

**SPEECH BY  
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AT THE UNITED NATIONS ASSOCIATION OF MALAYSIA DINNER  
AT MANDARIN ORIENTAL KUALA LUMPUR  
27 NOVEMBER 2006**

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Members of the United Nations Association of Malaysia,

Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen.

I am very pleased to be here this evening to speak to a most distinguished and interesting audience. It warms my heart tonight to see such a rich and refreshing mix of people from different professions and walks of life. I must thank and congratulate the organizers for convening such an occasion. I shall take this opportunity to speak to you about Malaysia's commitment to multilateralism and the pursuit of a just world order.

2. The world today has become more complex, more interdependent and, at the same time, more fragile. Yet, the human potential to respond adequately to these challenges has not kept pace. Indeed, the world today is a confusing place. The forces of globalization and rapid communications are knitting the world together as a global village. But the same forces are causing marginalization of the poor and dispossession of the weak. We need to ask ourselves what the myriad challenges of the 21st century mean to us, immersed as we are in our respective professions as students, civil servants, entrepreneurs, civil activists, diplomats, political leaders. What do they mean to our country?

3. Let us step back and take a bird's eye view of what our world today looks like, to assess it, warts and all. Let us try to understand what, in essence, phenomena like globalization, internationalism and multilateralism really mean to us. Ultimately, we need to turn our minds to pondering the true nature and role of international relations and international diplomacy.

4. Let us start with globalization. The available literature on the subject is considerably vast. But we must not lose sight of the essence which is the interdependence of our current existence. The concept has been discussed and analyzed in many ways. The essential which we must discern from this phenomenon is the fact that the world today is not only interlinked and interconnected. It is interdependent. Perhaps if we reflect upon the interdependence of the world of nature, we will begin to understand the interdependence of the community of nations. Our flora and fauna have, since the beginning of time, always depended on one another to maintain a delicate balance in each particular sphere of existence and chain of being. Any upsetting of the balance in one sphere will bring about dire repercussions for the other spheres. Indeed, in the pursuit of plenty and profit, we humans have risked fast forwarding the environment to a point of no return.

5. Similar to the world of nature is the community of nations. I would suggest that the interdependence between nation states is not an entirely new phenomenon. It is simply that we have just come to realize, and appreciate more, this fact. Although it is true that there are many new happenings like the highly contagious SARS and the Avian flu, the environmental haze, tsunami and even the Asian financial crisis, the nature of interdependence between nations is actually defined by time and

circumstance. Depending on the particular political climate of the day and on where a nation stands in the hierarchy of power or in the political chain of being, certain terms can carry one meaning at one time and another the next. They can even mean different things simultaneously depending upon the power quotient of the party using these terms.

6. For instance, many decades ago, John Foster Dulles spoke of the Yellow Menace, referring to China. Indeed, China is now on the rise but it is no more than a country that is economically burgeoning. China is not a menacing communist giant but merely a global power of increasing economic might. China's success in lifting hundreds of millions of its people above the poverty line over the last decade is to be applauded and should not be viewed as a threat to be parried and countered at all costs. We here in Asia have recognized this fact as evidenced by the growing network of trade ties and friendly relations across East Asia. The first East Asia Summit which Malaysia hosted during the 11th ASEAN Summit last year is significant in this context. The same can be said of the fifteen years of ASEAN-China Dialogue relations which we recently celebrated in Nanning. In fact, many countries outside of the region are keen to be part of the dynamics taking place in East Asia. So we must bear in mind that the phenomenon of a rising China is, in reality, a threat only to those who want the world to remain just like before.

7. Similarly, we should pause for a moment and reflect upon the power of language. We have to accept the fact that knowledge, conveyed to us through language, is never neutral but is shaped, instead, by the worldview from which it springs. For example, the great powers make huge investments, oftentimes at great material and human costs, to persuade other nations to espouse freedom and democracy. Could these be, in actuality, a disguise to secure domination and control? Thus the American call for reform in the Middle East, under its 4-year Middle East Partnership Initiative, may be greeted with suspicion by those who do not share the American definition of freedom and democracy. They say it is the same impetus or force that seeks domination and control. Some others would even contend that the rallying cry for freedom and democracy, when applied in certain places like the Middle East, will pit states, old and new, modern or traditional, into tension and conflict and bring the entire region into ruin in the end.

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8. What are the options available to nations dealing with globalization? Multilateralism is arguably the most attractive choice. In order to discern this, we need, again, to train our sight upon the broader picture. We are living in an age of ambivalence, that is a state of affairs in which there is much conflict in ideas and attitudes. The most obvious and significant ambivalence of our time is the clash between the forces of nationalism on the one hand and internationalism on the other. This ambivalence, this tension, masks the reality, more than ever before, that multilateralism is the key to world peace and security.

9. One reason is that, increasingly, international relations is value-driven. The powers that be conduct their foreign policies on the basis of value judgments. Certain values are made to eclipse others, resulting in the consequent rise in importance of some issues over and at the expense of others. One can even say that, in a sense, this is a most undemocratic state of affairs where all things are not treated equally or with equal measure. Herein lies another ambivalence, even a paradox. As states move or profess to move closer and closer to the ideal of

democracy, the conduct of international relations seems to veer further and further away from it.

10. This state of affairs is most amply illustrated by the ambivalence and consequent crisis of identity that is the United Nations of today. Having reached the sixth decade of its existence, the Organization is floundering in an outmoded *modus operandi*. It were almost as if the world craves democracy and the multilateralism that this demands, and yet the U.N recedes ever deeper into the dark recesses of undemocratic practices like permanent membership and veto powers offering themselves only to the big powers, among other things. This is actually a problem of power. More specifically, it is a problem of the unequal and undemocratic distribution of power. It is also a problem of those wielding power refusing to give up their hold on positions that bequeath to them inbuilt advantages. We may be well advised to remind ourselves of the caution made by Abraham Lincoln when he said that "nearly all men can stand adversity, but if you want to test a man's character, give him power". I think this can be applied to nations as well as individuals. We should remind especially those that aspire to be the new permanent members of the U.N. Security Council to remember Abraham Lincoln.

11. Differences between Member States have always existed. Nowadays, however, the ideological antagonisms have become more fundamental obstacles to the exercise of multilateralism and the attainment of its ultimate goal, that is, peace. Indeed, the inherent tension between the forces of nationalism and internationalism has effectively ruined the spirit of equality symbolized by the practice of mutual consultation and consensus. This has been severely lacking in the U.N as well as in its various agencies like the I.M.F, the W.T.O and the World Bank. Moreover, this 'delegation' of U.N powers and functions to these other bodies has not been accepted in toto by many developing countries, so that the question of U.N reform becomes really part of the larger question of how to find new ways of managing international politics.

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12. We need to ask ourselves this question: Is Malaysia satisfied with the current state of affairs? Are we content to relegate to the U.N only so-called 'soft issues' like those of sustainable development, population and refugees, human rights and humanitarian issues? Are we prepared to continue allowing those issues with more political and economic impact to remain outside of the U.N proper, for instance letting finance and development to be handled by the World Bank, structural adjustment by the I.M.F and leaving trade and investment with the W.T.O? Can we continue to live with the situation that the massive task of maintaining international peace and security remains almost exclusively under the control of the Security Council, itself an undemocratic, elitist construct? The answer can only be that the playing field must be leveled in order to broaden the decision-making process.

13. This is especially necessary with the United Nations being tasked more and more to solve deep-seated, often seemingly intractable internal problems of vulnerable States. Today's wars are often wars within a particular State, civil wars fuelled by easy access to cheap weaponry sold mostly by the major powers. Furthermore, several agencies of the United Nations system, such as the Economic and Social Council, the Department of Humanitarian Affairs and other international agencies no longer are able to reflect and respond in any unified and adequate way to the modern reality.

14. Therefore, we must be acutely aware of the reality as it stands today. We must also resist being naïve and keep our eyes open to the fact that many of the reforms being advocated for the U.N are in reality not intended to make the United Nations more democratic, but instead more cost-effective, leaner, more efficient and coordinated. We must be aware of this distinction. We should be wary of such moves that divert our attention away from the United Nations' core functions and responsibilities.

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15. I have been speaking about ambivalence. For us in ASEAN there exists another ambivalence, namely, that of the ambivalence between cooperation on the one hand and competition on the other. Cooperation is intrinsic and competition is inevitable but if they are not in balance, ASEAN will not move far to deal with the impetus or the thrusts of other regions and countries. Since present-day international relations are increasingly value-laden, it follows that nations must strive to promote liberal global values.

16. For example, we can legitimately ask the question how far ASEAN can or should go in promoting civil and political rights especially in comparison to what it has done in the field of social and economic rights. Where do we draw the line on the question of non-interference in internal affairs of member states, which is at the very core of the ASEAN brand of multilateralism? We should be able to make a distinction between what is interference and what is not interference. Actually, ASEAN has made some progress in this regard. For instance, some ASEAN members are now directly involved in peace-building efforts in Southern Mindanao, the Philippines and in Aceh, Indonesia.

17. However, in the ASEAN context, the question of ambivalence about cooperation and competition remains. Do we want cooperation at all costs, or competition to the death? These are tough questions which, sooner or later, must be addressed not just by governments but by all stakeholders such as those present here tonight.

18. Whatever we decide, we must bear in mind not to repeat the situation of the U.N but create a regional machinery that is more efficient and at the same time, more just to all parties. We must however be careful not to allow the quest for greater political and civil rights to cause an imbalance in priorities and application of the regional agenda. We must also be aware of the complex repercussions for industrialized economies of our readiness to admit social and economic rights, especially at a time when environmental protection and sustainable development have risen to the top of the international economic agenda. However, combining the economic and social agenda with the political and civil is no longer a mere option; it is a necessity.

19. In the interdependent global society that we live in today, it is clear that international organizations - be they the U.N and its affiliates, the E.U, the O.I.C or ASEAN - must provide for the articulation of grievances and some kind of participation of non-State actors. This is where N.G.Os can step in to play a bigger role in developing concrete solutions for the eradication of poverty, for the building of social equity and ensuring sustainability. Member States of the U.N can and should work together with N.G.Os to generate the political pressure necessary to convince reluctant Governments of the need to change the United Nations. For the United

Nations is still the most viable opportunity for the articulation, coordination and management of global cooperation. It is inherently the best-equipped for the task of championing the cause of multilateralism.

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20. While multilateralism is essentially concerned with the management of relations among nations, it can also be an avenue for finding solutions to problems within nations. I am referring specifically to the problem of good governance which the multilateral process can help to implant. Multilateral bodies can facilitate the sharing of information or serve as a neutral provider of assistance. Good governance of a nation will usually result in the peace and stability of that nation. Conversely, bad governance results in turmoil and instability - precisely the situation currently prevailing in many areas of the globe. The key to solving many problems lies in the dissemination of knowledge and the provision of education. Therefore, it is the responsibility of good governance, and of those nations that wish to practise good governance, to educate both those at the helm of power and also those who seek instruction from them, of their rights and duties and of the precise relation between the two.

21. In Malaysia, we have adopted the approach of Islam Hadhari as one of the tools of good governance. Islam Hadhari is first and foremost an initiative to communicate a proper appreciation of Islam as a force for good and opposed to all things evil. It is an approach for nurturing a progressive society that is compatible with modernity yet firmly rooted in the noble values and injunctions of Islam. From the economic and social standpoint, Islam Hadhari is a call for equitable development and progress for all within the society. In the context of the management of human relations, it is a call for moderation and tolerance. In exercising the powers of government, it is an assurance of justice and fairness for all without regard to ethnicity, culture or religion. I must reiterate what I have said many times before, that this is not a new religion, nor a new mazhab or any kind of religious order but simply an approach for the promotion of good governance within societies based on the tenets of Islam. Islam Hadhari is eminently suitable for a heterogeneous country that Malaysia is, with its mixed cultural, ethnic and religious heritage. It should work equally well for other, less complex Muslim societies or countries.

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22. On the subject of religion, I would be remiss if I failed to highlight the problem which is presenting itself as one of the gravest threats to international stability in the history of the world. I am referring, of course, to the schism that is ever widening between the Christian west and the Islamic world. This conflict has both strategic and ideological dimensions. At the strategic level, the Muslim world sees the suppression of Palestine, the invasion of Afghanistan, the conquest of Iraq and the destruction of Lebanon as a complicity to humiliate Muslim countries. At the ideological level, Muslims see the refusal of the Christian west to acknowledge Islam as a way of life for all Muslims as intolerance and arrogance. The west in general, and modern Europe in particular, has allowed secularism to remove religion from the public domain into the confines of the home and family. They expect Muslims, especially those living in their societies, to do the same. Of course, this runs counter to the teachings of Islam which its followers must use as a guide in conducting all their affairs whether in the public domain or in their private homes.

23. In my view, it is critical that the full weight of the multilateral process be brought to bear to arrest the fast developing slide in the relations between the two great civilizations of the world. The clash of civilizations as postulated by Samuel Huntington must not be allowed to become a self-fulfilling prophesy. The United Nations might do well to convene a special conference to address all the issues that has brought extreme stress to the state of affairs between the Christian west and the Muslim world.

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24. Malaysia needs to work hand-in-hand with other countries to leverage our common advantage. For almost half a century, Malaysia has created a society based on interracial harmony, with a deliberate policy of affirmative action to improve the livelihood of millions. Largely as a result of this conscious and critical decision, the country's very cultural and political D.N.A are now imbued with a deep sense of mutual cooperation and gain. Malaysia does not and will not marginalize any particular racial group.

25. It is my hope that this example of ours will act like a ripple, emanating outwards to reach the shores of other peace-loving nations, acting as a wave to bring relief and hope especially to the 500 million people who live with us in this Southeast Asian region. Yet we must continue to reach further, to help our fellow Asian nations combine the weight of Asia with that of Europe in order to promote effective multilateralism. The recent Asia Europe Meeting in Helsinki in September this year was very encouraging in this regard, with all leaders affirming their commitment toward joining forces.

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26. It is on this positive note that I thus end my talk this evening. Looking at all the varied and hopeful faces present, coming as they do from the multiple layers of our society, both political and civil, I am indeed encouraged and hopeful. I am confident that, together, we can conduct our international relations and practise our international diplomacy in a similarly multilayered, multilateral approach for achieving peace and stability for ourselves and for the world.

Thank you.