

THE STATE BANQUET ON THE OCCASION OF THE OFFICIAL VISIT TO THE REPUBLIC OF LEBANON

BEIRUT, LEBANON, 16 JUNE 1997

I would like to express my sincere appreciation for the very warm welcome extended to my wife and I and to the members of my delegation. The welcome and the warm expression of friendship and goodwill accorded to our delegation clearly demonstrate the close fraternal relations that exist between our two countries.

2. It is a privilege for me to make this first official visit by a Malaysian Prime Minister to Lebanon. My predecessors had made private visits to Beirut and there have also been numerous contacts at both official and commercial levels especially since the early 1960s. Lebanon was among the first countries with which Malaysia established diplomatic relations following our Independence. Dato Umar Jundi who has served with distinction as our Honorary Consul has played an important role in nurturing Malaysian-Lebanese friendship. Malaysia established a Trade Office in Beirut as early as in 1968. It was the first such office in this part of the world.

3. Malaysia has, from the very beginning, attached importance to its relations with Lebanon. However, some 17 years of war and turmoil have exacted their toll and valuable time has been lost. Fortunately, it has not diminished our solidarity with the people of Lebanon.

4. Malaysia understands and sympathises with the pains and deprivation that Lebanon has suffered because of the prolonged civil war which was aided and abetted by foreign interests. From being one of the world's most sophisticated centres of commerce and culture, it is sad and regrettable that Lebanon had been reduced to a scarred battlefield. We are however impressed that Lebanon has begun in earnest to rebuild itself and is determined to lay the foundation for durable peace, both at home and in the region.

5. Malaysia is delighted that Lebanon has already accomplished a great deal. I congratulate Prime Minister Rafic Hariri for his strong leadership and his single-mindedness in leading the Lebanese people in the immense task of reconstruction. The Lebanese people, I believe, place reconstruction above petty politics. We in Malaysia know very well the need for political stability for a country's development. We are sure that Lebanon will rise again. The remarkable recovery currently underway is a testimony of Lebanon's indomitable spirit.

6. We do not know what role we can play in the reconstruction of Lebanon but I have with me a number of Malaysian businessmen familiar with the economic and physical rehabilitation of a country. Many of the members of this delegation and their companies have played a key role in the economic transformation of Malaysia. We hope that they can be given an opportunity to participate in returning Lebanon to its former glory as the premier business centre of West Asia. We know that Lebanese prosperity will not only contribute to the well-being

of this region but also to us in Malaysia who wish to trade and interact economically with Lebanon.

7. The renowned entrepreneurial spirit of the Lebanese people and their determination to help the country to resume its traditional role as a dynamic commercial and cultural centre for the entire region is sufficient for Malaysia to want to participate in your reconstruction. We trust there is excellent scope for our two peoples to work together.

8. I must also congratulate Prime Minister Hariri for the highly successful 'Friends of Lebanon Conference' which was held in Washington last December, which has forged an effective partnership to rebuild initiatives on the basis of the Lebanese people helping themselves through the private sector, both domestic and foreign. This approach and model had worked well in Malaysia and, I am sure, it can help Lebanon to flourish as well.

9. In Malaysia, we have been quite successful in tapping the dynamism of the private sector and have utilised private capital to serve the national interest. The public sector under the concept of 'Malaysian Incorporated' works closely with the private sector, whether foreign or local. This has helped to create jobs, accelerate economic growth, and speed up the construction of the necessary infrastructure. In other words public/private sector cooperation is good for Malaysia's growth and well-being.

10. Malaysia believes there can also be a 'smart partnership' between governments, nations and regions. In our part of the world, this idea was applied to accelerate ASEAN development. Besides devising elements of complementarity for our manufacturing industries, we have also made efforts to promote joint development among ASEAN countries through 'growth triangles' involving adjacent territories of neighbouring countries. Our national policies, be they economic or trade, are designed to 'prosper our neighbours', rather than impoverish them. Poor neighbours create problems. Rich neighbours make good trading partners.

11. Perhaps West Asia would like to experiment with this approach. A key element for regional peace is the acceptance by all of the settlement of problems between and among neighbours through negotiations. Failing this we resort to third parties, such as the World Court. Where justified we would rather share what is disputed than try to take all for ourselves through costly confrontations and the destruction of what is claimed.

12. Malaysia simply cannot countenance aggression by anyone, whether friend or foe. In West Asia Israel must realise that the threats it perceives are a direct consequence of its own action. Any country that forcibly takes over land and property belonging to others, that destroys other people's dwellings in order to erect its own settlements, cannot be said to be sincere in wanting peace. Yet Israel tries to justify its actions by accusing its neighbours of threatening to retaliate. If others cannot retaliate and cannot even threaten to retaliate, then all aggression must be condoned. What kind of a world will we create if aggression

and disregard for world opinion is considered a right? Israel must learn to reject violence as a solution to its so-called security problem. Violence is not the solution. Good- neighbourliness and sincerity are.

13. Malaysia fully sympathises with the people of Lebanon as their lands have been taken away from them, and we fully support UN resolution 425 and consider its implementation as being the only suitable and acceptable way for the establishment of peace in Lebanon.

14. The current Israel Government must also honour commitments made by the preceding government. If a new government scuttles solemn undertakings by the previous government, how do we conduct international relations? Peace can only come about with sacrifice. The Jews found sanctuary in Muslim countries when they were persecuted in Europe. No one -- Arab, Palestinian or Muslim -- regards Jews as their eternal enemies. What is required is a change in the current Israeli government' s mind-set which condemns Muslims and Arabs as their eternal enemies. This mindset prevents any real progress towards peace.

15. Malaysia is delighted and indeed encouraged by the fact that Lebanon, under your leadership, has steadfastly stayed the course of national reconciliation and economic recovery. The democratic process has ensured a fair hearing for everyone, irrespective of religious affiliation. Our experience convinces us that the concept of partnership through coalition and networking among the various ethnic and religious groups is a key element in building a vibrant and tolerant society. There can be strength in diversity. But, it must be seriously and sincerely nurtured over time. Malaysia believes in sharing what we have rather than trying to take all for ourselves only to destroy the prize completely in the process. We are confident that the people of Lebanon will want to share what is left rather than destroy everything once again.