

SPEECH BY: DATO' SERI DR. MAHATHIR BIN MOHAMAD
(PRIME MINISTER)

EVENT: AT THE OFFICIAL OPENING OF THE FIFTH CONFERENCE OF RED
CROSS/RED CRESCENT LEADERS OF ASEAN

VENUE: DEWAN BANDARAYA, KUALA LUMPUR

DATE: 07 MAY 1983

TIME:

Her Royal Highness Princess Maha Chakri
Sirimdhorn;
Tengku Tan Sri Mohamad,
Chairman of the Organising Committee;
Distinguished Guests;
Ladies and Gentlemen.

I take this opportunity, on behalf of my wife and I, to express our sincere appreciation to the organisers of the Fifth Conference of Red Cross/Red Crescent Leaders of Countries within ASEAN, for inviting us to be present here to-day. It is, indeed, a privilege and honour for me to address this gathering of distinguished delegates, observers and guests from so many organisations. On behalf of the Government and the people of Malaysia, I have great pleasure in welcoming you all to Kuala Lumpur. To you, Your Royal Highness, may I assure you that your visit to Malaysia, besides being a historical event, is yet another expression of strong bonds of friendship and cordial relations that exist between Thailand and Malaysia.

2. To the distinguished delegates from the ASEAN countries and observers from Japan and Brunei, as well as representatives from the International Committee of the Red Cross and the League of Red Cross Societies, on behalf of the Malaysian Red Crescent Society, I extend a warm welcome and I hope that this Conference will further strengthen our movement on world-wide and regional basis. The presence and participation of others from the various national and international organisations is proof of the support for the movement.

3. I understand that this Conference is the fifth in the series, but the first in Kuala Lumpur. I am confident that this Conference, held from time to time, will not only be beneficial to the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies but will also help in fostering greater cooperation for the success of ASEAN.

4. The theme that you have adopted for this Conference, that is "The ASEAN approach for Red Cross and Red Crescent

Societies in the Eighties", shows how sensitive the movement is towards adjusting to new development and changing realities. The theme allows the Conference to adopt a forward looking view which could prove very rewarding and stimulating for every participant.

5. We are living in an era of rapid change. Not only are things around us changing, but we ourselves are being subjected to change. Never before have we witnessed such a phenomenon whereby we are both the active agent as well as object of change. Scientific and technological advancement have been one of the main facilitators of this change. New discoveries, inventions and innovations in the various fields offer us tremendous possibilities in improving our well being and our environment. Nevertheless, positive developments always carry some undesirable effects, while some are subject to misuse and abuse.

6. The advancement of science and technology has resulted in new inventions and innovations in both hardware and software in the areas of health and medicine, communication and transportation, weapons and machinery among others. While new drugs, methods and techniques are progressing in the field of medicine, the sufferings of the people afflicted by the use of new weaponry, or even misuse and abuse of drugs, neglect of security precautions in factories and plants, and widespread crime and brutality with sophisticated weapons brings about a new and complicated dimension in the role of the Red Cross and Red Crescent in providing aid, welfare and social services.

7. The general advancement made does not reduce the need for the services of the Red Cross and Red Crescent societies. Famine, disasters, accidents and such like are still very much with us. In addition we now have the plight of refugees resulting from political and military conflicts which require the services of the Red Cross and Red Crescent and other voluntary organisations. Indeed there are more and more areas in which the services of the Red Cross and Red Crescent are needed. The fact that our services are more and more required by suffering humanity is itself a reward which should encourage us to strive further in performing our role.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

8. During the late seventies, the ASEAN Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies rallied round their respective Governments to deal with the problem of the Vietnamese Boat People by providing various forms of social care. The ASEAN countries certainly benefitted from the dedicated and effective services provided by the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies as auxiliaries to their respective Governments. In fact, they demonstrated to their Governments certain specific aspects of coping with this problem which was somewhat new to this region.

9. From the reports of the previous Conferences of this nature, I understand that the ASEAN Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies have taken a serious view of the 1976 Declaration of ASEAN Foreign Ministers with regard to Disaster. I am glad to note that at the Fourth Meeting of ASEAN Experts on Natural Disasters, held in Kuala Lumpur in December 1981, our Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies participated as a group. Natural disasters which tend to become increasingly destructive because of larger populations and zones of economic activities is of grave concern to us. Since these natural phenomena will continue to occur, we cannot avoid but be more prepared. While the prime responsibility still lies with the Governments, the community organisations nevertheless have an important role to play. I am glad to note that the ASEAN Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies continue to play an active role in the various forms of counter-disaster response activities, mainly through disaster preparedness and relief.

10. The Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, like almost all other voluntary organisations, are bound to experience the effects of the current world-wide economic recession. The slow-down in growth experienced by the public and private sectors will invariably be reflected in their financial and other forms of support for the voluntary sector. Hence, it is imperative that the voluntary agencies take a closer look at their present organisation and operations. They need to reassess the needs and priorities of their programmes and evaluate their performances in order to achieve a higher degree of accountability. Wherever possible, duplication of programmes and activities should be avoided and effective managerial input be provided to meet new challenges.

11. This Conference demonstrates the relationship and concern of ASEAN countries on a people-to-people basis. ASEAN people have many things in common. It is through interaction and cooperation of ASEAN organisations, such as the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, that we are able to appreciate our common problems and aspirations. We need to continually find alternatives to the traditional approaches of the developed countries. We need to plan and develop solutions to our common problems based on our regional experiences and resources. I am sure that you will also identify realistic ways and means of implementing the recommendations to be made at this Conference, and I am sure that the people and Governments of ASEAN are looking forward to learning about your deliberations and recommendations.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

12. With these words, I have great pleasure in declaring the Fifth Conference of Red Cross/Red Crescent Leaders of Countries within ASEAN open, and wish you all every success. Thank you.

