

THE SUMMIT LEVEL MEETING ON "COOPERATION FOR DEVELOPMENT" OR D-8

ISTANBUL, THE REPUBLIC OF TURKEY, 15 JUNE 1997

I wish at the outset to thank President Demirel for the warm words of welcome and for the gracious Turkish hospitality extended to me and members of my delegation. May I also express my appreciation to Prime Minister Erbakan for the excellent work he has done to move the D-8 initiative forward.

2. We meet here in Istanbul, a historic city which has been the seat of Empires. The Ottoman Empire has now been replaced by modern Turkey, a dynamic country which I'm sure will reclaim its past glory. The vision for that has already been set by its founder and it remains only for the successor Governments to strive towards it. I am sure that the people and the leaders of Turkey will not fail in their duty to their motherland.

3. We are glad to be associated with Turkey and other nations, in the long struggle to achieve our common visions. The members of the D 8 have two things in common. We are all developing countries wanting to lift our countries and peoples to a higher stage of development.

4. We are, secondly, countries with large Muslim populations. Other countries could also fall into this category but we are conscious that large memberships tend to slow down the process of cooperation. So Malaysia subscribes to the initial small membership. It is not, I am sure, a desire to be exclusive. It is merely the need to be manageable. Once progress or success has been achieved we should open our membership to others. By confining ourselves to the 8 countries we are not doing anyone any disservice. I am stressing this because I would not like to create misunderstanding or to offend anyone.

5. Cooperation between countries is now the accepted formula for accelerating progress and development. Even the developed countries are forming unions in order to grow their economy. It is now recognised that the most important thing to any Government or country is the well-being of its own people. And economic development would contribute much to that well-being.

6. Certainly for developing countries like ours, cooperation for economic development is even more important. Our people are in need not so much for affluence as they need just the basic necessities of life in order to live with dignity as befitting members of the human race.

7. It is true that there is strength in numbers. But numbers can also weigh us down. In the 8 countries of this group there are almost 800 million people. Whether they will contribute to strengthening us or whether they will weigh us down depends very much on us, i.e. the Governments responsible for the development or otherwise of our countries.

8. Malaysia with a population of only 20 million is the smallest member. We have succeeded in overcoming some of our problems because our numbers are

small. We cannot claim to know how to handle large populations especially now when we are expected to become more democratic and to give voice and power to our people. More people must mean more different views which may become difficult to reconcile. Our experience with such a system is not long enough. Yet unless we can handle the democratic system and achieve political stability, economic progress will evade us.

9. I am not suggesting for one moment that we should discard democracy. But I do want to suggest that since we cannot wait for years of experience to teach us and our people how to make democracy work, we should really hold crash courses in order to educate our people on how to make democracy work and to understand the limitations of democracy. A system is as good as the practitioners. A good system does not work simply because it is good. Good people are still needed in order to make a good system work.

10. In many of our countries the freedom of democracy simply leads to irresponsibility. Governments are elected which are not given a chance to govern. Newly elected Governments are brought down through democratic strikes and democratic demonstrations and new Governments put in place, only to suffer the same fate. And so despite the virtues of democracy what we get from it is anarchy. And anarchy cannot help us to develop. Developed countries may not need Governments for them to advance. But developing countries in a state of permanent turmoil cannot be expected to lift themselves out of the economic morass they are in.

11. We are being harassed into accepting democracy as interpreted by those who are mature and strong and can survive perpetual crises. We have a need to formulate our own form of democracy, a democracy in which the most important thing is that Governments can be brought down through the ballot box and not by other means. Between each election the Governments must be allowed to govern. If they fail to satisfy the people, then they should be voted out of office at the next election. Everyone of us must accept that our office is not permanent. The important thing is public good, not our political survival.

12. We, the D-8 have come together in order to cooperate. The first thing that we should cooperate on is the defence of our system of democracy. We must be democratic but democratic in our own mould. Liberal democracy may be good for some, but not for everyone. And I don't think from what I have observed it will work for everyone of us. The welfare of our people is more important than the right of a few to disrupt peace in order to promote themselves. We have seen time and time again how their accession to power accomplishes nothing. Our countries continue to slide backwards despite the changes in Government.

13. The democratic system is not divine law. It is concocted by very human and fallible people. We cannot be accused of heresy if we disagree and reject some of the interpretations of the new prophets.

14. We, the developing countries, need political stability more than ever before. Empires may be a thing of the past. But political and economic hegemony is very

much alive. If we don't put our houses in order, if we remain weak politically we will all revert to being colonies, in fact if not in name.

15. Without political stability even the economically strong will become weak. Certainly the economically weak will become totally paralysed. And we are economically weak and often politically unstable.

16. I would like once again to make it clear and to emphasise that I am not advocating authoritarian rule. I am advocating democracy as it was practised by the Western democrats during their democratic infancy. When they were less liberal democratically no one condemned them or threatened them. We are asking that we be allowed to evolve our democracy at our own pace without harassment and threats. That is all.

17. Once we are politically stable then only can we focus seriously on economic growth and the welfare of our people. We can probably manage to grow on our own. But growth would be made easier if we cooperate, if we exchange information and learn from each other. No country is so capable that it can know everything about the management of its own self. Malaysia has copied openly and unashamedly from others. We copied from the West and when the East did well we initiated our Look East policy. We even learn from the failures of others for then we would know what to avoid. And still we are looking around in order to learn from others.

18. That is why we welcome membership in the D-8. We hope to learn from the other members and to cooperate and trade with them. It is believed that poor countries are not good trading partners. But what is a fact is that the rich have always traded with the poor. Obviously they benefited from this trade. If they can extract some benefit from the poor, we should be able to do the same from each other. Only with us the extraction and benefits should be mutual.

19. Since we launched South-South Cooperation for example, the trade between the members of the G-15 and with other developing countries has grown by leaps and bounds. Similarly trade between the developing countries of South East Asia has trebled in just five years.

20. The D-8 countries can increase trade between them as well if we put in place the necessary policy and legal framework. For this we need to exchange information. I am glad that various working groups have been set up to look into these matters. There will be delays and obstruction but if there is political will, I am sure, we can overcome them. Again I would like to stress here the need for strong political leadership. Political will is going to be very necessary if we are going to make any progress at all.

21. As I have said just now, apart from being developing countries, we all have large Muslim population. Islam has been blamed by Muslims and non-Muslims alike, for the backwardness of our countries. I happen to think that this is not true. Islam had not only inspired the feuding primitive Arab tribes to unite and build the greatest empire in history but it has also enriched materially, spiritually

and in terms of human knowledge all those who accepted the faith. If today's Muslims are backward it cannot be due to Islam. It is most likely to be due to erroneous interpretation of Islamic teachings.

22. There are in our countries many who are learned in Islam. The majority of them wish to see the return of past greatness. We should call upon them to sincerely study and interpret the teachings of Islam. In the first 100 years of the Hijrah Islam changed primitive tribes, united them and built a great civilisation. It is illogical to think that a religion that brought greatness to such people could be the cause for a great civilisation to decline and fall . It is not Islam which is wrong. It is the ummah who have failed the religion. How else can we explain the quarrels and wars between Muslims when Islam enjoins us to be brothers? Yet there are many among us who blatantly preach enmity between us and not brotherhood. Is Islam wrong or are those who interpret the religion wrong?

23. The D-8 must serve as a purposeful forum of like- minded countries to exchange views and devise specific programme of action for effective cooperation among themselves. At the initial stages, we should not become overly ambitious. It is more prudent to be cautious and to plan our moves. But we must move, deliberately and positively. Development doesn't just happen. It has to be made to happen.

24. If the D-8 is going to gain credibility, we must show results, results which are irrefutable, on a yearly basis. If we fail then we should not make a pretence of being useful. We should fold up rather than hold meaningless meetings. That is the challenge that we have to face.

25. May Allah the Merciful and the Compassionate give us guidance, so we may not fail in our quest.