

The Official Dinner In Honour Of The Honourable Dr. Kenny D. Anthony The Prime Minister Of St. Lucia

Seri Perdana, Putrajaya 10 May 2001

It gives me great pleasure to welcome to Seri Perdana this evening the Hon. Prime Minister of St. Lucia and Mrs. Anthony and members of his delegation. Their visit to Malaysia is a historic milestone in our relations in that this is the first visit ever by a Prime Minister of St. Lucia to Malaysia.

2. Prime Minister, I recall my own visits to St. Lucia in 1991 and more recently in 1999 and the warm and generous hospitality I received during those visits. During my last visit we had talked about the possibility of your visiting Malaysia. I am delighted that you have now given me the honour to host you and your delegation in Malaysia.

3. Malaysia and St. Lucia share many things in common even though we are geographically far apart. Because of our common historical background, we share a similar system of Government as well as similar legal and administrative structures. We are also both members of the Commonwealth and the Group of Seventy-Seven. Equally important, we share a common aspiration to develop our respective nations in order to secure peace, prosperity and stability for our peoples in a rapidly changing and challenging world.

4. Malaysia would like to build upon these commonalities to strengthen bilateral cooperation. We can and must find ways to assist each other and learn from each other. In this connection, we want to work with St. Lucia to develop a mutually beneficial framework for bilateral cooperation. Malaysia also stands ready to cooperate with St. Lucia under our Technical Cooperation Programme. I believe that Malaysia can also offer the young people of St. Lucia a conducive, friendly and competitive environment to pursue their higher education at fees which are very low and competitive. I hope you will take back with you the message that our universities, and particularly those that specialise in information technology is open to St. Lucians. Studying in Malaysia will also expose St. Lucia to the dynamics and the vast economic potential of our East Asian region.

5. I wish to reiterate that we will also encourage Malaysian businessmen to consider investing in St. Lucia's tourism industry. The tourism industry has been growing in Malaysia. We had more than 10 million tourists last year. Perhaps our people can contribute to your tourist industry.

6. Malaysia has always believed in seeking to establish and enhance friendships across the globe. As a small developing country, Malaysia has been particularly keen to strengthen relations with other developing countries. We think this is of strategic importance. We have seen how small developing countries are often ignored and sidelined at important global conferences and negotiations on trade, finance and other critical issues. We are acutely aware of the raw deal you had in the banana trade.

7. For this reason, Malaysia has been a consistent advocate of closer South-South relations. We have also been very active in the Group of 77, the Group of 15 and the Non-Aligned Movement. I hasten to add that it is not our desire nor is it our intention to seek confrontation with the developed countries. What we are striving to achieve is a fairer system of consultation and decision making in which the interests of both developing and developed countries can be given appropriate consideration.

8. Our ability to forge an effective South-South consensus that would enable developing countries to speak with one voice and coordinate our positions will be particularly crucial in the context of the new round of WTO negotiations. There is a real fear that the new round could severely disadvantage developing countries. We are being asked to remove the safety net that we have put in place to protect our economies with no guarantees that our interests will be protected, that we will gain anything substantive in return.

9. It is my hope that Malaysia and St. Lucia, together with other developing countries will strengthen our own process of consultation and dialogue in order that we may be better able to press for the interests of developing countries.

10. Once again, please allow me to say how honoured we are to welcome you to Malaysia. We trust that you will have a pleasant and fruitful visit. On the basis of our discussion this morning, I think I can say that we have established a good framework for our future relations. Please convey to the people of St. Lucia the warm greetings and good wishes of the people of Malaysia.