

**The Official Dinner In Honour Of H.E. Recep Tayyip Erdogan
Prime Minister Of The Republic Of Turkey**

Putrajaya, 13 June 2003

My wife and I welcome Your Excellency, Mrs. Erdogan and members of your delegation to this evening's dinner at Seri Perdana. We are indeed honoured to receive Your Excellency, this being your first official visit to Malaysia. Kuala Lumpur and Ankara are twin cities and this adds to the special feeling of friendship between our two countries.

2. I recall with pleasant memories of my own visits to Turkey, in 1983 and 1994 and once again in 1997 to attend the first D-8 Summit in Istanbul. Personally, I have sailed along the beautiful coast of Turkey, in the Aegean and Mediterranean Seas. Turkey is certainly blessed not only with a rich cultural heritage, but magnificent and breathtaking landscape and scenery. Anatolia is truly a cradle of civilisation.

3. Relations between Malaysia and Turkey have always been warm and friendly. This is not only expressive of, or owing to, our common Islamic heritage, but also due to the fact that we have constantly endeavoured to establish contacts and to work together, bilaterally as well as multilaterally. Our close cooperation to assist the people of Bosnia-Herzegovina during those dark days of war and ethnic cleansing comes readily to mind.

4. Your Excellency's visit is indeed timely and opportune. The discussion that we had today has provided us with the opportunity to take stock of and identify ways to further enhance our bilateral relations. Our total bilateral trade was only valued at USD270 million in 2002 with exports from Malaysia standing at USD211 million. Although we had tried to shore up bilateral trade and investment, more concrete measures would have to be taken to tap the full potential of the business opportunities available in our respective countries.

5. It is significant that Your Excellency has brought with you leading representatives of the Turkish private sector. There is no doubt the intensification of direct contacts between the Malaysian and Turkish private sectors would foster a mutually rewarding cooperation. There are numerous existing opportunities in our countries as well as new opportunities in third countries. In this respect, the reactivation and revitalisation of the Malaysia-Turkey Business Council and the Joint Committee on Economic and Trade, which have been dormant for some time now is a welcome move.

6. Turkey occupies a unique position, straddling Asia and Europe. I would like to encourage the Malaysian private sector to take advantage of Turkey as a gateway to the vast markets of the European Union, the Middle East and the Central Asian states. Malaysia is also aware that under the current privatisation process in Turkey, there are opportunities for Malaysian companies to participate in some of the projects.

7. Malaysia embarked on a privatisation policy in the 1980s. This was designed, in part, to increase the role of the private sector in the national economic development and further increase the levels of productivity and efficiency. The private sector is our engine of growth and its role was re-emphasised in the package of new strategies adopted by Malaysia towards stimulating the nation's economic growth. Malaysia is willing and ready to share its privatisation experience with Turkey.

8. We also wish to invite the Turkish companies, which are seeking a market expansion into the Far East, to take advantage of the ASEAN Free Trade Area (AFTA). The AFTA market with a combined population of more than 400 million and a GDP of US\$500 billion would offer Turkish companies profitable opportunities. From their base in ASEAN, Turkish businessmen would further be able to diversify and exploit the huge market in ASEAN and China.

9. This October, Malaysia will play host to the 10th OIC Summit. We believe that cooperation and solidarity among OIC member countries is crucial if our views are to be heard and respected internationally. The need is real for Islamic countries to remain united in addressing and confronting those challenges and difficulties, which have serious political and economic ramifications for the entire Muslim world. This has become urgent in the aftermath of the September 11 terrorist attacks and more so following the recent war against Iraq.

10. Malaysia regards Turkey as a partner and leading member of the OIC and D-8. We are confident that the important role currently played by Turkey in those organisations and at the international arena would continue to contribute to greater international development and progress. Bilaterally, the strengthening of Malaysia-Turkey relations will positively impact on the overall unity and solidarity among Islamic countries and its Ummah.

11. I am confident that Your Excellency's visit to Malaysia will open new grounds and stimulate greater bilateral interaction, especially in the fields of economic co-operation and trade.

12. In conclusion, let me once again welcome Your Excellency, Mrs. Erdogan and members of the Turkish delegation to Malaysia. I hope that you will have a fruitful and memorable visit.