

## **THE EIGHTH ISLAMIC SUMMIT CONFERENCE**

TEHRAN, ISLAMIC REPUBLIC OF IRAN , 09 DISEMBER 1997

On behalf of the Malaysian delegation, I would like to thank President Khatemi, the Government and people of the Islamic Republic of Iran for the warm welcome and hospitality accorded us. I would also like to thank and congratulate His Emminence Ayatollah Khamenei for his inaugural speech which reflects the expectations of the Islamic Ummah for peace and brotherhood between Islamic Nations, for a balanced and fair expressions of the problems faced by us, and the way ahead for this, the Organisation of Islamic Conference. I am sure that we will all strive to make a reality of the Islamic Ummah as voiced by His Emminence Ayatollah Khamenei the Supreme Leader of Iran.

2. As we gather in Tehran on the threshold of a new Western century and millennium, we realise, with renewed urgency, the enormous challenges that have to be faced. The Summit takes place at a time when the world is subjecting the Ummah to new threats and pressures. The Palestinians continue to remain, by and large, refugees and the promises of Oslo are in tatters. Acknowledged statehood for Palestine seems as distant as ever unless Palestine takes unilateral action, a move which will surely result in unnecessary bloodletting. The objective of the struggle of our Palestinian brothers is clear. We must not allow it to be clouded by our outrage and indulge in uncalculated risks.

3. Malaysia is deeply saddened by the killings of foreigners and Muslim brothers alike in some Islamic countries. They are not in accord with Islam and they really do not help the cause of Islam. We should shelve our own quarrels in order to present a united front in the face of the combined threats against us. We should not be our own enemy. Yet we see in so many Muslim countries fratricidal wars and instabilities which render most of our Governments impotent either to develop and compete with our detractors or even to govern effectively. Personal quarrels and personal ambitions for power are allowed to disrupt Government administration, leaving it incapable of addressing the needs of the people. As a result Muslim countries remain largely undeveloped and the Muslim ummah poor, unskilled, uneducated and incapable of contributing positively towards the well-being of Muslims, their faith and their countries.

4. By the Grace of Allah many of us are endowed with rich resources but we are unable to put such resources to good use, to serve and defend Islam and Islamic countries against those who loudly confess to having a dislike for us and our religion and equally loudly proclaim their intention to frustrate us.

5. Such is the state of our countries that the best of our people migrate out and contribute to the wealth of knowledge and skills of the countries of their domicile, often countries which are hostile to us. We have no facilities to offer these talented people and the conditions in our countries are unsuitable for the application of the considerable attributes that they possess. We are too busy with our petty quarrels to attend to their needs.

6. We have not yet found or developed a system of determining how our

Government should govern. Some of us are monarchies, some are theocracies and some are democracies. Despite all that the West claims about the efficacy and fairness of their brand of democracy, it is still far from being a perfect system or even a good system for them or for anyone. Far too often the wrong people are chosen to form their Governments. Vested interest often deflect them from the duties they have to perform. Corruption is rife and immorality is common.

7. To deflect from their problems at home, they often focus on the so called misdeeds of other Governments and other countries. They accuse our countries in particular of abusing human rights, of terrorism, of mismanaging our countries, of environmental degradation. With their NGOs they are able to actively interfere in our affairs, instigating our people to violence against our Government and against each other. They give refuge to those of our people who promote disruptive activities in our countries.

8. The present Western style system and concept of democracy is no better than the feudalistic theocratic states which had preceded them. Their ways may be different but the objective and the end result is the same. One must not forget that it was they who invented the inquisition. They don't burn people at the stakes now but the economic heat they place under and around their victims is no less searing. It is still recant, submit or be liquidated. 9. Islamic nations need not invent systems of Government because systems can never be perfect and can never guarantee good Government. What creates good Government is the quality of the people who are entrusted with ruling the country. And for the right quality of people we need only revert to the teachings of our Islamic religion, the true teachings, not the teachings which are interpreted to justify what we are doing, right or wrong, good or bad.

10. If we are not sure what is meant by the true teachings, we need to ask only a few questions. Does Islam advocate wars and violence between Muslims whether as groups or as sects or as nations? Does Islam advocate oppression of the people by the Government or destabilising and subverting of Governments through irresponsible acts by the people? Does Islam advocate the rejection of a good life in this world or a good life in the hereafter, or does Islam preach hassanah in this world and in the akhirah? Can we really say that it is our religious duty to be poor, without knowledge and skills, incapable of defending ourselves against our enemies, or is it our religious duty to have wealth and knowledge and skills in order to be able to defend the ummah against our detractors, our oppressors? Did the Prophet depend on the wealth and the skills of his followers or did the Prophet buy bows and arrows, swords, horses and camels from those whose manifest objective was to make money for themselves, or worse still, to destroy the Muslims and Islam?

11. We know the answers to all these questions. And yet we do not care to follow the Islamic answers to these questions. Instead we quibble about small things such as how should a Muslim look or what he should wear. At times we fight each other over minor differences in the expression of our faith. We are forever trying to outdo each other in various external manifestations of religious piety, in inventing newer and more restrictive practices in our desire to exhibit the

strength of our faith. And then we try to impose these practices on everyone, condemning them if they refuse. Where Muslims are living in peace and unity we divide them and cause them to fight each other because of differences created in our practices of Islam.

12. Islam is a religion of peace, of brotherhood and of flexibility. The practice of Islam is never rigid. Always there is leeway given in order that Islam does not become a burden to the faithful. In prayers, in fasting, in the disbursement of the zakat and in the performance of the haj, Islam allows for circumstance to dictate the practice. Thus one can perform the solat in many ways depending on the situation and one's own fitness; one fasts in accordance with one's physical capacity and the place where one is; one pays the zakat according to one's means, and performs the haj if one is able to. It is only in the profession of faith in Allah and the acceptance of Mohamad as His Rasul that one cannot be flexible in one's heart, though one may be forced to renounce openly.

13. I am not trying to preach but we all know that we are always urged and at times threatened to be rigid in the practice of Islam. Indeed we seem to want to compete in exhibiting how much more we are willing to endure unnecessary discomfort, hardship and even pain in order to demonstrate visibly the high degree of our adherence to our faith.

14. We seem to want to reject the bounties of Allah S.A.W in this world, including the faculty to think because we often consider that this world is not for us. It is not the unthinking enjoyment of life that I refer to -- it is the acquisition of knowledge and skills required to defend and contribute to the greatness of Islam, the religion we refer to as Ad-Deen, a way of life. And because of all these we find the ummah trodden under and oppressed everywhere and insults thrown at our religion, while we are completely incapable of doing anything to protect and safeguard our honour and the sanctity of Islam.

15. Today there is not a single Muslim power in the world. There is not a single Muslim country which is strong enough to defend itself, much less to defend other Muslim countries or Muslims who are attacked. In Bosnia we have seen 200,000 Muslims slaughtered while the soldiers of non-Muslim countries watched without raising a finger. We cannot blame these soldiers for we ourselves did nothing. We had to place ourselves under the command of others. If they decide to let our co-religionist be tortured, raped and massacred, we had to stand by like them, whether we are there or we are in our own countries.

16. Malaysia realises our own weakness in terms of defense capabilities. We had concentrated on achieving economic independence, believing that we could free ourselves from political pressures, from being recolonised and dictated to, from having others determine who should be our friends and who our enemies, if we are economically strong.

17. Today we are not so sure that that alone is enough. The globalisation of the world has changed the whole equation. We may not want to accept the changes. We may want to stay out. But there is no way we can do this. One way or

another the process of globalisation, of breaking down borders will take place and become a fact of life. 18. The speed and ease of travel, of telecommunication, of multi-media technologies and the spread of information; all these will render us exposed to everything that is happening around us. They can easily undermine our faith or they can push us into self-destructive extremism or into rejection. In the end the advances in science and technology will engulf us. We cannot resist these changes any more than our immediate forebears were able to resist the cannons and the guns, the steel-hulled warships and the warplanes and the changing character of battles and wars. They had to retreat not just from their lands but also from the fields of knowledge and skills they were once masters of. They lost because they failed to adjust to a changing world and the new knowledge and skills that fuelled these changes.

19. Today we are witnessing two simultaneous revolutions, a technological revolution and a revolution in the concept of relationship between nations referred to as globalisation. Whether we like them or not they will engulf us as much or much more than the Industrial Revolution did. Fortunately they, our detractors are as new to these changes as we are. They are groping around to find a way through the maze of knowledge and capabilities which the Information technology creates and the breakdown of borders poses. We are not so far behind them in these fields. Indeed many of us are pioneers and contributors to the new skills and knowledge and new concepts of international relations.

20. We have an opportunity to leap-frog over the Industrial Age into the Information Age and the global world and be at the same level as the others. Unfortunately it looks like we are again going to miss this opportunity to catch up. And if we fail this time we are going to be so disadvantaged that we will lose hope, become desperate and do the very things which will ensure our defeat and resubjugation.

21. Is it important therefore that we take up the challenges of the Information Age and the global society concept now? If we do we can help shape the response and the changes and devise our own usage and concepts so as not to lose our faith, our identity and our way of life. As much as the early followers of the faith adopted and adapted to life outside the Arabian Peninsular and built an empire of the faithful which included peoples and cultures of the non-Arabs in Asia, Africa and Europe, we can, by mastering the changes, now taking place enhance our faith and preserve our way of life. If we employ all our skills, we will not only survive but we will direct the application of the technologies and the concepts.

22. It is important that we appreciate the powerful forces which are gathering around us, forces which most of the time will be hostile. If we Muslims insist on remaining without knowledge in this area, we can be sure that we and our religion will be under constant attack and will be in retreat all the time. If we buy these skills from them then it will be like our purchasing of defence capabilities from them. We will get only what will not give us ultimate success in the preservation of our faith and way of life.

23. Let us ponder over these things even as we try to resolve the very real problems which confront us now.