

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

EVENT: THE OPENING OF THE 9TH GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE ASEAN  
INTER PARLIAMENTARY ORGANISATION (AIPO)

VENUE: DEWAN RAKYAT, KUALA LUMPUR

DATE: 26 JAN 1988

TIME:

Honourable President of AIPO;  
Honourable Speakers and Heads of AIPO  
Delegations;  
Excellencies;  
Honourable Delegates;  
Distinguished guests,  
Ladies and Gentlemen.

It is indeed an honour for me to be here this morning to welcome the ASEAN Speakers and the Members of Parliament as well as observers from a number of countries. I bid you all a warm 'Selamat Datang' or Welcome to Malaysia.

2. I hope that your brief stay in Malaysia would enable you, to gain a greater insight and understanding of the people and the country. I am informed that apart from formal meetings there are also excursions planned for you. I hope the excursions will enable you to have a better appreciation of Malaysia.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

3. The 3rd Meeting of the ASEAN Heads of Government took place in Manila in December 1987. The Meeting was a clear manifestation of the depth of regional solidarity and unity that has emerged within ASEAN. A new impetus was given to the ASEAN cooperative endeavours to see it through the next decade and beyond. The ASEAN Heads of Government agreed on a comprehensive Programme of Action aimed at enhancing and upgrading every sector of ASEAN's multifarious development activities. The Programme of Action is therefore ASEAN's strategy to meet future challenges in a comprehensive, coordinated and pragmatic way.

4. The political, economic and social interests of ASEAN member countries, though diverse, are inextricably intertwined. The increasing strategic and economic importance of ASEAN and Southeast Asia in general, and the continuing uncertainty in Indochina makes it more imperative for the Southeast Asian region to accelerate development and progress and to maintain durable peace and stability.

5. The problems of occupied Kampuchea continue to be a source of great concern to us. We in ASEAN must, however, persevere in the search for a comprehensive political solution without sacrificing the principles of national sovereignty and the right of self-determination of the Kampuchean people. The unsettled situation in Kampuchea indeed represents an impediment to the realisation of the Zone of Peace, Freedom and Neutrality or ZOPFAN in the region.

6. ASEAN's reaffirmation of its commitment to the early realisation of the Zone of Peace, Freedom and Neutrality should be translated into positive action, now that the superpowers themselves have come to a new and positive phase in their relationship. The concept of a Southeast Asian Nuclear Weapon Free Zone is therefore ASEAN's contribution to the international efforts to keep this region free of nuclear weapons and hence help create a more stable political environment conducive to world peace.

7. Southeast Asia remains an area of strategic importance in the emerging era of the Pacific in which the major powers would no doubt continue to have a significant role in determining the region's future directions. However, it is the primary responsibility of the nations of the region to ensure a conflict-free Southeast Asia through closer cooperation in the political, economic, social and cultural fields among themselves, as well as with other interested parties.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

8. Significant changes have taken place in the economies of the ASEAN countries. ASEAN countries are dependent on external markets for the export of their commodities and increasingly on their manufactured goods. However, the unfavourable global trading conditions, compounded by the protectionist trends in the developed countries have created difficulties for all developing countries, including ASEAN. With this unhealthy environment it is even more necessary that ASEAN achieve greater intra-ASEAN cooperation in industry and trade so as to be less dependent on markets outside our control.

9. In this scheme of things therefore, where do Parliamentarians stand and how do they contribute towards achieving these goals? While it is the Executive's responsibility to come up with suggestions on policies and their modus operandi, the Parliamentarians are equally responsible to find ways to overcome our national and regional problems. Parliamentarians are particularly well-placed to reject legislative measures which will reduce intra-regional and world trade.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

10. While the Third ASEAN Summit was taking place, President Ronald Reagan and General Secretary Mikhail Gorbachev, had their summit in Washington. The Treaty they signed to eliminate intermediate and short range nuclear missiles marks an important step in the reduction of nuclear arms and disarmament. It could pave the way for a general multilateral disarmament and usher a new era of understanding among countries of varying shades of political conviction. If this is achieved then developing countries can divert scarce funds from the purchase of arms to the improvement of the living standards of the people.

11. In recent weeks the problem of the Palestinian refugees has taken new dimensions. In defiance of world opinion and United Nations resolutions, the Tel Aviv regime is continuing its relentless policies of systematic and brutal repression against innocent and unarmed Palestinians in the occupied territories. The increasing atrocities, bloodshed and injustice being inflicted by Israel are against human decency and all that it stands for. Malaysia strongly and emphatically condemns the Tel Aviv regime for its cruelties against Palestinians in the occupied territories, and calls on it to immediately abide by international norms and practice. Israel must respect the inalienable right of Palestinians to a national homeland so that permanent peace and stability could be achieved in West Asia. I would like to suggest that you deliberate on this issue and make appropriate recommendations.

12. This Assembly is the right forum to discuss the fate of suffering humanity, particularly that of the blacks in South Africa. Malaysia has been unequivocal in the abhorrence and condemnation of the racist white regime in South Africa. We in Malaysia feel strongly that South Africa should be completely ostracised. The excuse that this would hurt the blacks more than the whites have been disproved by the realities we see today. Even without sanctions the blacks are still being oppressed, ill-treated and murdered. The only answer would be for total sanctions and isolation of the racist regime of South Africa.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

13. I would also like to touch on a matter of great importance which has become a serious problem affecting many countries in the world. I refer of course to the scourge of drug addiction which has debilitating effects on the economic and social development of our countries. The International Conference on Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking (ICDAIT) has recommended a comprehensive programme for all countries which can go a long way towards ridding ourselves of this scourge. It remains for the countries to implement them. Malaysia is totally committed to the fight. As you know the penalty for trafficking in drugs in Malaysia is death. Since we have demonstrated that we discriminate in favour of no one where Malaysian laws

are concerned, Malaysia has become less of a transit country.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

14. We have come a long way in ASEAN. The forging of a common stand and collective will on matters of vital concern to ASEAN, both within our region and at the international level, are only the outward signs of the quiet progress we have made in building cohesion and cooperation among our countries. The going has not been entirely smooth. The challenges that have emerged from time to time have tested our collective will as well as the resilience within our countries and in the region as a whole. The success we have had reflects the high priority that each one country has placed on ASEAN and its viability. As Parliamentarians you have a high duty to entrench this priority and progress.

15. ASEAN's solidarity and achievements have had the continuing attention and efforts of our Foreign and Economic Ministers, but we also owe a great deal to the roots of understanding, goodwill and cooperation that have been put down by other governmental, non-governmental and people's institutions across ASEAN. AIPO, as the forum of ASEAN Parliamentarians, has also played its part in developing common framework of approaches and actions on matters of deep concern to all of us. AIPO's contacts with Parliamentarians in Europe, Asia, Australia and elsewhere have been valuable assets.

16. Indeed, AIPO has provided a unique opportunity for the people of ASEAN, and our friends from elsewhere, an opportunity to see parliamentary institutions and legislative processes at work in ASEAN. These reflect our people's will and the diversity of historical and cultural backgrounds that we are heirs to. Democratic and parliamentary institutions and processes have been nurtured and have grown in a meaningful way in the countries of ASEAN, but they have not escaped the pressures and the tensions created by our cultural, ethnic and religious diversity within each of our countries. They have not yet become totally immunized against the sporadic attacks of adventurous dreamers, of tunnel-visioned proponents of alien concepts and of plain anti-social forces. They will in time become immune, but in the meantime we must manage to hold the fundamentals of our nationhood intact. In the end, democratic and parliamentary processes have to ensure our people the peace and security that they are entitled to.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

17. We in ASEAN can be proud that we have in fact been able to manage these processes, considering that we have been independent, with the exception of Thailand, only since the end of the Second World War. Before that we were colonies of Western nations, whose imperial interests preclude

training in the art and science of Government, particularly the democratic form of government. The colonial governments we were exposed to were, if not totalitarian, at least authoritarian. Except for a few tame nominees, the people of our countries were never represented in these colonial governments.

18. If these colonial governments had problems, they resolved these problems without any regard for the feelings or interests of the indigenous people. Thus when faced with a shortage of manpower to exploit the resources of their colonies, they did not hesitate to import culturally and ethnically alien people. No effort was made to integrate these people. Indeed, they were deliberately separated in keeping with the dictum 'divide and rule'.

19. Consequently when independence was gained and democracy was adopted the peoples of these new nations found democracy very difficult to manage. A system does not work merely because it is a good system. What makes it tick is the people who manage or participate in it. Not having had any democratic experience under colonial rule, the peoples of the newly independent countries could not appreciate the restraints and the responsibilities in the exercise of democratic rights.

20. That the ASEAN countries have succeeded in mastering the intricacies of democracy and to develop rapidly at the same time is a matter for much satisfaction. We should not gloat over our successes, nor should we rest satisfied with them. There is much to be done still to develop our countries. For this we need stability. Members of Parliament must know this and they must contribute towards stability. Those who undermine stability in the pursuit of dubious democratic rights; those who ignore the well-being of the majority cannot be considered as having the interest of their country or even of democracy at heart. It is for these reasons that communists and extremists are not allowed to use democratic processes in order to destroy democracy.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

21. The ASEAN Inter Parliamentary Organisation has a role to play in promoting better understanding of the limitations and responsibilities of democracy as much as it must promote the benefits to be derived from the system.

22. I hope that this Assembly will contribute towards the betterment of ASEAN countries in particular and developing countries in general.

23. Now I have much pleasure in declaring open this 9th. General Assembly of the ASEAN Inter Parliamentary Organisation.  
Thank you.

