

**SPEECH BY  
YAB DATO' SERI ABDULLAH BIN HAJI AHMAD BADAWI  
AT THE ASIA-EUROPE MEETING  
AT BEIJING, CHINA  
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GLOBAL FOOD SECURITY

EXCELLENCIES,

THE GLOBAL FOOD SUPPLY SYSTEM IS GROANING UNDER THE STRAIN OF SKYROCKETING DEMAND, SOARING COST OF INPUTS, DEPLETING STOCKS, CROP LOSSES DUE TO DROUGHT, FLOODS, SEVERE WEATHER CONDITIONS, HIGH ENERGY PRICE AND THE NEGATIVE IMPACTS FROM THE TRANSFORMATION OF AGRICULTURAL LAND FOR BIO ENERGY GENERATION

2. FOOD PRICES HAVE BEEN PROJECTED TO CONTINUE RISING IN THE SHORT AND MEDIUM TERM. MANY COUNTRIES ARE FINDING IT MORE AND MORE CHALLENGING TO MEET THE BASIC NEEDS OF THEIR PEOPLE. WE NEED TO ADDRESS THE ISSUE OF PRICE INCREASES.

3. THE INTERNATIONAL FOOD PRICE INDEX INCREASED BY 9 PERCENT IN 2006, ACCELERATED TO A 40 PERCENT INCREASE IN 2007 AND TO 57 PERCENT IN MARCH 2008.

4. UNREST LINKED TO HIGH FOOD PRICE HAS OCCURRED IN MORE THAN 30 COUNTRIES. THE WORLD'S POPULATION CONTINUES TO GROW RAPIDLY. ALL OF THIS MEANS A GREATER DEMAND FOR FOOD. THESE CHALLENGES ARE NOT MERELY HUMANITARIAN BUT ALSO STRATEGIC IN NATURE.

5. THE PRESENT TURMOIL IN THE GLOBAL FINANCIAL SECTOR, ENERGY CRISIS AND CLIMATE CHANGE HAS CONTRIBUTED TO MAKING THE SITUATION MORE CRITICAL.

6. IN 1974, WE ESTIMATED 680 MILLION PEOPLE COULD SUFFER HUNGER IN 2010. BUT THE REALITY HAS BEEN WORSE. THE LATEST FIGURES SHOW THAT, AT PRESENT, 850 MILLION PEOPLE FACE HUNGER ON A DAILY BASIS.

7. I MUST EMPHASIZE THAT FOOD SECURITY GOALS CANNOT BE ACHIEVED WITHOUT AN INCREASE IN VOLUMES AS WELL AS AN INCREASE IN PRODUCTION CAPACITY IN THE FIELD OF AGRICULTURE.

8. WE MUST CREATE A RENEWED INTEREST IN AGRICULTURE AND ITS DEVELOPMENT. WE MIGHT HAVE LOST SIGHT OF THIS BASIC AND YET CRITICAL SECTOR OF THE ECONOMY, ESPECIALLY WHEN ALLURING OPPORTUNITIES PRESENT THEMSELVES IN THE SERVICES, MANUFACTURING AND TECHNOLOGY SECTORS.

9. THE DEGREE OF DEPENDENCY UPON IMPORTS NEEDS TO BE ADDRESSED. EVERY COUNTRY MUST ESTABLISH AN ADEQUATE BALANCE BETWEEN DEPENDENCE UPON EXTERNAL SUPPLIES AND DOMESTIC PRODUCTION OF FOOD ITEMS. THIS IS THE ONLY WAY TO AVOID EMERGENCY SITUATIONS CONCERNING FOOD.

10. MALAYSIA HAS INITIATED SEVERAL MEASURES TO INCREASE ITS DOMESTIC SUPPLY OF FOOD, ESPECIALLY RICE, THROUGH GREATER INVESTMENTS IN AGRICULTURE INFRASTRUCTURE, PEST AND DISEASE CONTROL, THE USE OF HIGH QUALITY SEEDS, AS WELL AS JUDICIOUS USE OF AGRICULTURE INPUTS. THE USE OF BIO-TECHNOLOGY HAS HELPED TO INCREASE YIELD AND QUALITY OF AGRICULTURAL PRODUCE AND PROMOTE THE DEVELOPMENT OF AGRO-BASED INDUSTRIES. IDLE LAND HAS BEEN IDENTIFIED AND EARMARKED FOR FOOD PRODUCTION. OUR AGRICULTURE IS NOW A NEW AGRICULTURE OF HIGH QUALITY PRODUCTION FOR FOOD AND DEVELOPMENT OF AGRO-RELATED INDUSTRIES.

11. MALAYSIA NOW HOLDS THE CHAIR OF THE D-8 GROUP OF COUNTRIES. LAST JULY IN KUALA LUMPUR, THE GROUP AGREED ON JOINING FORCES TO EMBARK UPON LARGE SCALE PRODUCTION OF FERTILIZERS.

12. I WOULD LIKE TO MAKE A SPECIAL POINT ABOUT BIO FUEL. SEVEN YEARS AGO, THERE WERE ONLY 1 MILLION HECTARES OF LAND UTILIZED FOR BIO FUEL PRODUCTION. TODAY, 25 MILLION HECTARES OF LAND CAPABLE OF PRODUCING ABOUT 100 MILLION TONS OF FOOD CROPS ARE BEING USED ANNUALLY FOR THE PRODUCTION OF BIO FUEL. WE CAN EXPECT MORE FOOD CROPS TO BE CONVERTED INTO BIO FUEL IN THE FUTURE. WE MUST SERIOUSLY ANALYZE THE EFFECTS OF BIO FUEL PRODUCTION ON FOOD SECURITY. WE MUST FIND A PROPER BALANCE BETWEEN THE UTILIZATION OF SCARCE RESOURCES FOR FOOD AND FOR BIO FUEL PURPOSES.

13. WE SHOULD FIND ALTERNATIVES - SUCH AS CELLULOSIC BIOMASS - TO USE FOR FUEL PRODUCTION INSTEAD OF FOOD CROPS. JETROPAH, FOR EXAMPLE, IS NOT A FOOD CROP BUT CAN BE USED TO PRODUCE BIO-FUEL. CURRENTLY, SOME PALM OIL MILLS IN MALAYSIA ARE ALREADY UTILIZING WASTE FIBERS AND SHELL RESIDUES FROM ITS MILLING PROCESS AS FUEL TO PRODUCE ENERGY. MORE RESEARCH IS NEEDED TO PROMOTE THE EFFICIENT CONVERSION OF CELLULOSIC BIOMASS INTO BIO FUEL.

14. THE SCALE OF THE PRESENT FOOD CRISIS HAS NEVER BEEN EXPERIENCED BEFORE. WE ARE ACTUALLY FACING A NEW CHALLENGE WHICH IS NEW IN ITS SEVERITY, ITS PERVASIVENESS, AND ITS GLOBAL DIMENSION.

15. IT IS MY EARNEST HOPE THAT THE INTERNATIONAL RESPONSE TO THE GLOBAL FOOD CRISIS WOULD FOCUS ON HELPING DEVELOPING COUNTRIES IMPROVE THEIR CAPACITY TO FEED THEMSELVES, TO MARKET THEIR PRODUCTS AND IN THE PROCESS, LIFT THEMSELVES OUT OF THE CYCLE OF POVERTY.

16. WE MUST CREATE THE POLITICAL WILL TO DO THE NECESSARY WE NEED TO TRANSLATE THE POLITICAL WILL INTO CONCRETE AND PRAGMATIC ACTION PROGRAMMES.