

KEYNOTE ADDRESS
YAB DATO' SERI ABDULLAH HAJI AHMAD BADAWI
PRESIDENT OF UMNO
59TH UMNO GENERAL ASSEMBLY
PUTRA WORLD TRADE CENTRE (PWTC)
DATE: 26TH MARCH 2009 (THURSDAY); TIME: 9.30 AM.

“THE FUTURE AND SURVIVAL OF THE PARTY”

Mr. Permanent Chairman

Mr. Deputy Permanent Chairman

The Right Honourable Deputy President

Vice Presidents

Chiefs of the Women, Youth and *Puteri* Movements

Members of the Supreme Council

Excellencies High Commissioners and Ambassadors

Leaders of the BARISAN NASIONAL component parties

Representatives of political parties from around the world

Honoured guests

Delegates and observers

Alhamdulillah, the highest praise is for Allah *Subhanahu Wata'ala*, for it is with His blessings, that the fifty-ninth UMNO General Assembly is now underway. This year, *Insyah Allah* UMNO will be 63 years old on May 2009; and if Allah also permits Abdullah Ahmad Badawi to go on, I will reach the age of 70 this coming November 26th.

2. When UMNO was established, I was a mere boy in primary school. Many members of my family, especially my grandfather, Haji Abdullah Fahim (*Allahyarham*), my father Haji Ahmad Badawi (*Allahyarham*) and my mother Hajah Khailan binti Hassan (*Allahyarhamah*) were actively involved in the founding of UMNO. I observed various meetings and discussions, including the ones in my grandfather's home and the Madrasah Daeratul Maarif Al-

Wataniah although at that time, I did not truly understand much of what was being deliberated.

3. I am descended from founding fathers of UMNO and I was exposed to the party's struggle during my formative years. It is therefore inevitable that I would inherit the UMNO spirit. As an adult, I later chose to join UMNO, because I believed in the purity of its objectives and the worthiness of its cause. I have held fast to an unflinching conviction that has prevented me from ever betraying UMNO and has led me to steer clear from those who seek to destroy it. I have never denigrated UMNO. I have never made offensive remarks about UMNO. And certainly, I have never deserted UMNO, even though there was a time when I was insulted by certain members of UMNO. Indeed, one's loyalty is truly tested when the party is faced with grave challenges, during a time of difficulty and when one has no position or standing within the party.

4. I witnessed the struggles of my grandfather and my father, the sacrifices borne by my mother, and that of their generation. I have seen thousands of members, who have fought for UMNO's cause. I saw that the strength of UMNO was forged and made potent by unsung heroes, anonymous and without rank in the party, many of whom have never made it to this Dewan Merdeka. These are people who have never offered to contest for any position in the party's Supreme Council, who have never asked to take but instead kept on giving, who did not see UMNO as a means to satisfy their self interest or personal gain. They are the true heroes of UMNO. They are the ones who have supported and upheld the party; they are the heroes who have kept faith in UMNO's commitment and resolve in protecting the Malays fighting for the independence of the nation, upholding Islam, defending the sovereignty of the Malay Rulers and maintaining the status of the Malay language and Malay culture. They are the ones true standard bearers of UMNO's struggle – the struggle for the Malay people.

5. I have been with UMNO for a long time. I first came to know of the party as a seven year old boy, I followed the party throughout my days as a

youth and joined the party as an adult. UMNO has always been my political organisation of choice, and I have pledged my unbroken loyalty to its struggle because it has been my clear and unshakable conviction that UMNO's mission is noble and genuine. Notwithstanding any negative perceptions and opinions on UMNO today, no one can deny that UMNO has made countless contributions in a variety of areas to our nation and its citizens since its establishment in 1946, including Islam and Malay civilisation, politics and peace, as well as in the socio-economic arena.

6. In the 63 years since its founding, UMNO has succeeded. UMNO has contributed towards the unity of the Malays, stoked the fires of Malay nationalism, upheld the dignity of Islam, restored the sovereignty of the Malay Rulers, forged understanding and cooperation between the races, negotiated for and obtained the Independence of the Federation of Malaya and expanded it to form Malaysia, protected the peace and security of our nation, nurtured the nation's social and economic development, made Malaysia a land of plenty, created the Malay middle class, eradicated poverty, pioneered various forms of cooperation among the ASEAN nations and played an active role in promoting understanding and fellowship among the Muslim countries around the world.

7. For a long time, the contributions made and successes achieved by UMNO were appreciated and accepted by the citizens of our country and acknowledged by the international community. As a result, in successive general elections, a majority of Malaysians entrusted their vote, time and again, to UMNO and its partners in BARISAN NASIONAL. Internationally, stories of our success are often referred to, and held up as a positive example for other nations. In the past fifty years, Malaysia has progressed from being one of the poorest nations in the world, to being acknowledged recently by the UNDP as a nation with high human development. Foreign workers recognise Malaysia as a land of opportunity, a nation with blessed with abundant prosperity.

8. Nevertheless, we must also realise that of late, UMNO's glory has dimmed. The results of the twelfth general elections are an important reminder. Today, everything that UMNO does is seen as wrong, everything that UMNO says is believed to be untrue. Indeed UMNO, as well as the BARISAN NASIONAL have become everyone's favourite whipping boy, labelled as the cause of every defect and discordance, and blamed as the perpetrator of immoral behaviour and misconduct even when such actions are committed by those who are members of political parties opposed to UMNO.

9. How easy it is to be a member of the opposition pact; it is as if they have full licence to freely commit anything, free to utter the foulest words, for everything that is bad can be conveniently blamed on UMNO. I am not saying that all UMNO members are blameless or without weaknesses. But certainly, UMNO members should not be treated as garbage bins, merely to collect blame and slander that arise from the immoral behaviour and misconduct of others. It is not reasonable to believe that members and supporters of opposition parties are free from sin or flaws. Certainly they cannot all be saints.

10. Nonetheless, UMNO is facing a test of credibility. Why are we suffering this fate, blamed to this terrible extent? Why are we now seen to be completely without virtue? This situation has placed a heavy test of credibility unto UMNO. There are a number of internal factors which have led to this erosion of public trust in UMNO:

First: longevity in power has led to complacency and a number of UMNO leaders are increasingly out of touch with the ordinary people who have been the source of UMNO's strength for so long.

Second: relative neglect of the rural community in our desire and intent to achieve developed nation status.

Third: ineffectiveness of UMNO political programmes in reaching out to the younger generation, apart from what is already being implemented by various governmental institutions.

Fourth: prolonged conflict among ourselves, especially while competing for positions within the party, has eroded the spirit of fraternity among party members.

Fifth: materialism has seeped into the party, making a number of party members greedy and avaricious, hence creating the negative perception that UMNO is a corrupt party.

11. These internal factors have given great fodder to UMNO's enemies in their efforts to tarnish UMNO. At the same time, a certain group of Malay leaders have opened the door for Malays and *bumiputeras* to be attacked or insulted at will. These continuous and concerted attacks have tarnishing the good name of UMNO and poisoned the minds of the people to the point that the public believes and accepts every lie and slander that has been made against UMNO without any rational nor objective assessment.

12. Indeed, we must heed the alarm bells that have rung so loudly, demanding us to ask "what went wrong" or "why and how did we go wrong". My spontaneous response to that question is "We have failed to manage our own success". We were intoxicated by own achievements and we became complacent. We believed that we had become all powerful. We have put our own positions within the party first, instead of being concerned over UMNO's position in the eyes of our citizens and the nation.

13. Our current situation requires us to reflect within ourselves, to revisit the basis of our power all these years and to examine our weaknesses and recent missteps. In this regard, it is worth reviewing the source of UMNO's strength since its establishment in 1946. Briefly, we can summarise them as follows:

First: UMNO's sensitivity in understanding and dealing with the problems and aspirations of the Malays.

Second: UMNO's ability and success in managing cooperation among the races and UMNO's openness in acknowledging the role and importance of other races in our country.

Third: UMNO's ability to reconcile competing and contradictory demands.

Fourth: UMNO's ability to adapt to social and political changes.

Fifth: UMNO's ability to absorb newly-emerging social and political forces.

Sixth: UMNO's ability to seek a balance between the old and the new, the traditional and the modern, the local and the global.

14. We began with the slogan "HIDUP MELAYU", shifted to "MERDEKA", then on to "PEMBANGUNAN", followed by "PERPADUAN" and onwards to "ACHIEVE DEVELOPED NATION STATUS", which was strengthened with the "NATIONAL MISSION". That is the dynamic nature of UMNO, always adapting its struggle to current demands, reorienting its direction with the passage of time.

15. The extraordinary uniqueness that has become the backbone of UMNO's true might is its ability to pioneer and foster cooperation between the races that is truly meaningful; beginning with the UMNO-MCA partnership, followed by MIC to form the ALLIANCE that was later expanded into the BARISAN NASIONAL. Other attempts to foster inter-communal cooperation, such as efforts by the INDEPENDENCE OF MALAYA PARTY and PARTI NEGARA ended in failure. The MALAYSIAN CONVENTION PARTY did not succeed, and neither did the formation of a SOCIALIST FRONT through the merger of the PEOPLE'S PARTY and the LABOUR PARTY. Today, the

OPPOSITION PACT is earnestly attempting to imitate UMNO's successful copyrighted formula for cooperation. Although they are still enjoying their honeymoon period, visible cracks are beginning to show in their union.

16. We can conclude that the secret of UMNO's strength and success over the years is its sensitivity to the changing times and its ability to adapt to the demands of new social forces. Each situation has been faced and addressed by UMNO in a spirit of moderation, enacting change without sacrificing continuity. This has created a situation of dynamic balance which led to stability and peace, enabling the nation and its citizens to enjoy growth and development. It is this secret of our success that is now being targeted for relentless attack by the opposition. This is what we must polish and renew; we need to build a new dimension to this success so that we may benefit from it. If we have lost our way, let us retrace our steps and return to the correct path.

17. We believe in the Oneness of God, the Pillars of Islam (*Rukun Islam*) and the Articles of Faith (*Rukun Iman*). We must therefore greet every success and setback with equanimity, because everything is a test from God to remind His people so that they may heed His commands and search for truth. The Holy Quran contains numerous verses which serve to guide and remind us.

"See they not that Allah enlarges the provision and restricts it to whomsoever He pleases? Verily in that are Signs for those who believe." Surah Ar-Ruum – 37

Ladies and gentlemen

18. UMNO was born out of the merger of voluntary non-governmental bodies – UMNO graduated from the NGOs. UMNO was strong when UMNO maintained a close relationship with the community. UMNO leaders were known as leaders who were always close to the community at the grassroots level. UMNO succeeded in fostering the relationship between those in rural areas with those in urban areas, between the people and the aristocrats, in a

united fellowship, supporting a united struggle by putting the people's interests first. UMNO was once led by many Malay teachers who were acknowledged as genuinely representing the people and therefore became popular leaders in the truest sense.

19. Today we are grateful and proud that UMNO is being led and represented by many professionals, technocrats and corporate figures. What we need now is to reinvigorate the spirit of service and of being close to the people to complement to the professional qualifications that we have succeeded in obtaining, so that UMNO continues to be in line with the wishes and aspirations of the people. UMNO must truly understand the pulse of the *rakyat* so that its members can be true to the motto: "Unity, Loyalty, Service" (*"Bersatu, Bersetia, Berkhidmat"*).

20. We must also re-emphasise the formula that has put us in good stead over the years, a formula that has enabled us to successfully share power and govern the nation with our partners in the BARISAN NASIONAL. Recently, the Malays have begun to feel threatened by demands which are seen to be extreme and unreasonable by non-Malays upholding the 'MALAYSIAN-MALAYSIA' slogan that is vocally championed by the OPPOSITION ALLIANCE. There are those among the leaders of the OPPOSITION ALLIANCE who have ridiculed the sovereignty of the Malay Rulers in an ill-mannered and uncouth fashion, openly insulted the Malays, and heaped crude and vulgar abuse on Malay organisations. At the same time, non-Malays – including our friends in the BARISAN NASIONAL – feel compelled to speak out more stridently, feeling themselves marginalised and sidelined as a result of slippage in the implementation of certain Government policies. Both parties are making their concerns heard; both parties are harbouring mistrust and doubt.

21. If we allow this state of affairs to continue, it will certainly erode the spirit of cooperation and destroy the unity that we have built more than fifty years ago. We cannot allow these fundamental principles to be weakened. We must sincerely endeavour with open hearts to rediscover the cooperation

and mutual understanding that have formed the basis of our national unity, so that we may ensure a future that is peaceful, stable and prosperous for the coming generation. We cannot allow our nation's future to be mortgaged to those who have laid cunning plans, opportunists who have gained support from their success in inciting the people's hatred towards us.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

22. Five months after I was appointed Deputy Prime Minister, on June 17th 1999, I stood on this stage before you to officiate the Annual General Assembly of the Youth and Wanita wings, and I quoted from verse 68 Surah Al Qasas:

“And your Lord creates whatsoever He will and chooses: no choice have they (in any matter). Glorified be Allah, and exalted above all that they associate (as partners with Him).”

23. It was Allah's will that enabled me to earn the trust to lead UMNO and the country. I am the last of my generation still serving in the Cabinet. I have decided to retire some time after this Assembly and the leadership of the country will pass on to the next generation.

24. When I chose to be an UMNO member 45 years ago, I had one desire and one intent – to serve the party which had done so much for my people and my country. In my eyes, UMNO was a party that held high ideals; and there was sanctity in its struggle to serve. When I joined, it never crossed my mind that I should expect to be rewarded with any benefit, material or otherwise. I must emphasise that I was not unique; the tens of thousands of my colleagues and compatriots who were in UMNO then felt the same way. We all resolved to work towards bringing our people and beloved country to the highest pinnacle of success. In fact, when I officiated that Youth and Wanita Assembly in 1999, the theme of my speech was “Continuing the Struggle – Uplifting Our People”.

25. Today, not only is my generation decreasing in number, but I fear that the spirit and values that we embraced also seems to be a vastly diminished ideal among the current generation. Increasingly, people who become UMNO members place greater importance on what rewards they can reap for themselves rather than what they can contribute to the party and the people. They expect positions and projects; they expect titles and awards; they expect material fulfilment. The spirit of sacrifice, the spirit of struggle, the spirit of serving the people and country is fast fading away.

26. We must come to our senses. Outside the Dewan Merdeka, there are many who believe that if UMNO and the Barisan Nasional do not change their ways, then the March 8, 2008 general election will be the last time the BN forms the Government. After this (if we do not change), the people outside this hall will not vote for us again. Many have voiced the view that “**UMNO needs to change.**” But what I hope to hear is for you to say “*I will change*” and that we have the courage to follow up those words with actions. It would be a grave travesty if we do not understand that **we** are UMNO and as long as **we** do not change, UMNO will not change.

27. UMNO is today at the crossroads. The path that we choose will determine whether we continue to remain relevant or whether we are reduced to a forgotten footnote in the pages of history. Sadly, there are still those who feel that we do not need to pursue reforms. They believe that UMNO will regain its glory if we revert to the old ways – the old order, by restricting the freedom of our citizens and by silencing their criticism. They are of the view that UMNO can continue to be in power if they safeguard the interests of certain individuals and give in to the demands of certain groups. There are those among us who gain comfort from these thoughts and are still lulled into a false sense of security.

28. If we revert to the old path I believe we are choosing the wrong path; one that will take us to regression and decay. It is a path that I fear will hasten our demise. If we do not take courageous steps to reform in the face of this dynamic transformation of society and the radical global changes taking

place, then we shall live to witness the end of our beloved UMNO. What is the point of fighting tooth and nail for positions in the party if all that remains of us is an obsolete husk? Allah forbid that UMNO suffer such a fate. It is with that realization, a deep sense of love for UMNO, and a grave sense of responsibility to the party and to the Malay race, that I have chosen not to defend my position as President of UMNO. I have chosen to pave the way for a younger leadership, even though many within the party and Government asked me to defend my post. I appreciate the similar decision to step down taken by my colleagues and friends, whether at the level of branch, division, Youth, Wanita or Puteri. We have to accept that the reality is that positions and posts are not private property; even your own wealth and possessions cannot be brought with you after death.

29. For UMNO to remain relevant, the party has to fuse its past strengths with the new elements necessary for survival and success. We must rekindle the original spirit and commitment towards the struggle for the people and the party. Let us revive our willingness to sacrifice, strengthen our dedication, adhere to moderation and be governed by our humanity. Rid ourselves of our arrogance and the conceit that we are the only ones who are right, that we are the only ones who know all. Distance ourselves from corruption. Let us be equal in our concern for all, be they Malays or non-Malays, party members or those who support our opponents.

30. In Government, I have sought to introduce several mechanisms to strengthen the administration, to make it more transparent, efficient and just, to enhance the public delivery system. Efforts to restore the integrity of the judiciary have been implemented; the Malaysian Anti Corruption Commission has been constituted; the National Integrity Institute established; and PEMUDAH has been introduced. In our efforts to improve the public delivery system, we have prioritized human capital development and we are emphasizing progressive Islam through Islam Hadhari. To tap into new areas of growth and to ensure the equitable distribution of quality opportunities, we have embarked on the regional economic corridor development.

31. In UMNO, perhaps the time has come for us to introduce regulations and procedures that will enable the party to be administered in a more disciplined and controlled manner. Perhaps, the party needs a mechanism that provides members with greater say and for us to shed the practices that does not allow those without positions or material wealth to be fairly treated. Perhaps the time has also come for UMNO to consider setting a maximum number of terms for those holding office. Perhaps UMNO should also give every UMNO member the right to vote to choose their leaders, especially for key party positions, to overcome and eradicate the problem of money politics.

32. UMNO should not turn its back on its responsibility towards safeguarding the position of the Malays and the Bumiputras. And at the same time, UMNO must never adopt racial and religious positions that are extremist. UMNO must never practice discrimination to the extent that non-Malays view it as a racist party. The rights of every citizen must always be protected, guaranteed and respected, as provided by the Constitution and as encapsulated in the Rukun Negara. The loyalty of every Malaysian citizen irrespective of race must always be appreciated in the spirit of power sharing and friendship. We must be conscious to the fact that a long time ago, we had already reached agreement that we would together bear the responsibilities of building our nation; that we would sink or swim together. Let us concentrate on the commonalities that unite us, rather than the differences that can divide us.

33. I fully appreciate the role that Malaysian citizens have played in ensuring the peace and progress of our nation. In almost 52 years of independence, we have undergone numerous trials and we have been united in facing them, enabling Malaysia to become a prosperous and successful nation. Today, we are faced with the most alarming economic challenges since independence. The world is struggling to overcome a deepening economic crisis, the Government is trying to lessen the burden of the people.

34. In the five and a half years I have been Prime Minister, I have become thoroughly convinced of our potential and strength and the God's blessings

towards our country. We have youthful human capital that can be developed to make us more productive. We have the resilience to face the threat of recession – as long as we remain united and focus. We have to reduce politicking and stop our infighting. Instead, harness our strengths, work harder and increase productivity.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

35. UMNO faces a life and death situation – one that concerns our future and survival. The fate of UMNO rests in the attitude of its members and leaders who will carry the aspirations of our religion, people and nation. UMNO's members and its leadership will play a crucial role to determine whether developments in the future will reflect the glory of our traditions. All of us realise that the leadership of UMNO forms the leadership of the country. That is the privilege and responsibility that has been granted us, with Allah's will. All of us know that our leaders must possess noble qualities – *siddiq* (truthfulness), *amanah* (trustworthiness), *tabligh* (spreading righteousness) and *fatimah* (wisdom). Remember - the vote of one who is faithful and fears God cannot be bought and sold. I hope that the UMNO elections will proceed without incident and produce results that accurately reflect our aspirations and more importantly, those whom we represent. It is written in the Holy Quran:

*“O you who believe! Why do you say that which you do not do?
Most hateful it is with Allah that you say which you do not do.”
Surah As-Saff – 2-3*

Ladies and Gentlemen,

36. My responsibilities as your President end at the conclusion of this Assembly. Soon after, my term of Prime Minister to the people and the country that I so love will also come to a close.

37. I want to record my gratitude and thanks for the dedication, sacrifices, support and assistance that you have given me in my 45 years of public

service, from the days when I was a civil servant through the time I entered politics in 1978. I record my appreciation to Dato Sri Najib Tun Razak for his support in his capacity as deputy president and deputy prime minister. It brings back nostalgic memories of the responsibility and trust given to me by his late father Tun Abdul Razak Hussin since 1969 when I served in the National Operations Council (NOC) Secretariat. I thank the late Tun Hussein Onn for giving me the opportunity to become a candidate in the Kepala Batas parliamentary constituency in 1978 and subsequently appointing me as a member of the Government. I thank Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad for appointing me a member of the Cabinet, as Deputy Prime Minister and finally, giving way for me to succeed him as Prime Minister. I thank all the respective heads of Pemuda UMNO, Wanita and Puteri, the Supreme Council, the state liaison committee chairmen, the divisional and branch heads, and all UMNO members around the country.

38. I believe that I am passing on the reins to a younger captain to steer the ship; a younger leader who has the maturity and experience to navigate the nation to greater heights. I urge everyone to give him the undivided support to enable him to bring us to greater success. I pledge to give my undivided support to the new President of UMNO – to the new Prime Minister of Malaysia.

39. I know from my experience as UMNO president and as Prime Minister of Malaysia that the burdens of the job and the responsibilities that come with it are immense. There are times when a decision creates controversy; there are times when a decision will not receive the support of all. It is the duty and responsibility of a leader to decide what is best for the people and the country even though it may cause unease. Nevertheless, despite any reservations we may have, our leader should be given the trust and stability of mind to allow him to continue to remain rational and objective. If we do not give him our support and trust, and if we choose to attack him and assassinate his character, we would be responsible for weakening our party and toppling our leader who sits in the Prime Minister's chair. We would be responsible for eroding the system that we have built, the system that has enabled us to

govern all these years. Heavy is the trust placed in the Prime Minister, who must fulfil his obligations as leader of the party, of our people, and of our nation. On his shoulders our hopes rest, for he is accountable to secure our future.

40. In my years of public service, there have been times that I have erred. I, too, have not been able to fulfil all my promises. For all my mistakes and for all my shortcomings, it has never been my intent to waver from the responsibilities of serving my people and my country to the best of my abilities. In continuing the work of my predecessors, and introducing new initiatives and measures to bring us to greater glory, I acknowledge that it could never have been done without your support, without the support of my colleagues in UMNO and the Barisan Nasional, without the support of my friends in the administration, and least of all, without the support of all Malaysians, be it in the rural areas or the cities.

41. Only the Almighty is perfect. I acknowledge here that the weaknesses and imperfections are my own; and today, I seek your forgiveness for those weaknesses and imperfections. I have tried to carry out my responsibilities with sincerity and honesty. I thank the Almighty Allah for having placed me in this noble position. In the years ahead, I pray that the Almighty will bless me so that I have peace of mind and soul; I pray that Allah showers His blessings and provides guidance to our party and to our leaders, to the people of Malaysia and to our country, and that He protects us from disaster and misfortune.

42. It is written in the Holy Quran:

“Whoever desires honour, (power and glory), then to Allah belong all honour, power and glory. To Him ascend (all) worldly goods, and the righteous deeds exalt it, but those who plot evils, theirs will be severe torment. And the plotting of such will perish” Surah Al-Fatir – 10

43. I pray that the fate and future of UMNO and our country always be in the hands of those who are sincere and may Allah prevent UMNO and our country from falling into the hands of those who will bring us destruction. May Allah bless our efforts.