

The Luncheon To The U.S. Congress' Malaysia-America Friendship Caucus

Capitol Hill, U.S.A. 14 May 2002

This first meeting of the U.S. Congress' Malaysia- America Friendship Caucus is an auspicious moment in the relations between our two nations.

2. The tragic events of September 11th has shocked all of us into realising that no one is truly safe, that borders and distances are no longer the protective wall that we believe them to be. Technology has advanced and along with the good things that it brings must come the negative, the abuses which will force us to rethink the things that we had welcome with so much joy and expectations. At the same time we must realise that globalisation is not just about economic and business opportunities, of greater possibilities of making more and more money. It is also about better communication and faster travel for those who are bent on doing harm to those whom they may consider as their enemies; even to those who are innocent who may be made the victim of the vengeful, the callous and the anarchic.

3. As much as we must get the whole world to agree to universal systems for international relations and business, we must also get the whole world to cooperate in fighting those who abuse the new internationalism. In fighting against the terrorists we must agree to act together and to play our part.

4. We may not like to acknowledge it but the world is now living in fear. We had happily taken to the air, flitting from place to place as if we are visiting friends across the street, or across the town. But we no longer feel safe even if we fly a short distance. We cannot even be sure that innocent though we may be, we will not be the target and the victims of terror attacks as we go about our work or as we enjoy leisure in our own country or outside. The world may not think much of one life lost, but if it is our life which is lost, we have lost everything.

5. We have to prevent this from happening. The world must be made safe again. The world can be made safe if instead of subscribing to the idea that terror can be fought with terror, indeed that terror can be fought with greater terror, we revert to achieving greater understanding between people and to the building up of friendship between them.

6. The United States and Americans were the most liked people not so long ago. In Malaysia we were grateful to America

because we were liberated from Japanese occupation by Americans largely. Americans were our heroes and our friends. The first person to condemn British colonisation of the Malay states was Rupert Emerson, an American professor. He wrote his book "Malaysia" before the Second World War, long before we called our country Malaysia; at a time when we were known to the world as Malaya. He was omniscient. He foresaw Malaysia before we even thought about independence and the unification of the Malay States into Malaysia.

7. After our independence in 1957 we welcomed the American Peace Corp. They did immense work to seal the friendship between Malaysians and indeed the peoples of other developing countries with America. The United States became the best friend of the colonial people seeking independence and their friend and guide after independence. The United States gladly gave independence to the Philippines.

8. America and the American people were the best friends of all the oppressed people of the world. But America also remained the best friend of the Europeans as the Marshall Plan made economic recovery possible for the European countries. Clearly America was the best friend of the world. In the confrontations between the Communist bloc and the Western bloc few had any difficulty in choosing America and the West.

9. When the confrontation ended with the defeat of the Communist bloc the world saw a period of world peace and unprecedented prosperity. The world even welcomed the role of the United States as the policeman, the law keeper of the world.

10. I would be lying if I say that the world still see the United States of America as the friend that they knew. Yet there is every reason and every possibility for the United States and the Americans to be once again the universal friend of the world. All that is needed is to be more gentle when faced with recalcitrant nations and people. People tend to respond more positively to the friendly approach than to confrontations. Pushed into a corner, even the weakest will fight. Victory over them will really not mean much.

11. A Malaysian was asked by the United Nations to persuade Burma to be democratic and more conciliatory towards Aung San Su Kyi. Persuasion must take time. We think we are making progress. The Malaysian Government has not been asked to do anything but we try to help Burma make the transition by assuring the military Government leaders that they will not end in jail if they opt for democracy.

12. One must remember that when Ershad of Bangladesh and Choon Doo Hwan were persuaded to accept democracy, they both ended in jail, Choon Doo Hwan being sentenced to death. The fate of Suharto is not encouraging either for dictators to give up power in favour of democracy.

13. To cut a long story short, the Burmese Junta is now less resistant towards a switch to democracy. They have released a substantial number of their political prisoners. It is not easy for them. Already attempts are being made to topple the Junta. They have to be careful if they want to stay in power to make the transition.

14. The West is very impatient. You want an overnight change. Sudden change even if it is for the good is disruptive. Democracy for people who are not used to it can undermine stability resulting in war even. Sadly it does not compare well with the safety and stability achieved by an authoritarian society. So let there be patience. The loss in time is made up by the gain in the smoothness of the transition. It is well to remember that democracy is only a means and not an end in itself. It is the good life that democracy brings that counts, not democracy per se.

15. We in Malaysia understand Americans' anxiety to see that the freedom that they enjoy should be enjoyed also by Malaysians and other people. But we must admit that at the moment we are unable to accept the absolute freedom that you believe in. There are certain freedoms that you enjoy which we think we can do without. We hope you can tolerate our different sense of values. One day perhaps we will be comfortable with your values. But for the moment we are not comfortable. Let us celebrate the difference for that is what makes the world interesting.

16. If we can accept that there will always be differences between us, differences in culture, values and opinions then we will be more tolerant of each other. Then we will be able to live in peace and friendship with each other. As you know three very different people live in Malaysia. Apart from ethnic differences, we differ in religious beliefs, languages and cultures. Despite all these we can live together, work together and play together. Not many multi-ethnic countries are able to enjoy peace, harmony and development. We have, because we accept the differences between us.

17. I am not trying to hold Malaysia up as a shining example to the world. But you will agree with me that being sensitive and tolerant helps peoples of different races, different countries to be at peace with each other. In fact we can be great friends despite our differences. When the United States

of America was young you appreciated the recognition and support of whatever country irrespective of their ethnic and religious differences. Moreover, an Arab Muslim country was among the first to recognise and cooperate with you. With the passage of time the whole world came to recognise and respect you. And you grew into the great country that you are today.

18. Today you can afford to use your power and strength. But it would do you no harm to be friendly to other countries, to be patient with them and to win them over to your side.

19. I am sure that at least with Malaysia, you as members of this caucus will contribute much to greater understanding and friendship between our two countries and our people. We have nothing to lose but everything to gain, even though by virtue of different sizes Malaysia will gain more.