULD BE, THE RELEVANCE OF RELIGION TO POLITICAL OFFICE, AND ITS ROLE IN IT?.

10. IN SEEKING TO ANSWER THIS QUESTION MY ADMINISTRATION IDENTIFIED THE MOST IMPORTANT PRINCIPLES OF GOVERNANCE THAT SINCE MALAYSIA'S INDEPENDENCE IN 1957 EVERY MALAYSIAN ADMINISTRATION STROVE TO FULFILL IN ORDER TO FORGE MALAYSIA AND MALAYSIAN SOCIETY INTO A ROBUST, SUCCESSFUL, PLURALISTIC, COSMOPOLITAN, MODERN AND HIGHLY-DEVELOPED ISLAMIC NATION STATE.

THE FIRST THREE OVER-ARCHING PRINCIPLES WERE:

1. THAT OUR GOVERNMENT BE JUST AND TRUSTWORTHY,
2. SOLICITOUS OF ITS PEOPLE'S FREEDOMS AND INDEPENDENCE, AND
3. MAINTAINED A ROBUST NATIONAL DEFENCE TO PROTECT ITS PEOPLE. FURTHER TO THAT, OUR GOVERNMENT:
4. ENCOURAGED ITS CITIZENS TO EXPRESS THEIR EXISTENTIAL BELIEF, ESPECIALLY OF FAITH AND PIETY IN THE ONE AND ALMIGHTY CREATOR, AND
5. VALUE ITS TRADITIONS AND CULTURE. IN THE REALM OF SPECIFIC TASKS, OUR GOVERNMENT DID ALL IT COULD TO:
6. ENCOURAGE EDUCATION NOT ONLY TO LEVELS OF BASIC LITERACY AND THE "THREE R'S OF READING, WRITING AND ARITHMETIC"— BUT URGED ITS PEOPLE TO CONTINUE ON TO THE HIGHEST LEVELS OF MASTERY OF KNOWLEDGE.
7. FURTHER ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT
8. PROTECT THE RIGHTS OF WOMEN, AND ADVANCED THEIR RIGHTS.
9. PROTECT THE RIGHTS OF RELIGIOUS AND ETHNIC MINORITIES, AND FINALLY
10. PROTECT THE ENVIRONMENT.

BECAUSE THESE PRINCIPLES ALSO FLOW FROM AND ARE COMPLIANT WITH THE FIVE FUNDAMENTAL OBJECTIVES OF ISLAMIC LAW (THE MAQASID OF THE SHARIA), MY ADMINISTRATION PICKED THE TERM ISLAM HADHARI TO DESCRIBE THIS SET OF PRINCIPLES THAT REFLECTED OUR UNDERSTANDING OF PROPER GOVERNANCE FLOWING OUT OF THE MALAYSIAN EXPERIENCE, AN EXPERIENCE THAT HAS ALWAYS SOUGHT TO ANCHOR ITSELF IN THE PROPER UNDERSTANDING OF ISLAMIC LAW AND JURISPRUDENCE.

I HAVE TAKEN THIS OPPORTUNITY TO OFFER MY GOVERNMENT'S APPROACH TO RELIGION THROUGH ISLAM HADHARI AS AN EXAMPLE OF A MUSLIM STATE THAT ALL NATIONS ARE COMFORTABLE WITH. MORE IMPORTANTLY, I BELIEVE, ISLAM HADHARI EMBODIES PRINCIPLES WHICH ARE UNIVERSALLY FAMILIAR AND ACCEPTED, AND PROVIDES US WITH AN INDISPUTABLE PREMISE UPON WHICH TO START ENHANCED DIALOGUE BASED ON COMMON OBJECTIVES IN GOVERNANCE.

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN

11. LET ME CONCLUDE BY STATING MY FIRM CONVICTION THAT GLOBAL PEACE AND UNDERSTANDING WILL BENEFIT GREATLY FROM DIALOGUE THAT IS PREMISED ON THE RIGHT VALUES. DIALOGUE HOWEVER MUST RESULT IN ACTION AND CAN NOT BE A SUBSTITUTE FOR IT. DIALOGUE BETWEEN THE MUSLIM AND WESTERN WORLDS MUST RESULT NOT ONLY IN ENHANCED UNDERSTANDING, BUT ALSO IN THE COURAGE AND STRENGTH TO RIGHT THE WRONGS. ULTIMATELY, THIS MEANS REVIEWING OUR POLICIES, POLICIES THAT CREATE GREAT INEQUITIES AMONG OUR PEOPLE AND POLICIES THAT INFLICT GREAT INJUSTICES UPON THE PEOPLE OF OTHER NATIONS.

12. THE EARLY HISTORY OF MY COUNTRY THAT IS MULTI-CULTURAL AND MULTI-RELIGIOUS DEMONSTRATED THE NEED FOR ENHANCED DIALOGUE BETWEEN OUR ETHNIC GROUPS. WE CAME VERY CLOSE TO SEEING OUR SOCIETY BEING TORN APART DURING RACIAL RIOTS IN 1969. BUT WE SAT DOWN – ALL ETHNIC GROUPS – AND BEGAN EXAMINING THE ROOT CAUSES OF OUR PROBLEMS WITH CLARITY AND OPENNESS. OUR DIALOGUE LED TO SWEEPING CHANGES IN OUR POLITICAL FRAMEWORK AND OUR SOCIOECONOMIC POLICIES. WE DID NOT JUST SIT DOWN AND HOPE THAT TALKING ALONE WOULD SOLVE OUR PROBLEMS. WE MADE TOUGH CHOICES AND EVERYONE, I REPEAT, EVERYONE, SACRIFICED AND WAS WILLING TO GIVE AS WELL AS TAKE – BOTH THE MAJORITY MUSLIMS AND THE NON-MUSLIM MINORITY.

13. I THEREFORE COME FROM A TRADITION OF ENHANCED DIALOGUE – ONE THAT CONTINUES TO KEEP THE PEACE IN MY COUNTRY AND ONE THAT HAS MADE MY COUNTRY ONE OF THE MOST ECONOMICALLY SUCCESSFUL MULTI-RELIGIOUS, MUSLIM-MAJORITY COUNTRY. WE KNEW THEN AS I SENSE TODAY THAT THE STAKES ARE HIGH. FOR IF DIALOGUE, IN A TIME OF MUTUAL DISTRUST, FAILS, THEN WE WILL START SEEING EACH SIDE DISENGAGE. I AM SURE YOU WILL AGREE WITH ME THAT DISENGAGEMENT IS THE LAST THING THAT WE WANT TO SEE BETWEEN THE MUSLIM WORLD AND THE WEST.

14. BEFORE IT COMES TO THAT POINT, WE MUST SEE RESULTS. BEFORE THE FRINGE ELEMENTS IN OUR SOCIETIES CONVINCED EVEN MORE PEOPLE THAT DIALOGUE DOES NOT YIELD RESULT AND IS A WASTE OF TIME, WE MUST START DISCUSSING SOLUTIONS. THE IMPERATIVE FOR ENHANCED DIALOGUE HAS NEVER BEEN CLEARER OR MORE URGENT. I HOPE OUR TALK CAN BE EVEN MORE MEANINGFUL AND SIGNIFICANT.

15. I CALL UPON THE WORLD ECONOMIC FORUM TO STRENGTHEN ITS OWN COUNCIL OF 100 LEADERS WHO HAVE BEEN WORKING HARD OVER THE PAST SEVERAL YEARS IN ADDRESSING THE MYRIAD AND COMPLEX ISSUES INVOLVED IN ENHANCING WEST-ISLAMIC WORLD DIALOGUE.

16. AMONG THE WAYS THIS CAN BE DONE IS FOR THE WEF TO INVITE THE C100 TO HELP SHAPE PANEL DISCUSSIONS THAT PROBE DEEPLY INTO THE INTERSECTION POINTS BETWEEN RELIGION AND POLITICS, AND BETWEEN RELIGION AND SOCIETY. FOR THESE ARE THE CHALLENGES THAT FACE MUSLIMS IN THE WEST, AND WESTERN GOVERNMENTS WITH THEIR DOMESTIC MUSLIM POPULATIONS; AND I SUBMIT TO YOU THAT OUR EXPERIENCE IN MALAYSIA CAN BE OF GREAT BENEFIT FOR THOSE GRAPPLING WITH THESE ISSUES.

17. THERE MAY BE THOSE WHO CLAIM THAT THE WEF'S PRIMARY FOCUS IS ON ECONOMIC ISSUES. BUT WHO CAN CLAIM THAT RELIGION DOESN'T DIRECTLY IMPACT ECONOMIC ISSUES?. AND WHO CAN CLAIM THAT RELIGION DOESN'T DIRECTLY IMPACT POLITICS?. MOST IMPORTANTLY, RELIGION IS WHAT GIVES MEANING TO OUR BEING HUMAN. OUR RELIGIOUS PRACTICE IS THE WAY WE EXPRESS OUR HUMANITY.

18. MY DEAR FRIENDS AND CO-BELIEVERS IN GOD, I PRAY TO THE ALMIGHTY GOD, THAT HE BLESS US ALL IN OUR WORK, AND SPECIFICALLY IN THIS ENDEAVOR. I PRAY THAT HE MAKE US INSTRUMENTS OF HIS GUIDANCE, HIS WISDOM, HIS COMPASSION AND HIS WILL.

THANK YOU.