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AN INDEPENDENT AND PRAGMATIC YET PRINCIPLED FOREIGN POLICY

As we celebrate, this year, the 50th anniversary of our country's independence, we can say with certainty that Malaysia has done well in the realm of diplomacy and international relations in the last fifty years. The challenge for us is to further strengthen the foundations of our global existence because we need to think far ahead. We should, for instance, envision the desired future position of Malaysia among the nations of the world fifty years from today.

2. In the context of international relations, the challenge of globalization is principally the need to be competitive in all aspects of our global position. We must establish competitive regulations, standards and facilities so that Malaysia becomes the country of choice for foreign investment. This applies to the industrial sector as well as in the fields of finance, banking, agriculture, bio-technology, to list just a few. Malaysia must also be able to produce and supply goods and services of the highest quality so that we can offer them as competitive items of trade with other countries. The traditional economic factors of production consisting of land, labour and capital have been increasingly replaced by knowledge, creativity and innovation as the main requisites for wealth creation. It is therefore imperative that Malaysia be at the cutting edge of research and development in science and technology, including information and communications technology, especially in relation to the development of human capital.

3. I firmly believe that the main secret to a nation's success lies in the quality of its people. Therefore, in planning for the future, I have placed great emphasis on enhancing the capacities and potentialities of our human capital. It includes the value adding of human capital through education and the sharpening of skills in various areas. I would like to put as much national effort, including using external expertise if necessary, to nurture the development of Malaysia's human capital.

4. Malaysian foreign policy in this era of globalization must provide support to the country's position as a very globalized economy. In fact, according to the A.T Kearney 2005 globalization index, Malaysia is now the 19th most globalized country in the world. In 2006, for the first time in Malaysia's history, our total trade surpassed Malaysian Ringgit 1 trillion which is equal to about U.S Dollars 291.5 billion. The total trade is more than twice that of the country's Gross Domestic Product. The openness of our economy has facilitated our growth. However, in an environment of increasingly intense global competition, we need to stay ahead of competition if we are to continue expanding. Our economic imperative is therefore to vie for and attract foreign direct investments, sustain domestic investments, and continue to be significant in the global trading environment.

5. To be able to do all these, Malaysia needs to have the trust and confidence of all of its international partners. Malaysia must be able to present itself not only as a credible and reliable economic collaborator but also a trustworthy friend. Malaysia must have, as we did in the past, an independent foreign policy. We need to be pragmatic in our outlook towards international issues and in our approach towards

other countries but we must preserve our principles.

6. The most fundamental principle is respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of all nation states. There must also be fairness and justice in the relations between nations, including adherence to international law. Just as we have a mission to become a developed country domestically, we have an equally important task to campaign for the establishment of a just and equitable economic and political order internationally. This is necessary not only to narrow the huge gap between the rich and poor nations of the world but also to establish certain codes of conduct in international economic relations so that emergent countries like Malaysia can compete on a fairer basis. Only then can small countries contribute effectively to the establishment of international peace and security.

7. Malaysia's diplomacy must therefore be shaped to support two simultaneous purposes. First, to help achieve our target of becoming a developed nation by the year 2020. Second, to help maintain our credibility in the campaign for a more just and equitable international order.

8. The main responsibility for charting the course of Malaysia's future diplomacy lies in the hands of Wisma Putra. I am confident that Wisma Putra, which has a tradition of excellence, will be able to rise to the occasion. You should draw inspiration from your predecessors in the Ministry especially those who pioneered the foreign service immediately after our country's independence in 1957. Tumultuous events in those early years compelled these pioneer officers to acquire sophisticated diplomatic skills and develop high expertise in international affairs very early in the life of our nation. These events included the signing of the Anglo-Malayan Defence Arrangement of 1957, the creation of A.S.A in 1961 and its subsequent demise, the formation of Malaysia in 1963 followed by the Indonesian confrontation and the break of diplomatic relations with the Philippines, plus the separation of Singapore in 1965. All of these happened within the first ten years of independence. They were indeed "baptism of fire" for Malaysian diplomacy.

9. Indeed, Malaysia can be proud of its record of having an independent and principled stance on international issues from the very beginnings of its entry into international politics and diplomacy. For example, as early as 1961, the then Malayan Delegation at the United Nations in New York was on record taking very strong stands against nuclear testing by the Soviet Union and against apartheid by the white South African regime in Pretoria.

10. Of course, we should not be dwelling on past glory but we need to keep history in mind to serve as lessons for the future. Today, as a global player particularly in trade and investment, the conduct of relations between Malaysia and other countries are no longer the exclusive purview of the Foreign Ministry. This is also reflective of another phenomenon, that nation states are no longer the only players in international affairs. Multinational corporations and the global civil society, exerting their influence through non-governmental forums and organizations, have become increasingly successful in putting their inputs into the management of the affairs of the world.

11. Wisma Putra must take into account the new realities, adjust its functioning and priorities, if it is to remain relevant as the principal manager of Malaysia's international relations. The Malaysian foreign service officer of the 21st century must be capable of multi tasking. The diplomat of the globalization era must not only be skillful in political and strategic issues but he or she must also be knowledgeable

about international economic and financial matters. The Malaysian diplomat of today and the future must be suitably qualified and given the necessary training for the challenging task of promoting and protecting our multifaceted national interest. In particular, officers must be proficient in the usage of international languages because effective communication is the key tool of international diplomacy.

12. I am aware that the Ministry is now embarking upon a major reorganization exercise. I hope the exercise will result not only in greater functional efficiency but also enhance knowledge and expertise inside the Ministry, including its 104 Missions abroad, on all subjects of interest to Malaysia at the international level. Only then can Wisma Putra perform as an effective advisor to the Government on all issues of international strategic importance.

13. In the country, I have embarked upon a personal campaign to improve and upgrade the public service delivery system. This applies in equal measure to the conduct of our diplomacy and international relations. Malaysian diplomatic officers abroad, just like their civil service counterparts at home, must efficiently and expeditiously deliver for the government, for the good name and for the benefit of Malaysia.

14. It is not possible for small countries like Malaysia to make an impact on international issues and situations except in partnership with other like minded countries. We need to work through such organizations as the Group of 77, the Organization of Islamic Conference, the Non Aligned Movement and the Commonwealth.

15. Malaysia's best hopes, and the best hopes of developing countries as a whole, lie in the preeminence of multilateralism. A genuine commitment to multilateralism by all countries, in particular the big powers, will send a strong signal to all governments that the purposes and principles of the United Nations shall form the basis of the conduct of relations between nations. Such a commitment will also provide the foundation for a true international partnership for establishing global peace and security and for achieving international economic and social development.

16. Therefore, the international community should intensify efforts of reforming the United Nations because the world body remains the best avenue for ensuring that multilateralism be the preferred approach for finding solutions to the world's problems. The United Nations is our best hope because it is the single most representative multilateral organization. But it must be made to serve better the interests of the smaller, less powerful and less prosperous of its membership. The playing field must be leveled in order to broaden the decision-making process in the Organization. In this exercise, however, we should constantly make a distinction between genuine reforms which can make the United Nations more democratic against those which are designed merely to make the United Nations more cost-effective, leaner, efficient and coordinated.

17. In the campaign for a more equitable international economic and political order, Malaysia should continue to be fearless in calling for the elimination of injustices in the world. We should continue to be in the forefront advocating for the removal of unfairness in the relations between nations. We should maintain our rejection of unilateralism as a methodology for finding solutions to world problems.

18. On the political front, Malaysia must continue to be vocal in championing the cause of Palestine because it is a just cause deserving our support. Malaysia must

also continue to advocate for the immediate withdrawal of foreign forces from Iraq because the invasion was illegal and unjustifiable. The non resolution of the Palestinian problem is the single most important factor perpetuating the tension between the west in general and the Muslim world as a whole. The continuing presence of foreign troops in Iraq has exacerbated the feelings of antagonism towards the west. The invasion of Afghanistan, the aggression against Lebanon and the continuing occupation of the Golan Heights in Syria have added to the humiliation being felt by Muslims everywhere.

19. These feelings of humiliation, compounded by the continuing non resolution of the problems affecting Muslim countries, have transformed disaffection into resentment and hostility. For decades, however, this resentment and hostility existed only as a political and strategic conflict. The conflict began to acquire religious dimensions when the war on terrorism erroneously associated Islam with extremism. The situation has become clouded by the prevalence of prejudices and hatred on both sides of the divide, causing a schism to develop between the Christian west and the world of Islam. Several acts considered insensitive to Islam, the latest being the tampering of Muslim holy sites around the Al Aqsa mosque in Jerusalem, have heightened tensions and worsened the situation.

20. This situation must be rectified so that the schism does not grow even wider. As a concerned country directly affected by these developments, Malaysia has a duty to contribute to the narrowing of the gap of misunderstanding between the two sides. As current Chairman of the Summit of the Organization of Islamic Conference, Malaysia has a special responsibility to take the lead in addressing this increasing divide between religions and civilizations. Everyone has an equal stake to prevent this schism from developing into the gravest ever threat to global stability.

21. Islam Hadhari is Malaysia's contribution towards a better understanding of Islam by all sides. Islam Hadhari will remind Muslims, and reveal to non Muslims, that Islam in reality is a religion which is tolerant, progressive and peace loving. It enables Muslims to know the proper approach for practising the religion as a way of life in these modern times. It exhorts them to be innovative, creative and relevant in this day and age of science and technology. Islam Hadhari advocates good governance. It is an undertaking to put into practice, among others, justice, freedom, love of knowledge, balanced development, a good quality of life for the people, protection of minorities and moral integrity. Islam Hadhari is not a new teaching. It is not a new religion. It is simply an exposition of the true nature of Islam.

22. It is in this connection that Malaysia must continue to make concerted efforts, especially during the remainder of its term as Summit Chairman, to put an economic face to the Organization of Islamic Conference. We need to strengthen the concept of brotherhood in Islam to include mutual assistance in economic and social terms. This is in view of the fact that the collective Gross Domestic Product of the 57 O.I.C member countries is less than 5% of the total world G.D.P. 31 of them are classified by the United Nations as least-developed low-income countries. The volume of trade between O.I.C members represents only 6 to 7 percent of the total global trade. The O.I.C has a moral obligation and an economic rationale to assist the least developed of its member countries get out of the poverty cycle. Much of the turmoil and violence in Muslim countries can be traced to the problem of poverty and deprivation. The eradication of poverty in Muslim societies should be a priority in the work programme of the O.I.C.

23. Consistent with our belief in multilateralism as the best approach for securing global peace, security and prosperity, we also believe in the utility of community building for dealing with various issues of common concern at the regional level. Malaysia should continue to remain fully committed to the strengthening of ASEAN because ASEAN is vital for the maintenance of peace and stability in Southeast Asia. Malaysia therefore supports the early adoption of an ASEAN Charter, just as we continue to be committed in meeting the targets for establishing the ASEAN Economic Community, the ASEAN Security Community and the ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community. Malaysia should encourage more concrete regional cooperation to combat region-wide problems, in particular international terrorism, diseases and other problems affecting the quality of the regional environment.

24. Malaysia will continue to value ASEAN's relationship with its Dialogue Partners for progress and prosperity. Similarly, Malaysia shall also continue to be fully supportive of ASEAN's efforts in securing peace and security in the wider East Asian region together with its partners in the ASEAN Regional Forum. In the same spirit, Malaysia shall continue to strive for bringing into being a larger East Asia Community through the ASEAN+3 process.

25. At the bilateral level, Malaysia wishes to have friendly relations with all countries and be enemies with none. Malaysia is fully committed to the principle of non interference in the internal affairs of other countries, and the settlement of all disputes by peaceful means. This includes the need to be sensitive to the feelings and concerns of others, especially those of immediate neighbours. Malaysia has no wish to impose its views and values on others but would be willing to share its experience and knowledge, particularly with other developing countries. For mutual benefit, Malaysia will continue to promote bilateral cooperation with as many countries and in as many sectors as possible.

26. Let me reemphasize - although Malaysian foreign policy has always been principles-based, we have never been doctrinaire in our thinking. Foreign policy cannot and must not remain static. Pragmatism shall continue to be Malaysia's diplomatic stance when dealing with problems and in conducting our relations, not only at the multilateral but also at the regional and bilateral levels. But we should not callously abandon our principles. This is the limit to our pragmatism. Our integrity as a nation must be maintained and our reputation as a country which honours its obligations must be protected.

27. As our front-liners in the field of diplomacy, I am pleased to welcome home all of you, Heads of Malaysian Diplomatic Missions in other countries. I am aware that is not possible to hold very often a Conference such as this. You should therefore make the fullest use of this occasion. It is most appropriate that this conference has been convened during the fiftieth anniversary of our national independence. I commend Wisma Putra for putting together a comprehensive programme of briefings and discussions. Do use this opportunity to update yourselves on our national mission for the longer term and understand fully the immediate priorities of our country. You should do this so that you will be better equipped to serve the nation in your respective Missions.

28. I wish all of you success in your deliberations. It is with great pleasure that I now declare officially open the Conference of Heads of Missions 2007.