

**SPEECH BY
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Madam President,

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen.

Firstly, I wish to congratulate you, Madam President, and the State of Bahrain on your election as the President of the 61st Session of the U.N General Assembly. As an Asian, a Muslim and the present Chairman of the O.I.C Summit Conference, I welcome your election with pride and satisfaction. I am confident that you will be able to steer the proceedings of this Assembly with consummate skill and achieve meaningful results. Needless to say, Malaysia will support you in any way that we can.

2. Allow me to also pay tribute to your distinguished predecessor, Mr. Jan Eliasson, the Foreign Minister of Sweden, for the exemplary way in which he guided the proceedings of the 60th Session of the General Assembly during some of the most trying times for the United Nations.

3. Speaking of trying times, I would also like to pay tribute to Mr. Kofi Annan, for his tireless efforts in serving humanity, not only during his tenure as the Secretary-General but throughout an entire career dedicated to the ideals of our Organization.

4. I must pay a special tribute to the members of the Secretariat and those serving under the U.N banner, in particular those who have made the ultimate sacrifice of their lives like the 4 members of UNIFIL who were killed last July during the height of the Israeli offensive against Lebanon.

Madam President,

5. We must continually remind ourselves that the United Nations was brought into being to serve as a forum, and as in Tennyson's words, to be a "Parliament of Man". Six decades since then, we have yet to achieve the intentions of the U.N Charter. Indeed, the situation in some corners of the world is bleaker than it ever was before. Yet the human family is still unable to find solutions to their own problems. .

6. As I review in my mind the events of the past year, I personally feel most disturbed that much of the ills in the affairs of our world were the result of irrational actions caused by prejudices in human attitudes. Basically, we have failed to dialogue, communicate and reach out to one another as fellow humans inhabiting the same planet. Indeed, the greatest discord today exists among the descendants of Abraham. These are the people of the book - the followers of Judaism, Christianity and Islam - who had in fact shared a common beginning which was the religion of Abraham.

7. Of course, dialogue would be endless if they are not accompanied by action. The purpose of honest discussion and engagement is to enable us to formulate rational and effective policies. To achieve this, I believe that all of us need to listen well and be sincere in our relations with one another.

8. Much of the dialogue that do take place result in the parties talking at, instead of talking to, one another. Any dialogue would certainly fail if it is already predetermined that certain states are "rogues" or that certain countries are necessarily "evil". Such name calling provides an excuse not to listen, let alone engage in serious negotiations to find amicable solutions to serious problems.

9. A blatant example of the refusal to grant even a hearing was the early decision by many important countries not to recognize or do business with Hamas after that group was elected into power in Palestine through a properly conducted democratic election. External assistance was stopped. Funds were blocked. As a result, millions of Palestinians have suffered for months without pay or food. I hope all sanctions against Palestine will soon be a matter of the past when President Abbas succeeds in the task of putting together a coalition government embracing all parties in Palestine. Surely, it is irrational and applying double standards to dictate or show preferences as to who should be elected into power in various countries.

10. The suppression of Palestine which is being allowed to fester, the invasion of Afghanistan, the conquest of Iraq and most recently, the unrestrained destruction of Lebanon have all been carried out in the name of the war against terrorism. The actions of Israel in the Middle East are being supported, either openly or tacitly, supposedly in defense of the Judeo-Christian tradition against the spread of radical militant Islam, thus legitimizing all of its actions, no matter how brutal. Even western commentators have conceded that Israel's latest assault against Lebanon has helped make what may once have been extremist opinions part of the Muslim mainstream. The Muslim world certainly sees all these as a complicity to humiliate Muslim countries and Muslim societies.

11. I am afraid that the schism between the west and the Muslim world will grow even deeper unless the international community is prepared to accept certain facts as the truth. The fact is that the sense of humiliation being felt by the Muslim world is the root cause for the loss of trust and confidence between the Muslim world on one side and the Judeo-Christian civilization on the other side. If the international community refuses or fails to accept this fact, then I am afraid we are denying the truth.

12. I believe much of the prejudices against Muslims stems from a lack of understanding of the true nature of Islam and what it stands for. For instance, there is a lack of appreciation in the west of the role of religion in the lives of Muslims. Modern Europe has generally embraced secularism and largely removed religion from the public domain into the confines of the home and family. For the Muslims, the teachings of Islam serve as their guide for doing all things, whether conducting their affairs in the public domain or practising the religion in their private homes. I suggest that much of the misunderstandings especially between the Christian west and the Muslim world arise out of this fundamental misunderstanding about the place of religion in the daily lives of Muslims all over the world. When dealing with Muslims, one cannot separate them from their religion because that is their way of life.

Madam President,

13. My country Malaysia is a multi-ethnic, multi-religious, multi-cultural country. However, Islam is respected by all the people as the official religion. The government which I now lead has embarked on a program to communicate a proper appreciation of Islam as a force for good. We call it Islam Hadhari, which is actually an approach for achieving a progressive society that is compatible with modernity 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 equitable development and progress. It is a call for moderation and tolerance as well as the assurance of justice and fairness for all irrespective of their faiths.

14. The point I am making is that Islam the religion is not the source of intolerance between peoples of different faiths. In fact, one of the fundamental teachings of Islam is the requirement to respect other religions. The Holy Quran contains this commandment by God. We must not confuse the perverse words and evil deeds of a small number of extremists, who operate within the fringes of Muslim societies, as a reflection of Islamic culture. The demonization of Islam must be stopped and Islamaphobia must be removed. The politics of fear must cease to dictate the conduct of relations between peoples and nations. If they do, then prejudice and irrationality will continue to prevail in the affairs of the world, and dialogues will continue to fail.

15. However, Madam President, we must persevere not only to eliminate the political and religious discord among man but we must also eradicate social and economic injustices particularly poverty and disease. It is an international responsibility not only in the name of humanity but also as a necessary aspect of maintaining international peace and stability.

16. We must therefore do all that we can to ensure that the impoverished and marginalized also enjoy the fruits of economic growth, globalization and free trade. It would indeed be unfortunate if we are unable to do so because the world has become more wealthy than ever before. We should learn from history that any economic system in which disparities exist cannot be sustained in the long term. All

too often such societies end up in violence. The civil wars and social unrests which we witness today are replays which we must stop.

17. Malaysia firmly believes that the key to prosperity, inclusion and equity is sustained economic growth, based on the building of national capacities, particularly human capital development. While education and skills by themselves are no guarantees of success, they are indispensable ingredients for greater productivity by the individual citizens which give them hope for a better future.

18. However, efforts at the national level alone are not sufficient. These need to be supplemented by the establishment of an international economic order that would cover areas such as trade, finance, debt, ODA and development that would enable the developing world to overcome their difficulties and contribute to global prosperity. Some progress has been made. But the overall results have been far from satisfactory.

19. Given the economic clout that the developed countries possess, it is essential that they demonstrate flexibility and goodwill at this critical juncture in the world trade talks. Malaysia will continue to be supportive of multilateral trade negotiations. Malaysia's approach, however, will be premised on the notion of progressive liberalization. We will continue to maintain a pragmatic approach by combining liberalisation with regulation in a policy mix consistent with the country's economic conditions and development needs.

Madam President,

20. It is all too clear that our human family must come together and talk to one another if we are to overcome the problems that threaten to engulf us all. To talk, however, is easy. To dialogue and communicate is more difficult. Indeed, this may be the most difficult of all human endeavours, given the human temperament with all its passions and foibles. It requires courage, humility and an appreciation of the diversities that make us human. In our relations, we must not be patronizing and condescending, and certainly not threatening. We must be persuasive and patient in dealing with complexities. Indeed, the pursuit of peace, justice and fairness in relations between nations and peoples have never been easy. Let us take up this challenge, with all the fortitude that it requires, and together put into effect a better world.

Thank you.