

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

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Bismillahir Rahmanir Rahim,
Your Excellency;
Honourable Ministers;
Excellencies;
Ladies and Gentlemen.

Assalamu'alaikum Warahmatullahi Wabarakatuh.

I am indeed honoured and privileged to be here in Mali today. Mali is an ancient land with a rich and historic culture and in its own time has contributed much to Islamic civilisation and learning. Indeed the ancient city of Timbuktu was once the repository of Islamic education and art. Above and beyond this, I have long desired to meet with Your Excellency and establish a personal link that would add to the already strong bond of friendship that has evolved in the few short years since we mutually decided to upgrade our bilateral relations to more meaningful levels.

2. Since our arrival in Bamako, we have been greatly touched by the very warm and brotherly welcome that Your Excellency personally and the Government and people of Mali have extended to us. It is most evident that you have spared no effort to make us feel at home. On behalf of my wife and members of my delegation, I would like to thank Your Excellency and the Government and people of Mali for this warm and sincere welcome and hospitality.

3. I also would like to take this opportunity to convey to Your Excellency and Madam Mariam, the best wishes and greetings of their Majesties the King and Queen of Malaysia.

4. Excellency, although Malaysia and Mali are separated by vast distances and even by culture, history and language, we nonetheless share a great deal in common. Perhaps the most important of these shared bonds is our common commitment to Islam and, springing from this, our commitment to peace, justice and socio-economic well-being that gives dignity to man. We are also both small developing countries and members of the Non-Aligned Movement and the Organisation of Islamic Conference. I am confident that these common bonds will propel our bilateral relations to new and even greater heights in the years to come.

5. Excellency, I know it will not be an exaggeration to say that we are now living in an era where socio-economic

development has become our topmost priority. Having won our political independence, we developing countries have now dedicated ourselves to uplifting the socio-economic well-being of our respective peoples so as to give substance to our political independence. Nowhere is this trend more evident than on the continent of Africa. However, it has not been an easy struggle. We have had to cope with the divisive impact on our societies as a result of years of colonial divide-and-rule policies. We have had to cope with an economic system that geared our respective economies to provide the raw materials to the industrialised nations often on exploitative terms; and we have had to cope with the interference and extraneous influences which seek to establish or re-establish forms of control over us. In addition these problems have sometimes been compounded by some of the worst natural calamities in history.

6. It was in these circumstances that Malaysia, Mali and other developing countries called for a re-examination of the fundamental premises of the prevailing international economic order within the context of the North-South dialogue. Unfortunately this, like many other important Third World initiatives, have suffered because of the lack of political will on the part of the developed countries. Therefore, even as we persuade the developed countries to commit themselves to the New International Economic Order, we must find ways to tackle the massive developmental problems we face on our own.

7. In this respect I am convinced that cooperative efforts amongst ourselves to share experiences and pool resources within the context of South-South cooperation offers the best hope. It was precisely with this in mind that my Government launched the Malaysian Technical Cooperation Programme or MTCP in 1980. Our objective was simply to promote meaningful cooperation amongst developing countries to lessen our dependence on the developed countries. Being a small country with no territorial ambitions and no desire to manipulate or control the destiny of other nations, we have sought only in a modest way, and to the limit that our own developing economy could afford, to help encourage national resilience.

8. Under the MTCP, Malaysia has offered its hand in friendship and cooperation to several countries including the Republic of Mali. I am confident that the cooperation between our two countries will grow in the years to come. The Joint Commission on Economic and Technical Cooperation which we have just concluded will act as a catalyst to achieve more meaningful cooperation to our mutual benefit.

9. Excellency, my Government is deeply aware of the immense economic and social difficulties that years of drought have inflicted upon your country. We share your sense of despair at the set-back to your national development efforts that this natural calamity has caused. Nevertheless, I know that with your wise leadership and the

determination of your people, this set-back will only be but a temporary obstacle. For our part I assure you that the Government and people of Malaysia will do whatever it can to assist you. Though we ourselves are a small developing nation, we possess some expertise in specific areas and some ability to assist you in other areas. We ask that you do not consider our help as assistance in the usual sense but rather that you consider it as a small token of our desire to share with you the fruits of our experience and labour in the spirit of solidarity and friendship between our two countries and our two peoples.

10. On a wider level, I am pleased to note that our two countries now have a tradition of good cooperation on a number of international and regional issues based on shared perceptions, ideals and beliefs. We have joined together on several occasions in such diverse fora as the United Nations, the Organisation of Islamic Conference and the Non-Aligned Movement in pursuit of initiatives designed to strengthen world peace and stability.

11. Malaysia highly appreciates Mali's support on such issues as Kampuchea and Antarctica and we have benefitted from the consultations and joint approaches taken on such important issues as Palestine and Afghanistan.

12. As Your Excellency is aware, Malaysia has also been greatly distressed by the injustices that have been inflicted on Palestine and the Palestinian people. We join the international community in condemning Israeli aggression. My Government views the Palestinian question as the core of the West Asian problem and only through its just solution can durable peace be promoted and assured in that region. We are also convinced that the Palestinian question cannot be solved without the exercise by the Palestinian people of their inalienable rights of self-determination and the establishment of an independent Palestinian State. In our support for the Palestinian cause, we will continue to make every effort to solicit concrete international action for the solution of the Palestinian question.

13. Excellency, we in Malaysia also take a keen interest in developments in Africa. We have unfailingly supported the initiatives of the African states to bring about a peaceful settlement of the Namibian issue and to end the inhuman and racist policy of apartheid which continues to be perpetrated by the South African regime. You may recall that in 1971, Malaysia successfully took the lead in calling for the expulsion of South Africa from the Commonwealth because of its apartheid policies. Malaysia also participated in the United Nations Peace-Keeping Force in the Congo, as it was then called, in 1960. It is our hope to widen the scope of the economic and political cooperation with the nations of Africa. We believe that Southeast Asia and Africa can and should be partners in the struggle for a better international political and economic order.

14. Your Excellency, may I once again thank you for your warm and brotherly hospitality. I am confident that exchange of visits such as this will lay the foundation for greater cooperation between our two countries and allow for very useful exchanges of views on a whole range of bilateral relations as well as regional and international issues of mutual concern.

15. Finally, I would like to take this opportunity to wish Your Excellency, Madam Mariam Traore and the people of Mali continued happiness and prosperity.
Thank you.