

**SPEECH BY  
YAB DATO' SERI ABDULLAH BIN HAJI AHMAD BADAWI  
AT THE BIOSAFETY & BIOSECURITY ASIA 2007 CONFERENCE  
AT PUSAT DAGANGAN DUNIA PUTRA (PWTC), KUALA LUMPUR  
21 MAY 2007**

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"UCAPAN INI DIBACA OLEH YB DATO' SERI MOHD RADZI SHEIKH AHMAD  
MENTERI HAL EHWAL DALAM NEGERI"

ASSALAMUALAIKUM WARAHMATULLAHI WABARAKATUH AND GOOD MORNING

HONOURABLE MINISTERS

YBHG DATO' SRI HAJI AHMAD LATFFI BIN HASHIM  
SECRETARY GENERAL, MINISTRY OF DEFENCE

DR. ABDUL GHAFFAR BIN RAMLI  
DIRECTOR GENERAL OF STRIDE

DISTINGUISHED SPEAKERS AND PARTICIPANTS

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN

1. IT IS AN HONOUR AND PRIVILEGE FOR ME TO OFFICIATE THE OPENING OF THIS CONFERENCE, WHICH FOCUSES ON A VERY INTERESTING AND CHALLENGING FIELD. INDEED, THE SUBJECT MATTER OF THIS CONFERENCE SITS AT THE INTERSECTION OF THREE CRITICAL ISSUES, WHICH ARE NATIONAL SECURITY, PUBLIC HEALTH, AND BIOTECHNOLOGY. AS SUCH, IT IS MY HOPE THAT THIS CONFERENCE, WHICH HAS BEEN PUT TOGETHER BY ELEVEN GOVERNMENT AGENCIES – LED BY THE SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY RESEARCH INSTITUTE FOR DEFENCE (STRIDE) – WILL HELP FURTHER OUR COLLECTIVE THINKING ON HOW BEST TO MANAGE THESE VERY IMPORTANT ISSUES.

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN

2. MODERN BIOTECHNOLOGY IS WIDELY ACKNOWLEDGED TO BE THE BREAKTHROUGH FOR SCIENCE IN THE 21ST CENTURY. THE MAPPING OF THE HUMAN GENOME AND DISCOVERIES OF GENE FUNCTION HAVE OPENED THE HORIZON FOR NEW SOLUTIONS TO AGE-OLD PROBLEMS.

3. HOWEVER, THESE NEW DEVELOPMENTS ALSO COME AT A TIME OF NEW DANGERS. IN THE AGE OF EXPANDING TRAVEL AND INTERNATIONAL TRADE, MICROBES AND VIRUSES ARE EASILY TRANSPORTED ACROSS BORDERS EVERY DAY. THIS INTRODUCES THE RISK OF INFECTIOUS DISEASES BEING SPREAD AT AN ALARMING RATE ACROSS BORDERS AND NATIONS.

4. FOR THOSE OF US IN ASIA, THIS SCENARIO IS SADLY ALL-TOO-FAMILIAR. IN THE LAST DECADE, SEVERAL NATIONS IN ASIA HAVE HAD TO GRAPPLE WITH OUTBREAKS OF VARIOUS INFECTIOUS DISEASES, INCLUDING AVIAN INFLUENZA (OR "BIRD FLU"), AS WELL AS SEVERE ACUTE RESPIRATORY SYNDROME (OR BETTER KNOWN AS "SARS").

5. WITH THIS CONTEXT IN MIND, THE TWIN ISSUES OF BIOSAFETY AND BIOSECURITY BECOME ALL THE MORE URGENT AND IMPORTANT IN THE MINDS OF POLICYMAKERS AND REGULATORS.

6. BIOSAFETY INVOLVES THE PROTECTION OF BIOLOGICAL INTEGRITY, BOTH OF ECOLOGY AND HUMAN HEALTH. IN THIS CONTEXT, BIOSAFETY ENCOMPASSES SAFE PRACTICES IN THE HANDLING OF BIOLOGICAL AGENTS, MANAGING THE RISK OF FOOD CHAIN CONTAMINATION, AND THE PROMOTION OF SAFETY STANDARDS IN RESEARCH WORK. BY ITS NATURE, WORK IN BIOSAFETY IS PRECAUTIONARY AND PREVENTIVE.

7. BIOSECURITY, ON THE OTHER HAND, INVOLVES ACTIVE EFFORTS IN PROTECTING POPULATIONS AND FOOD SOURCES FROM LARGE-SCALE EPIDEMICS, WHETHER THEY OCCUR NATURALLY OR RESULT FROM THE USE OF BIOLOGICAL WEAPONS. BIOSECURITY MEASURES INCLUDE MONITORING PATTERNS WHICH SUGGEST EMERGING EPIDEMICS, ENSURING SUFFICIENT STOCKPILES OF APPROPRIATE VACCINES IN CASE OF OUTBREAKS, AS WELL AS SPREADING PUBLIC HEALTH EDUCATION AND ALERTNESS.

8. EVEN IN PEACETIME, THE IMPORTANCE OF BIOSAFETY AND BIOSECURITY CANNOT BE UNDERESTIMATED. IN THE AGE OF BIOLOGICAL WEAPONS AND GLOBAL TERRORISM, THE URGENCY OF BIOSAFETY AND BIOSECURITY TAKES ON A WHOLE NEW DIMENSION.

9. WE CANNOT AFFORD TO BE LAX, AND WE MUST ALWAYS BE VIGILANT, IF WE ARE TO ENSURE THAT PUBLIC HEALTH AND NATIONAL SECURITY REMAIN SECURE. IF WE FAIL, THEN WE MAY FIND THAT THERE WILL BE A HEAVY PRICE TO PAY FOR OUR FAILURE.

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN

10. I WOULD LIKE TO SPEAK ON THE IMPORTANCE OF PREPAREDNESS IN THESE ISSUES. AS I MENTIONED EARLIER, THE PRINCIPLES OF BIOSAFETY AND BIOSECURITY DEMAND THAT WE TAKE PRECAUTIONARY AS WELL AS ACTIVE MEASURES TO PROTECT OURSELVES FROM INADVERTENT MISHANDLING, OR INTENTIONAL ABUSE OF INFECTIOUS AGENTS.

11. IN A 2006 SURVEY CONDUCTED BY THE SANDIA NATIONAL LABORATORIES IN THE UNITED STATES WITH OVER 300 ASIAN LIFE SCIENTISTS, FINDINGS INDICATED THAT THERE IS STILL MUCH WORK TO BE DONE IN TIGHTENING UP THE STANDARDS OF BIOSAFETY AND BIOSECURITY, PARTICULARLY IN THE ASIAN REGION.

12. FOR EXAMPLE, ONLY 21 PERCENT OF THE LIFE SCIENTISTS SURVEYED CONDUCTED RISK ASSESSMENTS TO IDENTIFY THE POTENTIAL FOR MALICIOUS USE OF ORGANISMS UNDER THEIR CARE. ANOTHER 14 PERCENT DID NOT CONDUCT ANY RISK ASSESSMENT.

13. FURTHERMORE, THE SURVEY ALSO UNCOVERED SOME INADEQUACIES IN TERMS OF SECURITY MEASURES. ONLY 54 PERCENT OF THOSE SURVEYED HAD GUARDS AT THE BUILDING ENTRANCE AT ALL TIMES, AND ONLY 51 PERCENT OF THOSE SURVEYED ENSURED THAT ACCESS TO LABORATORY AREAS WAS

RESTRICTED. THE SURVEY ALSO DISCOVERED THAT ONLY 54 PERCENT OF THOSE SURVEYED HAD A CURRENT INVENTORY OF ALL INFECTIOUS AGENTS AND TOXINS UNDER THEIR CARE.

14. THIS WORRYING LEVEL OF PREPAREDNESS IS NOT MERELY AN ASIAN PHENOMENON. IN ANOTHER STUDY CONDUCTED BY THE TRUST FOR AMERICA'S HEALTH IN 2005, MORE THAN 50 PERCENT OF AMERICANS LIVE IN STATES THAT DO NOT HAVE PLANS TO DEAL WITH LARGE NUMBERS OF CASUALTIES IN THE CASE OF A BIOLOGICAL ATTACK. WORSE YET, ONLY 2 OUT OF 50 STATES HAVE PLANS TO ENCOURAGE MEDICAL PERSONNEL TO REPORT FOR WORK DURING AN EPIDEMIC.

15. THE STATE OF PREPAREDNESS IN THE CASE OF A BIOLOGICAL ATTACK – BE IT AT THE MICRO LEVEL, OR AT THE LEVEL OF PUBLIC AUTHORITIES – IS SOMETHING THAT ALL OF US, ESPECIALLY AT THE LEVEL OF POLICY MAKERS, NEED TO BE CONCERNED ABOUT. I HOPE THAT THIS IS SOMETHING THAT WOULD BE GIVEN DUE CONSIDERATION DURING THE COURSE OF THIS CONFERENCE.

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN

16. THE ISSUE OF BIOSAFETY AND BIOSECURITY WILL PROVE TO BE MORE URGENT AND IMPORTANT, AS THE FULL IMPLICATIONS OF OUR RECENT ACHIEVEMENTS IN THE LIFE SCIENCES BECOME CLEARER TO US.

17. ON OUR PART, THE MALAYSIAN GOVERNMENT IS IN THE PROCESS OF DRAFTING A BIOSAFETY BILL, WHICH WOULD CREATE A ROBUST LEGAL FRAMEWORK FOR MANAGING BIOSAFETY ISSUES. WE ARE CONFIDENT THAT THE RESULTING LEGAL FRAMEWORK WOULD FACILITATE A SECURE REGIME FOR THE HANDLING OF HAZARDOUS BIOLOGICAL MATERIALS, WHILE AT THE SAME TIME ENSURING THAT THE REQUIREMENTS WOULD NOT BE UNFAIR OR UNSOUND PARTICULARLY FOR THOSE ENGAGED IN LIFE SCIENCES RESEARCH IN MALAYSIA. MY GOVERNMENT CONTINUES TO SEEK INPUT AND FEEDBACK ON HOW WE CAN ACCELERATE BIOTECHNOLOGY DEVELOPMENT IN THE COUNTRY, WHILE ENSURING THAT BIOSAFETY AND BIOSECURITY CONCERNS ARE ADDRESSED AND TAKEN INTO ACCOUNT.

18. I AM SURE THERE WILL BE MUCH DISCUSSION AND DELIBERATION AT THIS CONFERENCE, AND I LOOK FORWARD TO RECEIVING ANY ADVICE AND FEEDBACK THAT YOU MAY HAVE. THIS IS A VERY EXCITING TIME FOR THOSE INVOLVED IN BIOSAFETY AND BIOSECURITY, AND ALSO AN EXCITING TIME TO BE HERE IN MALAYSIA. AS SOME OF YOU MIGHT KNOW, THIS YEAR IS MALAYSIA'S 50TH YEAR OF INDEPENDENCE. WE HAVE LINED UP MANY EVENTS AND PROGRAMMES IN CONJUNCTION WITH OUR GOLDEN JUBILEE, WHICH HAS BEEN DESIGNATED "VISIT MALAYSIA YEAR 2007". I DO HOPE YOU WILL TAKE SOME TIME OFF TO ENJOY THE BEAUTIFUL SIGHTS AND SOUNDS OF MALAYSIA BEFORE YOU RETURN HOME.

19. LASTLY, I WISH YOU A SUCCESSFUL AND PRODUCTIVE MEETING HERE IN KUALA LUMPUR. ON THAT NOTE, WITH THE RECITATION OF BISMILLAHIR RAHMANIR RAHIM, IT IS NOW MY PLEASURE TO DECLARE OPEN THE BIOSAFETY AND BIOSECURITY ASIA 2007 CONFERENCE.

THANK YOU.