

THE OFFICIAL OPENING OF THE 2ND MINISTERIAL CONFERENCE OF DEVELOPING COUNTRIES ON ENVIRONMENT AND DEVELOPMENT
CROWN PRINCESS HOTEL, KUALA LUMPUR (K.L), 27 APRIL 1992

I wish you a very warm welcome to Malaysia. My fellow Malaysians and I are honoured to have this opportunity to host the Second Ministerial Conference of Developing Countries on Environment and Development.

2. It is truly regrettable that despite two years of preparations for the UNCED meeting, major issues and problems have yet to be resolved. I was made to understand that the fourth and final UNCED Preparatory Committee Meeting, which ended in New York earlier this month, was not quite satisfactory in terms of commitment. Though there has been identifiable progress on some aspects there is, as yet, no balanced platter on the issues of environment and development.

3. The financial issue remains unresolved. The South are very disappointed that the North is unwilling to respond either in terms of quantum or other tangible commitments. If the rich North expects the poor to foot the bill for a cleaner environment, Rio would become an exercise in futility. It must be remembered the UNCED is also about development. There will be no development if the poor countries are not allowed to extract their natural wealth. The only way for them to develop and yet avoid damage to the environment is for them to receive substantial material help. To ask the poor to help the rich is against all human principles of charity and fairness.

4. Also progress on this issue is compromised by the insistence of the North that the Global Environmental Facility (GEF) be the sole mechanism for funding environmental projects within the framework of decisions to be taken at Rio, as well as for the Conventions on Climate Change and Biological Diversity. The issue of governance is a critical area under negotiation. If the GEF is to be another appropriate funding mechanism after Rio, there must be a major transformation of the GEF to make it more democratic with universal membership encouraged and access and disbursement provided under agreed criteria.

5. It can be argued perhaps that the UNCED is too ambitious for total meaningful agreements to be achieved by the time of the Rio Summit. Certainly, the issues involved are extremely complex and Heads of Government meetings cannot resolve complex details. They, the Heads, do not normally negotiate the terms of treaties or agreements. They usually endorse and formalise what has already been negotiated by their experts and officials and fine-tuned by their ministers. The preparatory meetings are therefore more crucial than the ceremonials of a Heads of Government meeting. Failure at the preparatory stage will endanger the whole exercise.

6. If we think the success of UNCED is debatable, then why do we meet here? We meet here because the UNCED can be at least partially saved if the developing countries are able to have a clear view of what to expect and what

common stand to take.

7. The basic reference point for the South would be the UN consensus resolution 44/228 which clearly signposted the expected global package; a World Charter of high declaratory import; a global programme of action called Agenda 21; a specific decision on additional financial resources to fund Agenda 21; a decision on technology transfer at preferential rates; a statement of principles governing the management of all forests and an intergovernmental institutional structure to monitor the follow-up to the UNCED. There was also agreement that by the time of Rio, negotiations for conventions on Climate Change and Biodiversity would have been completed. The success of the Rio Summit can only be measured given significant achievements in all of these areas, in the context of a global package, not in terms of the advancement of one issue and the neglect of another. An intergovernmental institutional structure under the aegis of the United Nations would be of no value if there was no real agreement to all the critical issues above. For that matter too, what use is there of an Earth Charter if there is no real advance on the critical issues of finance and technology?

8. In essence, the negotiations to prepare for Rio reflect the continuing attempt by the South to bring the North to the table to overcome over four decades of neglect on the growth and development of the South. Fear by the North of environmental degradation provides the South the leverage that did not exist before. It is fully justified for us to approach it this way. Unless there is a sharing of the controls in a broader based and more democratic control structure and a more supportive economic international environment, forever the playing field will not be a level one. Forever will the South be at the bottom of the heap.

9. Whether we like it or not the developed North, having destroyed their heritage, will want to declare that what is left intact in the developing countries also belongs to them. Consequently they are going to insist on having more than just a say in the management of these remaining ecological assets of the world. And when the powerful North speak, the voice of the individual developing countries will be drowned. It will be different if they speak together with one strong voice in Rio.

10. To illustrate this let us take the case of the logging of tropical timber. The developed countries have no tropical forest but by involving environmental issues they wish to control the exploitation of forests in developing countries. We in Malaysia are fully aware of the role that the tropical forests are playing in preserving the delicate balance in the environment. We are aware too of the thousands of species of flora and fauna that are to be found only in our forests. We are aware that trees absorb carbon dioxide and give back the precious oxygen without which we will all drop dead.

11. But we are also acutely conscious that we are a developing country which needs the wealth afforded by our forests. We do not cut down our trees foolishly. We need living space, we need space for agriculture, and we need the money from the sale of our timber. If it is in the interest of the rich that we do not cut down our trees then they must compensate us for the loss of income. The

democratic North talk incessantly of fair compensation. They tell our workers to go on strike for "fair" compensation even if it destroys our economy. Well, if we have to service the world's need for oxygen, for ecological balance, then we must be fairly compensated. Or else allow us our right to our timber wealth.

12. But instead what have the North done? They launched a boycott of our timber. They reason that if they do not buy we will stop cutting our timber. It is so simple that is, if you can ignore the hundreds of thousands of people whose lives depend on the timber industry, and if you can ignore the loss of Government revenue with which we subsidise and support our people, particularly the poor. What the North is doing is not just to preserve the forest but to make Malaysians pay for it. Is this equitable?

13. Yet the extraction of timber can easily be reduced without making us pay for it. If the rich will pay twice the price, logging can be reduced by half. It is as simple as that.

14. They say most of the money in the timber industry is made in the rich North. Malaysia gets very little from the export of raw logs. So why export timber? We agree entirely. But the solution is not to stop logging but to relocate the processing industries to Malaysia so that we can earn more added value. We can then cut down even less trees without losing income. The boycott of Malaysian timber will help nothing. Indeed, if our timber is of no value to us, we might as well cut down the trees for fuel and release land for agriculture.

15. Once upon a time this planet was almost completely covered by forests. We are told that the deserts under which vast reservoirs of petroleum are found were once swamps and tropical forests. If we sincerely believe in equity and burden sharing, why not reafforest the deserts of the world and the vast farms in Europe and America which produce subsidised food the world does not need? If you can draw up ground water to build exclusive golf courses in the deserts of California, if you can create huge lakes in the middle of the desert on which to build luxury hotels, can you not use the same technique to water the desert and reafforest it? New tropical forests can be recreated complete with the flora and fauna transplanted from our tropical forests. Why should only the people in the tropics harbour diseasebearing insects for the world?

16. We do not want to obliterate all our deserts, of course. One cannot know what disaster will follow if we do this. But the farms of Europe and America which were hacked from the hard and soft wood forests of yesteryear and which today produce food inefficiently, can very well be returned to their pristine condition. The planting material, the technology and the experts are all available to make this project a success.

17. Let it be remembered always that it is not only the tropical trees which can absorb carbon dioxide and give out oxygen. All trees, including those in tree estates, do the job equally well.

18. Many tropical trees possess medicinal properties and must therefore be

preserved. Again it is the rich who benefit because they have the technology to extract and to isolate the active substance. Are the poor tropical countries expected to preserve their forests for the rich to exploit through their mastery of the science? What compensations are being considered in return? In the negotiations for a Convention on Biodiversity, the North have not been forthcoming on proposals for joint research in gene-rich countries to benefit from biotechnology. As things stand the poor may not extract timber and wealth from their own forest because the North would like to gain financially from the medical potentials of the tropical trees.

19. Last year vast tracts of forests in Indonesia caught fire and burned for months. The whole of Malaysia was covered in haze. More than logging, forest fires destroy everything. Nothing is left. Trees, animals, insects, and even humans are

exterminated.

20. If the tropical forests are so precious to the erstwhile environmentalists then the fire should cause greater alarm among them than the controlled extraction of timber. Governments and NGOs should have rushed to put out the fires. But there was not a squeak. The excuse was that they were not asked. Were they asked to agitate against logging? Yet they mounted a massive campaign against logging.

21. A lot can be done to prevent and fight forest fires. The rich have spy satellites to locate the fires precisely. They have sophisticated and expensive fire-fighting equipment. They have experts who can put out even the raging infernos of Kuwait. But they did nothing to save the forests they claim to love so much. We cannot be blamed if we think the campaign against tropical timber is because they compete too successfully with the temperate climate timber. Tropical timber destroyed by fire pose no threat to the sale of temperate climate timber but carefully logged timber do. So the forest fires are ignored while bitter condemnation is directed at the logging of tropical forests.

22. When the anti-tropical timber campaign did not attract sufficient attention, a human face was added to it. The Penans are a gentle law-abiding people numbering about ten thousand. They are originally shifting cultivators and hunters. But some nine thousand of them have already settled down on permanent farms or as wage-earners. Only one thousand are still in the jungle. If they should choose to stay in the forests, it is a choice which the government will respect but this choice must be well considered. This choice must not be a part of the North's anti-tropical timber campaign.

23. The anti-tropical timber activists see in the Penans an opportunity to put a human face to their campaign for temperate timber. And so the gentle Penans are urged to be militant, to protest, to erect blockades, and defy the authorities.

24. Stop making an issue of the Penans. Promote temperate timber if you must but accept competition by tropical timber. You advocate open markets and free

trade. Now live up to your own creed. Stop linking trade and aid to developing countries with environmental issues. Stop arm twisting.

25. On the other hand let us work together to protect and resuscitate the environment. Close down inefficient farms and polluting industries and reafforest the land released. Move the processing of primary products to developing countries so as to maximise their development. Help reafforest the deserts in the rich as well as the poor countries. Organise and coordinate the prevention and fight against forest fires worldwide. Pay more for tropical timber.

26. These are all positive things that can be done if there is sincerity in the campaign to preserve tropical forest.

27. The campaign against tropical trees is a clear case of an opportunistic use of the environmental issues. If not for opportunism the energy of the environmentalists can be rewardingly focused on other pollutants. Take the CFCs and the spray-cans. There are many non-polluting ways of spraying. Use biodegradable vegetable oil-based plastics instead of petroleum-based plastics. Reduce the use of fuel oils in transportation and electric generation. Allow reasonable hydro-electric projects to go on.

28. Stop the use of nuclear fuels for power. Above all outlaw the manufacture, storage and use of nuclear weapons.

29. If the environment is going to be cleaned, those most responsible for polluting it must act. 80 percent of the pollution is due to activities in the industrially developed North. They must first clean up their backyard. Their NGOs should stay at home and apply pressure on their own Governments, their industrialists and their military leaders.

30. The developing countries must of course do their bit too. The first thing is for them to come together to debate on a common stand. Let there be no break in our ranks when we talk about the environment. We will share the burden strictly in proportion with our culpability and our capacity. By no means can we accept that we sacrifice our development in order that the rich and the powerful can enjoy ever improving standards of living. Indeed, it is the rich who must be prepared to sacrifice their progress in the interest of our development.

31. We have a heavy responsibility to ensure that the South-South cooperation is effective in the area of environment and development. The South must identify specific areas of cooperation and interaction, particularly in forestry, technology transfer and sound environmental management. The South must set an example of international cooperation and evenhandedness as its own contribution to UNCED. It is also important that we continue to consult with each other in the post Rio period.

32. I sincerely hope that the historic opportunity at Rio will not be wasted. Rio can be the occasion to take important historic steps for a true global partnership. The South has suffered enough. It is wrong that we should be made scapegoats for the past sins of the North. The South cannot remain the repository of the

resources for the North including locking up its forest to serve as the global green lung and its genetic resource laboratory. The North must help the South to develop for it is in their environmental, economic and security interest that they do so.

33. Freedom is a commodity much touted by the North. Woe betide any country in the developing world which does not grant freedom to its citizens. Yet the North consider it right and proper to deprive the people in the developing countries of their freedom to exploit their own natural wealth. In campaigning against tropical timber and in boycotting it, they are denying us our freedom to make a living, to extract what little wealth we have, and to free ourselves from hunger, disease and poverty. How can they still talk of freedom when it is they who deprive us of freedom? When we achieved independence we thought we would be free. But the North is still subjecting us to imperial pressures. The late Indonesian President Sukarno was right when he talked of Neo-colonialism.

34. Development and economic growth cannot but be accompanied by some undesirable effect on the environment. While the developed countries had already damaged fully their environment, this is no reason for preventing developing countries from seeking to develop. If environmental damage is to be minimised, then the developed countries must be prepared to subsidise the cost. If the cost of development is higher because of present environmental considerations then the developing countries of today are being unfairly penalised. This is unacceptable.

35. Malaysia would like to propose to the world community a comprehensive environmentally beneficial programme involving the greening of the world. As a first step, we call upon the global community to target at least 30 percent of the Earth's terrestrial area to be greened by the year 2000. The world now has 27.6 percent of its land under forest cover and we need only increase this by 2.4 percent over the next eight years. This is clearly not an unreasonable target. All nations must set national greening targets and those which have no suitable land must contribute adequate funds to developing countries with available land.

36. The North, in particular, should not find this difficult because it has the funds, the technology and the resources. They can divert the subsidies for their inefficient farms towards a massive reforestation of these farm lands instead. No new funds are therefore needed, and yet the result will be a greener and bigger carbon sink.

37. As for Malaysia I wish to announce that the Government of Malaysia undertakes to ensure that at least 50 per cent of our land area will remain permanently under forest cover.

38. I call upon the world community to urgently establish a Global Fund to support this global greening target. The Fund would serve to finance reforestation and afforestation programmes as well as forest rehabilitation and maintenance. Contributions to the fund should be based on the population, wealth, and the ability to meet greening targets as well as other relevant factors.

Countries which have levels of carbon dioxide emissions that exceed a defined threshold should pay on the basis of an agreed schedule. However nothing in these proposals must compromise the principle of the sovereign right to development.

39. The greening of the world will hopefully inspire a new spirit of international cooperation and partnership in which global resources are fairly shared. If successful we would have solved at least partially an important environmental problem.

40. For our part, Malaysia has undertaken a number of measures towards ensuring a cleaner and healthier environment. These include the creation of awareness among the people and towards this end we have prepared a video film entitled "An Initiative for the Greening of the World" which reflects Malaysia's commitment and desire for a greener world. This video film will be shown to you shortly. 41. I wish you all a successful meeting and I hope that your stay in green Kuala Lumpur and greener Malaysia will be a pleasant one.