

The Conference On Terrorism

PWTC, Kuala Lumpur, 16 November 2001

Saya ucap berbanyak terima kasih kerana dijemput untuk memberi ucap utama dalam konferensi berkenaan dengan keganasan atau terrorism ini. Saya harap konferensi ini berjaya menghasilkan kefahaman akan masalah keganasan yang mencabar dunia dan menolong mengenalpasti pendekatan yang dapat mengatasi sedikit sebanyak musibah yang menimpa dunia di abad ke-21 ini.

2. The terrorists have been with us throughout history. Over the last half a century the terrorists have become more sophisticated and are much more focussed. We may not agree with them, we may consider them misguided but it would be a mistake to think that they terrorise for the sake of terrorism, or because they enjoy terrorising their victims. Their evil deeds have a purpose, to them at least. They would not willingly kill themselves in the most horrible fashion on Sept 11 if it is not because they believe there is a purpose for their suicide.

3. And so, whether we like it or not we have to learn to understand their psyche if we want to deal with them, if we want to counter them, if we want to eliminate them, if we want to stop terrorism.

4. But first of all we have to determine who is a terrorist. This is important because people who some people describe as terrorists are regarded as noble freedom fighters by some others. More confusing still, some are condemned as terrorists one day, only to be considered respectable people another day. If we want the whole world to join in the fight against terrorists then we must ensure that a terrorist is a terrorist to all and everyone at all times.

5. Examples of the ambivalence in the definition of terrorists are many. The Jewish Hagana, Irgun and Stern Gang were at one time regarded as terrorists and were hunted by the British. But later they became respected leaders of Israel. Jomo Kenyatta and Robert Mugabe were described as terrorists and were condemned by the British only to become in the end the acknowledged leaders of independent states.

6. The Irish Republican Army is a terrorist organisation in the eyes of the British but are regarded as freedom fighters worthy of financial support by the Americans.

7. With such differences in the views of different people at different times, it is difficult to get the whole world to

join in the fight against terrorism. And if the whole world is not in the fight and the hunt, if some people and some countries provide shelter and protection for the terrorists because in their eyes these are not terrorists, it would be impossible to eliminate or liquidate the terrorists and to put an end to terrorism.

8. The operative word is terror. Terrorists use terror as their weapon. The hijacking and crashing of the aircrafts create terror in the minds of people especially the direct and indirect victims. Such is the fear created that people are now afraid to fly. The Abu Sayyaf kidnapers inspire fear by beheading their hostages. Exploding bombs in public places and killing innocent people inspire fear and terror, and a feeling of being unsafe anywhere at any time. Unexpected death stares everyone in the face without one knowing it and being able to take evasive measures.

9. Poisoning through chemicals or gas frighten people. Killing children and non-combatants, taking hostages etc. all cause fear and terror among people.

10. If we have to determine who is a terrorist and who is not then we have to base it on the act and not on the person or the group or the race or the religion.

11. Once we are agreed on what constitutes an act of terror then it would be easy to identify a terrorist. Even if his cause is noble, even if he is fighting against oppression, against terrorists themselves, using acts of terror would not be justified. He becomes a terrorist. And as a terrorist he should be outlawed by the world, should be hunted, captured, tried and appropriately punished.

12. At the moment Osama bin Laden and his followers are considered to be terrorists. Admitted, at the moment they are the prime suspects and they should be hunted. But despite protests that the war against terrorists is not a war against Islam, what cannot be denied is that only Muslim terrorists are being targeted.

13. In Palestine civilians including children are being shot and killed every day by Israelis. And in retaliation the Palestinians kill Israelis with human bombs at times. Every day Palestinians face the possibility of being killed. Can it be said that they do not live in terror of being the next victim? Yes the Israelis too, but they have superior firepower and obviously they instill more terror in the hearts of Palestinians than the other way round.

14. Then there are the Bosnians, the Chechens, the Iraqis, the people of Kosovo - all living or had lived in fear of being killed. Are we to dismiss their terror as of no consequence? Are we just going to hunt for the collaborators of the 11th September attack and ignore the other acts of terror?

15. The Afghans must be living in a state of terror, waiting for the bombs to rain on them, to maim and kill them, their children and their friends. Can we say that because other innocent people had been killed therefore it is right to retaliate by killing other innocent people? Terrorists are unprincipled, despicable people. Should civilised people do unprincipled, despicable things because the terrorists did?

16. And now there is talk of extending the war to other countries. Iraq should receive the same treatment as Afghanistan even if there is no evidence that they harboured the prime suspect and his followers. There is some evidence, as vague as the evidence against Osama bin Laden, that anthrax were being spread not by Muslim Arabs but by violently rightist Christians. We must remember that Timothy McVeigh who blew up the Government building in Oklahoma belonged to such a group. Yet while there is talk about attacking Iraq there is no violent rage against the spreaders of anthrax or McVeigh's supporters. We hate to say it but it is beginning to look more and more like a war against Muslims.

17. This impression can only be got rid of if actions are taken also against those people who terrorise the Muslims e.g. against the Israelis in Palestine. Maybe the world is not prepared to punish the Israelis. But at least the world can take action to protect the Palestinians, to separate them from the Israelis.

18. Terrorists are not people who advertise their intention to commit acts of terror. They are not usually soldiers in uniform, although some can be. Usually they are unrecognisable until they commit their terrible acts. Usually they would be like ordinary people. They need not stay in a particular country. They can be everywhere and anywhere. Indeed they can live as very ordinary people in the country they consider to be their enemy, against whom they intend to commit acts of terror.

19. Today we can safely assume that the associates of those involved in the Sept 11 attack are not just in Afghanistan. Today we can assume that they are in the U.S. or Europe or in any of the Muslim or non-Muslim countries. Because we do not know who they are or where they are it is difficult to wage a

conventional war against them. Afghanistan may be harbouring them, but it is not necessary that they will be under the control of the Afghans. Even if the Afghans want to, they may not be able to hand over the terrorists to the people who are after them.

20. Attacking Afghanistan is not going to result in the killing or capture of the terrorists. Wiping out the Afghans, reducing their country to dust will not wipe out the terrorists. Some may be killed but many others living outside Afghanistan or who have slipped out of Afghanistan would escape unscathed. Safe and alive they can still carry out acts of terror. They are not likely to be deterred by the killings of the Afghans or the destruction of the country.

21. On the other hand the killing of the Afghans and the destruction of that country is likely to anger a lot of Muslims. Their Governments may not, though it is very likely that they too could be angered by the wanton acts against a brother Muslim country. But certainly the vast majority of the Muslims in whichever country are going to get very angry. And of the many millions of angry Muslims there would be quite a few who would join the ranks of the terrorists and be willing to die to avenge what is to them a gross injustice and cruelty. And so the bombings and rocketing of Afghanistan, far from progressing the war to eliminate terrorists would actually result in the spawning of more terrorists. The world is going to be saddled with the terrorists problem forever. And we don't know what new villainy they would think of.

22. Malaysia is familiar with terrorism and the war against terrorists. Rebel-trained guerillas believe that guerillas can never be defeated. By their books the terrorists in Malaysia could not be defeated. But we defeated them. After fighting for 42 years, 1948 to 1990, the terrorists in Malaysia decided to lay down arms.

23. Why did they do so? They laid down arms because the Government of Malaysia did not just fight them with arms. We did not just chase them into the jungles and out of Malaysia. We did not just force them to resort to the plastic mines and ambushes. We carried out a campaign to win the hearts and minds of the people so as to ensure that the terrorists lost their civilian support.

24. We studied the causes of the disaffection of these terrorists and their supporters and we took remedial action. Our decision to accord citizenship rights to over a million non-Malays was not regarded as a victory for the struggle of the terrorists but rather as a means to win the loyalty of

disaffected people and to get them to join in the war against the terrorists. This act and others helped to mobilise the people of Malaysia to defeat the terrorists.

25. Similarly in the fight against terrorists and terrorism, the causes of the anger and frustration of the terrorists must be studied and action taken to remove these causes. I believe that the principal cause is the Palestine issue. Israelis believe they have a historical claim to the land of Palestine but prior to the deliberate settlement of Jews in Palestine there were only six thousand Jews against over 300,000 Arabs. The settlement of Jews after the Second World War not only reduced the Arab majority, but forced more than 1 million Arabs to be displaced and to live in miserable tent cities for over 50 years. Their futile attempts to regain Arab land only resulted in the Palestinians losing their own State.

26. After tens of thousands of them had died, they do not even have a right to their own independent State. Their land has been seized by the Israelis who built settlements on these lands. Arab houses were bulldozed and the occupants forced to evacuate. All the while Arabs were killed with impunity and reported in the world press as retaliation for Arab attacks against the Jews. Actually the Arab attacks were retaliation for Jewish attacks on the Palestinians. What is an undeniable fact is that more Palestinians are killed than Jews. Still the Palestinians were described as terrorist and their peace overtures were rejected.

27. Although initially the Arabs refused to recognise an Israeli State, their subsequent recognition did not result in any relenting on the part of the Israelis. The Israelis refused to recognise the State of Palestine. In frustration the Palestinian restarted the Intifada. Again stones were thrown at Israeli forces by Palestinian children. The Israelis replied with live bullets, machinegun fire and rocket attacks. Children were killed along with those who were defending the Palestinian State.

28. There is no sign of the fighting coming to a halt. International pressure to cease fighting is not practical. Even if Arafat agreed to a ceasefire, he cannot possibly stop his people, individuals, bitter at having lost their children or members of their family or their friends from continuing to attack and kill the Israelis. Each attack by Arabs invariably resulted in more Arabs than Israelis being killed. And the Israelis would attack the Arabs with deadly accuracy. And the Arabs would retaliate ineffectively.

29. We can say that it is because of Arab attacks that the Israelis have to retaliate. But such retaliation will not solve the Israeli / Arab conflict. Only forcible separation of the two people by a strong UN force can do this. The Palestinians are willing to have the UN peace keeping force but the Israelis object. And the world pander to the wishes of the Israelis. And so the killings and terror goes on.

30. In the Muslim world there is a great deal of anger which the West cannot understand. But the Muslim world, weak and unable to be of any help to the Palestinians see in the unwillingness of the West to stop the Israelis as a sign that the West is anti- Palestine, anti-Arab and anti-Muslim.

31. Most Muslims will only feel anger, will talk but will do nothing. But among the billion Muslims there must be those whose anger cannot be contained. These are the people who will resort to terror tactics.

32. It is reasonable to believe that if there is no Palestinian issue, if the Palestinians are not being oppressed and children being killed the anger of the Arabs and Muslims would not be there or would be much less. Certainly there would not be those who would be willing to kill themselves in that horrible fashion on 11th September.

33. The belief that these terrorists act in that manner because of poverty or because of jealousy for the good life and the freedom of other people does not reflect a deep knowledge of the terrorist mind. Those who hijacked and crash the aircrafts are not fanatical illiterates who only see heaven in after-life. These people came from the richer Muslim countries, countries where generous governments give allowances and subsidised the life of the people. These people are married and have wives and children. They must know that the course they were taking would separate them permanently from their family, friends and a good life. And yet, apparently, they were prepared to die in a horrible fashion as they steered their aircrafts towards the WTC.

34. We must not glorify these terrorists. But we need to understand their minds and their mentality. We need to do this if we want to understand the reason why they did this. If we don't then we will not be able to remove the causes and reduce the incidence of terrorism.

35. Revenge is sweet. But if we are going to liquidate the culprits almost completely as is likely to happen if we simply bomb and rocket Afghanistan then we won't even achieve the revenge that we are after. The terrorists will probably feel sorry that they had brought death and destruction to

their host but they are more likely to feel angrier and to be more determined to continue with their acts of terror. So there is no revenge.

36. But in fighting terrorism one must not think of revenge. One must think of ways to make the world free of terrorists. And that is going to require careful strategy.

37. If the whole world, including the Muslim world, is to be asked to participate in the elimination of terrorists and terrorism then all terrorists, irrespective of their race or religion or the particular acts of terrorism that they were involved in must be the target for elimination. And these must include State terrorists as well, including the Israeli Government of Ariel Sharon, the man responsible for the massacre of thousands of Palestinians in Shabra and Shatilla and is still the man behind the systematic killings of the Palestinians today. No terrorists should be spared, no matter whether their cause is right or not.

38. The world must be serious about the fight against terrorists. It will never be completely wiped out but it certainly can be reduced and rendered less frightening for the world. Because of the attack on Sept 11, the whole world's economy has been thrown into recession. The cost of turning around the world's economy will be very, very high for at every turn the possibility of terrorist attacks has to be gauged and costly countermeasures provided for. It is far better to spend that money to reduce or eliminate terrorism than to try and live in fear of terrorist attacks at a very high cost.

39. We used to talk of the balance of terror. This refers to the nuclear arms held by the East / West blocs in the cold war. Today the terror comes not from great nuclear powers but from individuals and groups whose capacity to do damage is out of all proportion to their financial capacity or their technological capacity. But they hold the balance of terror. Perhaps the great powers with their command of sophisticated technology and unlimited finance may be able to tilt the balance of terror in their favour again. But we cannot bank on it, not in the near future anyway.

40. To eliminate the terrorists we must know who they are. Race, religion and country cannot be used to identify the terrorists. We can only identify terrorists by their acts. Unfortunately by the time they commit their crime it is too late. If the whole world cooperates we can determine who are their compatriots or collaborators or supporters. The world must support action taken specially against these criminals.

41. But identifying and hunting the terrorists will be very difficult and will take a long time. The better immediate solution is to remove the causes of terrorism. We may not want to remove these causes because we do not like to give the impression that the terrorists have succeeded. But such an attitude will not help. The terrorists must be hunted and brought to justice but the causes of their committing the acts of terror must be removed.

42. Once the causes have been removed, support for the terrorists will be much reduced if not cease altogether. And as in the case of Malaysia, once the terrorists lost their support base sooner or later they must give up their activity. Even terrorists would not want to sacrifice their lives for nothing, and removing the cause will mean their sacrifices would be for nothing.

43. I hope this conference will be able to discuss terrorism dispassionately. There is no doubt that the world is under seige. Everyone is exposed to terror attacks whether they are in any way involved or not. It is therefore in everyone's interest to seek a solution to this problem. You may not find the ultimate solution but you are certain to throw up ideas on how to deal with this terrible problem of the 21st century; ideas which we can study and develop and in due course will help us put an end this scourge.

44. I wish you a fruitful discussion. We foresee further discussion when the ASEAN countries hold their seminar on terrorism and hopefully one day the world will admit the need for the UN to tackle this problem and to seek a solution to this threat that seems to increase even as our technological capacity increases. Thank you.