

The International Nuclear Conference 2002

Putra World Trade Centre, Kuala Lumpur 15 October 2002

I am very pleased to be here this morning to officiate at the Opening Ceremony of the International Nuclear Conference 2002.

2. I have always had reservations on nuclear power, largely due to my concern on the safety of nuclear power plants, and the possibility of use in nuclear weapons. Nevertheless, the study of nuclear science and technology is essential for a better understanding of the physical properties of elements and substances and their possible non-military application.

3. Nuclear physics and pharmacology, for example, have given us new tools to treat cancer, and the advent of X-rays and nuclear magnetic resonance have made physical imaging, foetal monitoring and therapeutic procedures not only possible but also successful. It is for this reason that the Government saw the need to establish the Malaysian Institute for Nuclear Technology Research (MINT), and to continue to support its activities.

4. In this respect, it is gratifying to note that MINT has managed to find itself a niche in applying the knowledge that it has acquired for the larger benefit of Malaysian society and industry. Such an involvement by MINT has contributed to the development of new products, processes and services that have benefited certain local industries in a number of economic sectors, ranging from manufacturing, oil exploration and refining, mining, medical and healthcare, agriculture, environmental care, and even to the sewage treatment and telecommunication industries. As a result, MINT has also been generating increasing revenue from these industries that help fund its research activities, and also provide some returns on the investment that the Government has made in establishing the Institute.

5. While the generation of such returns is encouraged, the Government will continue to provide the necessary funding for MINT to further strengthen its facilities and activities, in the hope that such capacity-building in research and development will help to achieve our vision to transform into a fully-developed nation. This is more justifiable, from the tax-payers' point of view, now that MINT has attained not only a number of internationally-recognised quality standards for its products and services, and is striving for more, but has also received a number of international awards for its inventions and innovation.

6. But like any other fields of knowledge, there is always bound to be someone who would find a way to use nuclear know-how for war and terror. While Mankind is still cursed with the development and continued possession of nuclear weapons by some States, we are now faced with the new threat of nuclear terrorism, such as the use of radioactive materials in dirty bombs, following the multiple terrorist attacks on the United States on September 11th. There are even reports that alleged that some terrorists are trying to acquire nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction.

7. This is unfortunate because suspicions directed at some countries particularly Muslim countries is likely to result in these countries from having access to materials and technology for peaceful use. It would seem that some countries are not trusted despite their concession to the Treaty on the Non-proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT), which entitles them to access to non-military technology under the Treaty. Already, there is an attempt to inhibit peaceful nuclear co-operation among Middle Eastern States.

8. If we look at the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty, we will find that it embodies a bargain struck between three general objectives; firstly, a commitment by all Parties not to contribute to the horizontal proliferation of nuclear weapons, or the spread of nuclear weapons to States not already in possession of such weapons; secondly, a commitment to promote the international transfer of technology for the peaceful applications of nuclear energy, especially to developing nations; and thirdly, a commitment not to contribute to the vertical proliferation of nuclear weapons or the increase in the nuclear weapons arsenal of States in possession of such weapons, as a step towards total nuclear disarmament.

9. But the Treaty, by no means, assures any right for the nuclear weapon States to possess such weapons of mass destruction in perpetuity. Instead, they are obliged to pursue negotiations in good faith on effective measures relating to cessation of the nuclear arms race at an early date, and to general and complete disarmament under strict and effective international control.

10. However, for a long while now, the focus has instead been on restricting access to nuclear technology by the non-nuclear weapon States, for fear that they might use the technology to develop such weapons in contravention of the Treaty. This has since led to the rise of stringent nuclear non-proliferation export control, which is now being further tightened in view of the threat of nuclear terrorism.

11. While there is a need to institute such a control in cases where there have been clear breaches of NPT obligations by any non-nuclear weapon State, there is also a possibility of some of the nuclear technology supplier States overzealously applying such a control for purposes other than preventing the proliferation of nuclear weapons. This may be for alleged human rights violation or other issues, or even as a non-tariff trade barrier, especially when it comes to dual-use items, or items that can be used either for the production of nuclear weapons or peaceful non-nuclear applications.

12. The non-nuclear weapon States that produce such items, which may range from electronic components to process equipment, have the right to be duly concerned over such a control, particularly in light of the apparent double standard among the non-proliferation export control proponent States on nuclear disarmament matters.

13. Malaysia has joined other like-minded States in calling for a complete and irreversible elimination of nuclear weapons from the face of the Earth, starting with the request for the International Court of Justice (ICJ) to render an Advisory Opinion on whether the threat or use of nuclear weapons in any circumstance is permitted under international law.

14. To make matters worse, there is also a propensity for some countries to unilaterally judge others as developing or harbouring an intention to develop nuclear weapons, without due regard to the findings of, or recourse to the authority of the multilateral agencies that have been empowered to make such a judgement. Furthermore, we have also seen how biased such a unilateral judgement can be. If the State developing such weapons is an ally, no action is taken to curb the development or possession or to institute nuclear export control. If not an ally, the full military might and fury of those countries would be brought to bear upon the States concerned.

15. As a result of such a propensity to unilaterally act as an international prosecutor, judge and jury, there is also now a threat for these countries to launch pre-emptive military strikes on the nuclear facilities of the alleged proliferating States, with the current war on terrorism serving as a convenient excuse.

16. Such a lack of clear moral standing between pushing for nuclear export control and striving for nuclear disarmament and also a propensity to unilaterally act as prosecutor, judge, jury and enforcer against others on non-proliferation matters, will lead to a downward spiral to the detriment of global nuclear non-proliferation objectives. More States will,

understandably, feel threatened and be alarmed by such unilateralist actions, as well as the use of pre-emptive military power

17 As a result, the radical and hard-line constituencies in the threatened States will grow and be emboldened, with some, probably, even wishing to take matters into their own hands, by resorting to acts of terrorism, perhaps, even nuclear terrorism.

18. Even more dangerous is when the threatened States are those that are predominantly populated by people of a particular religious faith. This will further lead to a perceived escalation in the victimisation of countries and people of that faith, following similar widespread perception in the context of the current global war on terrorism.

19. Malaysia takes pride in being a Muslim country adhering to the fundamental teachings of Islam and will endeavour to use that position to advance the cause of inter-faith dialogue, with a view to promoting global peace and security. However, this downward spiral on matters concerning nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament will undermine such efforts.

20. To stem this downward spiral, an international dialogue to critically and objectively assess the threat of nuclear weapon proliferation as well as the lack of progress on nuclear disarmament, including the linkages between the two, should be initiated, with a view to developing a consensus on the most effective means to address the problem.

21. The assessment should be conducted on a non-partisan and objective basis, in order to avoid any unilateralist tendency in the approach to be used, and the judgment made to address the problem of nuclear non-proliferation and export control.

22. Rightfully, the NPT Review Conferences should have provided the avenue for such a dialogue, but they have not. Similarly, the Conference on Disarmament (CD) in Geneva should have provided another avenue for such a dialogue, but the CD has been stalled by the reluctance of the nuclear weapon States, as well as their nuclear-umbrella States, which are the most active proponents of stringent nuclear export control, to link the issue of developing a time-table for nuclear disarmament to, initially, that of banning nuclear weapon tests, and, currently, that of cutting off the production of fissile nuclear material.

23. We have a duty to the world, and to the future of Mankind, to urgently pursue such a dialogue, and also to develop a broad consensus on the need to, as well as the most effective

multilateral approach to achieve nuclear weapon non-proliferation and disarmament. Let us not be blinded by narrow national interests in doing this.

24. Malaysia has been assisting other developing countries in the peaceful non-power applications of nuclear technology, ranging from pest control, healthcare, enhancing agricultural productivity, increasing food quality, safety and security, improving water resource management, industrial applications, to pollution control, with a view to enhancing the quality of life. In this regard, MINT and other Malaysian agencies have hosted a large number of regional and international training courses, and also received a substantial number of scientists from other developing countries for fellowship training, either under the auspices of the International Atomic Energy Agency or other multilateral organisations. Malaysia hopes to be able to continue doing this.

25. On that note, I officially declare open the International Nuclear Conference 2002.