

**SPEECH BY
YAB DATO' SERI ABDULLAH BIN HAJI AHMAD BADAWI
AT THE SECOND UNION NETWORK INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE FOR THE
ASIA-PACIFIC REGION
AT HOTEL ISTANA, KUALA LUMPUR
28 AUGUST 2007**

ASSALAMUALAIKUM WARAHMATULLAHI WABARAKATUH AND GOOD MORNING

HIS EXCELLENCY MR ONG KENG YONG
ASEAN SECRETARY GENERAL

MR JOE HANSEN
U.N.I. WORLD PRESIDENT

MR PHILIP JENNINGS
U.N.I. SECRETARY GENERAL

MR JOSEPH DE BRUYN
PRESIDENT OF U.N.I., ASIA PACIFIC REGION

MR CHRISTOPHER NG
U.N.I. REGIONAL SECRETARY, ASIA PACIFIC REGION

ENCIK MOHAMED SHAFIE BP MAMMAL
PRESIDENT OF THE UNI-MALAYSIAN LIAISON COUNCIL AND PRESIDENT OF THE
MALAYSIAN NATIONAL UNION OF TELECOMS EMPLOYEES (N.U.T.E.)

ESTEEMED DELEGATES, LADIES AND GENTLEMEN

1. FIRSTLY, ALLOW ME TO THANK THE ORGANISERS FOR AFFORDING ME THE OPPORTUNITY TO SPEAK WITH YOU TODAY AND TO OFFICIATE THE OPENING OF THIS REGIONAL CONFERENCE. I AM PLEASED TO HAVE A CHANCE TO ADDRESS THE DISTINGUISHED LEADERS OF SOME 200 SERVICE SECTOR UNIONS, FROM ACROSS THE ASIA PACIFIC REGION. I HAD MET SOME OF YOU BEFORE WHEN I OFFICIATED A U.N.I. CONFERENCE IN 2005. I SEE THIS SECOND MEETING AS A TESTAMENT OF OUR SHARED UNDERSTANDING AND COMMON DESIRE TO PROMOTE HEALTHY ECONOMIES, COMPETITIVE WORKFORCE, FAIR WORKING CONDITIONS, AND SUSTAINABLE STANDARDS OF LIVING.

2. IT IS VITAL THAT GOVERNMENTS AND WORKERS SHARE A STRONG UNDERSTANDING, NOT ONLY OF EACH OTHERS' NEEDS BUT ALSO OF EACH OTHERS' CHALLENGES. WITH A STRONG UNDERSTANDING, WE WILL SEE THAT ECONOMIC PROGRESS AND THE ADVANCEMENT OF LIVING STANDARDS OF WORKERS NEED NOT CONFLICT AND CAN IN FACT GO HAND-IN-HAND. INDEED, ECONOMIC PROGRESS SHOULD IMPROVE THE LIVES OF ALL WHO CONTRIBUTE TO ITS GROWTH. UNDERSTANDING HOW THIS CAN BE ACHIEVED, IN THE CONTEXT OF TODAY'S WORLD ENVIRONMENT, SHOULD BE A TASK NOT ONLY FOR GOVERNMENTS BUT ALSO FOR WORKER GROUPS.

3. GOVERNMENTS AND WORKERS ALIKE HAVE HAD TO ADAPT TO A RAPIDLY CHANGING WORLD. LIBERALISATION OF MARKETS AND SECTORS, AS AGREED UNDER W.T.O. AND ASEAN FOR EXAMPLE, HAS HAD GREAT IMPLICATIONS ON HOW WORK AND SKILLS ARE VALUED. DUE TO THE FREE MOVEMENT OF INVESTMENTS, WORK THAT INVOLVES MINIMAL SKILLS WILL BE UNDER THE GREATEST OF PRESSURE, WHEREAS WORK THAT REQUIRES SPECIALISED SKILLS WILL BE PRIZED AND REWARDED. MINIMAL-SKILLED WORK WILL CONTINUE TO MOVE TO COUNTRIES THAT HAS THE LOWEST COST OF LABOUR. THIS IS THE REALITY FACED BY MANY DEVELOPING COUNTRIES AND THEIR PEOPLE TODAY.

4. NO NATION WISHES TO SUPPRESS WAGES OR TO KEEP WAGES ARTIFICIALLY LOW IN ORDER TO ATTRACT INVESTMENTS. INDEED, ALL WORKERS SHOULD BE PAID WAGES THAT ARE COMMENSURATE WITH THEIR PRODUCTIVITY AND VALUE ADD. THIS IS ONLY FAIR AND APPROPRIATE.

5. NONETHELESS, WHAT IS "FAIR AND APPROPRIATE" TO EMPLOYERS AND EMPLOYEES MUST ALSO BE DICTATED BY PREVAILING MARKET CONDITIONS AND RELEVANT COMMERCIAL CONSIDERATIONS. AFTER ALL, COMPANIES AND NATIONS MUST BE BOUND BY THE RULES OF THE MARKET ECONOMY. NATIONS CAN AND MUST ESTABLISH SUFFICIENT PROTECTION AGAINST UNFETTERED MARKETS, SUCH AS ADEQUATE SAFETY LAWS AND FAIR WORKPLACE CONDITIONS.

6. BUT NATIONS MUST ALSO UNDERSTAND THE LAWS OF SUPPLY AND DEMAND. THIS MEANS THAT ULTIMATELY, NATIONS AND THEIR WORKERS MUST ENSURE THAT THEY CAN OFFER VALUE TO THE WORLD'S MARKETS. WAGES, WELFARE AND WELL-BEING DEPEND ON HOW MUCH VALUE ONE CAN PRODUCE. VALUE, IN TURN, IS DETERMINED BY IDEAS, MANAGEMENT, SKILLS AND PRODUCTIVITY.

7. ALONG WITH ENSURING DECENT WORK CONDITIONS AND FAIR LABOUR LAWS, THE MOST IMPORTANT SHARED RESPONSIBILITY FOR NATIONS AND WORKERS IS TO FIND WAYS TO OFFER GREATER VALUE ADD TO THE WORLD. UPGRADING SKILLS AND IMPROVING INCENTIVES FOR PERFORMANCE MUST BE PURSUED, NOT ONLY BY GOVERNMENTS BUT ALSO BY BUSINESS OWNERS AND THEIR WORKERS. WE ALL HAVE A SHARED RESPONSIBILITY TO IMPROVE OURSELVES, AND IN SO DOING, LIFT OUR INCOMES, LIVING STANDARDS, BUSINESSES AND ECONOMIC GROWTH.

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN,

8. I APPLAUD THE WORK DONE BY U.N.I. TO HAVE MEANINGFUL AND CONSTRUCTIVE ENGAGEMENT WITH GOVERNMENTAL ORGANISATIONS. I UNDERSTAND THAT AN ASEAN SERVICE EMPLOYEES TRADE UNION COUNCIL HAS BEEN ESTABLISHED IN RESPONSE TO THE UPCOMING 2010 LIBERALISATION OF SERVICES WITHIN ASEAN, WHICH INCLUDES THE I.C.T., AVIATION, TOURISM AND HEALTHCARE INDUSTRIES, AMONG OTHERS. I HOPE THAT THIS COUNCIL'S DIALOGUES WITH THE RELEVANT ORGANISATIONS WILL BE FRUITFUL AND I WOULD ALSO LIKE TO CONGRATULATE ENCIK SHAFIE BP MAMMAL WHO WAS ELECTED TO BE THE COUNCIL'S FIRST GENERAL SECRETARY.

9. I WOULD ALSO LIKE TO CONGRATULATE U.N.I. FOR WORKING TOWARDS ESTABLISHING A FRAMEWORK FOR THE PROTECTION AND PROMOTION OF THE RIGHTS OF MIGRANT WORKERS IN THE ASIA PACIFIC REGION. WITH MARKET LIBERALISATION, WE CAN EXPECT MORE AND MORE CROSS-BORDER MOVEMENT

OF LABOUR AND THE ATTENDANT ISSUES. I UNDERSTAND THAT THE U.N.I. MALAYSIAN HELPDESK FOR MIGRANT WORKERS HAS BEEN PLAYING A FINE ROLE IN ADVISING MIGRANT WORKERS AND RESOLVING WORK-RELATED PROBLEMS. THIS IS A NOBLE EFFORT AND I HOPE THAT THIS WORK WILL CONTINUE.

10. FINALLY, IT IS ONLY THREE DAYS AWAY FROM MY COUNTRY'S 50TH YEAR OF INDEPENDENCE CELEBRATIONS. THIS IS A GREAT MILESTONE IN MALAYSIA'S HISTORY. I CORDIALLY INVITE ALL YOU WHO ARE ATTENDING THIS CONFERENCE TO STAY A LITTLE LONGER AND TO JOIN IN SOME OF THE CELEBRATIONS. SHARE WITH US THE FRUITS OF OUR 50 YEARS OF PROGRESS, COOPERATION AND GROWTH.

11. ON THAT NOTE, IT IS NOW MY PLEASURE TO OFFICIALLY DECLARE THE SECOND UNION NETWORK INTERNATIONAL ASIA PACIFIC CONFERENCE OPEN.

THANK YOU.