

THE LAUNCHING OF THE G-15 TRADE EXHIBITION AND THE MALAYSIAN PRODUCTS EXHIBITION (MPE)

MINES RESORT CITY, SG. BESI, SELANGOR, 01 NOVEMBER 1997

1. I wish to thank the organisers of the G-15 Trade Exhibition and the Malaysian Products Exhibition '97 for inviting me to officiate at the opening of this exhibition this evening. It is gratifying to see the private sector of the G-15 countries gathered here today. To our guests from the G-15 countries, I wish to say 'Selamat Datang' to Malaysia.

2. The G-15 is an important platform for the developing countries of the South to jointly develop trade and economic opportunities within the grouping and beyond. Events such as the G-15 Trade Exhibition is ideal for this purpose as it enables the private sector of the member countries and non-member countries to get a glimpse of what the G-15 countries have to offer. At the same time the Malaysian Products Exhibition (MPE) is also organised to showcase a cross-section of Malaysian products and services. These two events organised in conjunction with the Meeting of Heads of Government of the G-15 countries, hopefully will enhance networking among the private sectors of member countries.

3. Trade promotional activities such as these will surely help promote products and services initially in the G-15 markets. Producing world class goods that are competitive in the world market should be our goal. We have to make our presence felt through aggressive marketing and promotion to enable us to get a bigger share of world trade.

4. The G-15 as a group has a large population. This in itself offers a ready market for a wide range of products and services. It is therefore imperative that G-15 member countries take the initiative to forge new trade and economic partnership. This should be a continuous effort and we should not wait for events such as these to explore business opportunities in the member countries. There are vast opportunities to be tapped in all the member countries, and we should not let any slip away.

5. As for Malaysia, our record shows that Malaysia's trade with member countries of the G-15 has expanded from RM5.86 billion in 1990 to RM16.72 billion in 1996. Malaysia's total trade with the G-15 in 1996 represents 4.24 percent of Malaysia's global trade. I am sure other member countries' trade with the G-15 have similarly expanded, admittedly at different rates of growth.

6. In addition, we are all at varying stages of development and thus, have on-going and proposed development projects, which can be undertaken by joint-venture companies of the G-15 countries that have the necessary expertise and knowledge. Similarly sub-contractors, engineers and technicians from member countries should be encouraged to participate. We must be willing and prepared to take on these challenges. Trade missions and business delegations to member countries should be organised so that we have a better understanding of the needs and demands of one another within the grouping.

7. Being developing countries, the common shortcoming we face is the acquisition of technology. The G-15 should band together to enable quick and effective technology transfer. Technology developed by a developing country is more appropriate and relevant to other developing countries. Countries that have the technology should be willing to teach, support and transfer technology to countries that need the relevant technology. The basis of the G-15 should be one of cooperation and mutual support for each other. We must all adopt the philosophy and concept of 'prospering our neighbours'.

8. The world is galloping ahead towards globalisation and liberalisation. The actual meaning of globalisation and liberalisation is not clear. Developed countries have taken it upon themselves to interpret these terms as meaning the removal of barriers to their trade and their investments including portfolio investment. Developing countries need to watch this very carefully as their own industries are not yet able to compete and to take advantage of investments in other countries and opening their markets may result in unrestricted entry of competing products from industrialised countries which can afford to lose because they can make profits elsewhere. Developing countries on the other hand may not have products to export to markets which are opened to them. The result may be detrimental to their economic and industrial development.

9. The success of the members of the G-15 depends on their ability to understand the changes in the global market place and to influence these changes in their favour. They cannot be passive and accept anything and everything that is thrust upon them. They have to be more circumspect. We have already seen how a liberal policy towards currency and share trading has resulted in abuses which undermine years of painstaking efforts to develop the countries of Southeast Asia. While the majority of those who take advantage of our openness are genuine and serious, we must not forget that there are many who only see opportunities for enriching themselves at our expense. Impoverishing us in order to enrich themselves is not something that they will hesitate to do.

10. I would like to wish all the participants and exhibitors in the two exhibitions every success. On that note, I now officially declare open the G-15 Trade Exhibition and the Malaysian Products Exhibition '97.