

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

EVENT: AT THE OPENING OF THE ASIAN CONFERENCE ON THE QUESTION OF PALESTINE

VENUE: THE HILTON HOTEL, KUALA LUMPUR

DATE: 03 MAY 1983

TIME:

Mr. Chairman;
Your Excellencies;
Distinguished Delegates;
Ladies and Gentlemen.

I wish to welcome all of you who have come a long way to make a genuine and meaningful contribution to finding a solution to the Palestinian problem -- a problem which has been with us for more than three decades since the displacement of the Palestinian people from their homeland following the establishment of the so-called state of Israel. Your presence here is proof of the support of the countries and peoples of the ASIA-PACIFIC region for the just struggle of the Palestinian people for their right to their homeland in Palestine.

2. This show of solidarity by your presence here will no doubt reassure the Palestinian people that their struggle has not been in vain, that they are not alone and that the international community is still conscious of its responsibility for peace and justice.

3. I wish to take this opportunity to convey, on behalf of the Government and people of Malaysia, our deep appreciation to Mrs. Lucille Mair, the Secretary-General of the International Conference on the Question of Palestine, and to Ambassador Masamba Sarre, the Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People for their commendable efforts, not only in projecting the just cause of the Palestinians, but also in pursuing, on behalf of the Palestinian people, greater international commitment to justice. The Palestinian struggle is nothing more than a struggle for justice, to which they, as much as everyone else, have a right.

4. It is unfortunate, however, that certain quarters have tried to undermine our efforts in the cause of justice for the Palestinian struggle. If they are indeed committed to justice and peace in West Asia, they should appreciate that we are only trying to achieve the same objective. There is no cause for them to persuade countries not to participate in this Conference. That they have done so vindicates those who question their sincerity and sense of justice. Israel

will now be more intransigent than ever.

Distinguished delegates,

5. The fundamental issues involved in the question of Palestine are well known to all of us. We have a case here where an entire people have been driven out of their homeland, humiliated and endlessly harassed. In this regard, for over three decades the international community has been ineffective. The injustice and indignities perpetrated on the Palestinian people have been repeatedly voiced in the United Nations, and countless resolutions have been passed. But, the cruelty towards, and the persecution of the Palestinian people continue unabated.

6. The Palestinian people have suffered enough. If we have any conscience, we must endeavour to find a solution to end this injustice inflicted on them not because they did wrong but because others wish to assuage their conscience. The supporters of Israel, who claim to be the champions of human rights, must now forsake hypocrisy and double standards, and effectively apply pressure on the Israeli regime in order that it will cease its intransigence and belligerency. There has never been any parallel in history where a political entity has been created to supplant an existing rightful state and the new entity supplied with the most lethal weapons to perpetuate aggression against the people they had displaced. If the world continues to be blind and deaf to Israeli expansionism and aggression, others will be encouraged to commit similar crimes elsewhere. The world community must stand firm in upholding the basic principle that aggression is not any more the solution to racial or national conflicts. We must put a stop to aggression. We must make it clear to Israel by our action that they cannot continue with their belligerency. Similarly, we must make clear to others who have violated this principle that they should cease and desist from such act.

7. The Palestinians are a people. They are a distinct entity. They deserve the right to their homeland and to exist as a member of an international community with sovereignty and dignity. Unless this is recognised there can be no lasting peace in that region. It is in the interest of Israel too that the Palestinian problem be resolved. Even Israel's mentor must appreciate this. The Palestinian problem is both a problem of justice as well as of world-wide security, and it is in the interest of humanity that it should be resolved.

8. It is almost unbelievable that in an age when colonised territories have gained, or are gaining independence and sovereignty, the Palestinians are not only denied independence but they are actually hounded from their homeland. The world community, if it is committed to the principle of freedom and self-government must see to it that

the Palestinians regain their rights to an independent State of their own. It is immoral for a handful of nations at the United Nations to ask the Palestinian people or its exclusive representative, the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO), to acquiesce to pre-conditions that amounts to surrender. It is even more wrong to refuse to recognise the PLO because of some acts of terror by people who claim to be its members, more so when the chief of the Israeli terrorist movement is now recognised as the Prime Minister of Israel. It is this double standard that has led to the massacres at Sabra and Shatilla.

9. The question before us today, and in the next few days, is whether this regional conference is to be a platform for empty rhetoric and resolutions, or as a forum which will come up with concrete proposals. We are not gathered here to pass resolutions for the sake of passing resolutions. There are already over 300 resolutions on the question of Palestine. The rights of Palestinian self-determination, including the establishment of an independent State of their own in Palestine, is today accepted unequivocally by the overwhelming majority at the United Nations. Decades have passed and the Palestinians are yet to enjoy these rights. Obviously, we have not acted vigorously and sincerely enough. I hope that this Conference would come up with definite ideas as to how the peace plans and initiatives that are already afoot, could enable the Palestinians to re-enter and regain possession of their rights and property in their historic homeland, Palestine.

10. Even if there are difficulties in whatever talks that are apace or have been suspended, this should not prevent us here at this regional conference from looking beyond, that is to come out with a mechanism as to how these plans and initiatives could be made to work. The lack of progress in on-going efforts must not deter us here from proceeding from where UN resolutions, particularly the recommendations of the UN Committee on Palestine, have left.

11. This Conference should provide concrete inputs for the ultimate international conference to be held in Paris later this year. However, it must be borne in mind that any negotiation should include the PLO. This is crucial if the current approaches based on the Fez plan, or other initiatives, are to succeed. We have to accept that the PLO represents all the Palestinians and that it must be included in all negotiations on the West Asian settlement as the sole voice of Palestinian aspirations. Another important element which should be accepted is that any talk must have as its objective the reinstatement of an independent State of Palestine. Finally the big powers, in particular the United States, should prove to the Palestinian people, and the world at large, that it would be willing, and able to use its tremendous influence on Israel to bring about a workable and durable peace settlement in West Asia, at the core of which is the question of Palestinian self-determination and

right to their own homeland in Palestine.

Distinguished delegates,

12. The Palestinian problem has been with us for far too long. We must, therefore, approach the problem with a greater sense of urgency and commitment. Let us hope that the series of conferences on the Palestinian problem would bring us closer to a workable solution. We are here not because we are allied to the Palestinian people because of race or religion, but because we believe in justice for all humanity, and the Palestinian people are as much a part of that world community as are we all. We owe it to the Palestinian people to restore to them their rights and dignity. No one, but no one, deserves to be hounded from their home, permanent or temporary, time and time again as are the Palestinians. Surely the world which has such a guilty conscience over the past ill-treatment of Jews by the Nazis, must have some conscience over the injustice and oppression that is being suffered by the Palestinians right now in our times.

13. May God give you the wisdom and courage to seek justice in this period of human civilisation.
Thank you.