

**SPEECH BY  
YAB DATO' SERI ABDULLAH BIN HAJI AHMAD BADAWI  
AT THE OFFICIAL DINNER IN HONOUR OF H.E. ENG. MOHAMAD NAJI OTRI,  
PRIME MINISTER OF THE SYRIAN ARAB REPUBLIC  
AT HOTEL MANDARIN ORIENTAL, KUALA LUMPUR  
7 JANUARY 2009**

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His Excellency Eng. Mohd Naji Otri  
Prime Minister of the Syrian Arab Republic

Excellencies, Distinguished guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Mr. Prime Minister, I take great pleasure in welcoming you and all members of your delegation to Malaysia. Indeed, I welcome you most warmly, not only as the Prime Minister of the Syrian Arab Republic but also as a friend of Malaysia. You have greatly honored us with your visit. Most significantly, it is a testimony of the friendly ties that exist between our two countries and peoples.

2. I have fond memories of my own visit to your beautiful country in February 2007 and the generous hospitality that your Government accorded to me and my delegation during our stay in the historic city of Damascus. We hope to reciprocate that kindness as much as we can during Your Excellency's stay in our country this time.

3. We value your visit because it will help to cement the strong bonds of friendship which have existed between Malaysia and Syria for a very long time. I am confident that it will also provide the impetus for further enhancement of the relations between our two countries.

Your Excellency,

4. Beginning with the establishment of diplomatic ties between our two countries in 1958, relations between Malaysia and Syria have developed and grown steadily. Although there is still much room for expansion, the substance of the relations between Malaysia and Syria are substantial.

5. We already have strong collaborations in the area of infrastructure development especially highways and public utilities. We have cooperated in Smart School Pilot Projects and we intend to do more in the area of e-Government and Smart Cards. Some Malaysian car manufacturers are already selling certain models in the Syrian market. We also hope to share with Syria our experience and capabilities in monorail, provision of housing, and construction of industrial parks.

6. On the whole, however, trade and investment between Malaysia and Syria are still at low levels. These are certainly two areas for priority attention by both countries because the potentials for improvement do exist. We have agreed to cooperate to expand tourism between our two countries, just as we agreed to enhance cooperation in education.

7. I have just highlighted some of the subjects we discussed during our meeting this morning.

8. I am pleased to inform this audience tonight that we did have very productive discussions on many other subjects and issues. We were particularly pleased to witness the signing of documents to establish cooperation in three new areas, namely the Agreement for the Promotion and Protection of Investments (IGA), the Agreement on Air Services (ASA) and the M.O.U on Small and Medium Enterprise (SME) Development. I am very satisfied with the results of our meeting especially as it showed that we have common views and aspirations on many matters, be they bilateral, regional or international in nature.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

9. The Prime Minister of the Syrian Arab Republic and I took stock of the fast developing situation in the Middle East, especially the critical circumstances pertaining to Gaza. I informed the Prime Minister about Malaysia's strong belief that an emergency special session of the United Nations General Assembly needed to be convened - in accordance with the "Uniting for Peace" Resolution No. 377(V) of 3 November 1950 - to address the gravity of the situation regarding Gaza. In the wake of the continuing paralysis of the U.N Security Council, the general membership of the United Nations should invoke this leverage at their disposal in order to prevent a complete devastation of Gaza. The Prime Minister and I agreed that our two countries shall work hard to do whatever we can to avert a humanitarian disaster in that part of Palestine.

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

10. Let me conclude by wishing our Syrian guests a very pleasant stay in Malaysia. I know that, as they had wished, a tight schedule of visits and briefings have been arranged for them. I hope they will find all of them interesting and beneficial. I am confident, however, that this official visit by the Prime Minister of the Syrian Arab Republic will not only serve to reaffirm the strength of the brotherly ties that exist between Malaysia and Syria but also help to take the relations between our two countries to greater heights.

Thank you.