

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

EVENT: THE SECOND MEETING OF THE SOUTH COMMISSION

VENUE: THE SHANGRI-LA HOTEL, KUALA LUMPUR

DATE: 01 MAR 1988

TIME

Your Excellency Mwalimu Julius Nyerere;  
Distinguished Commissioners;  
Excellencies;  
Ladies and Gentlemen.

On behalf of the Government and people of Malaysia I would like to warmly welcome Mwalimu and all the distinguished Commissioners of the South Commission to Kuala Lumpur. I am very pleased that Kuala Lumpur has been chosen as the venue for your second meeting. I hope that despite your busy schedule, you and your gracious ladies will have the opportunity to see our country and meet with our people.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

2. Malaysia feels highly privileged and greatly honoured at being able to play host to this Second Meeting of the South Commission. The honour is further enhanced by the fact that this is the first time that the South Commission is holding a meeting in a country of the South since its inception in Geneva last July.

3. Malaysia has other reasons to feel honoured. Two years ago, during the South-South II Conference which was held here in Kuala Lumpur, in this very building, the idea and proposal to establish the South Commission was broached and conceived. The proposal was seriously developed and it gained momentum when the Eighth Summit of the Non-Aligned Movement endorsed the proposal to establish an Independent Commission of the South and applauded the acceptance of our esteemed colleague, Mwalimu Julius Nyerere, to become its Chairman. Hence the South Commission was born. In hosting this meeting, Malaysia must be excused for feeling slightly proprietary and gratified with the close identification of the South Commission with Malaysia.

4. In welcoming the distinguished Commissioners, I would like to take this opportunity to express my utmost appreciation and respect for their laudable readiness to serve on this Commission. As we are fully aware, the distinguished Commissioners are prominent personalities shouldering heavy responsibilities in their respective countries, while some are already serving the international

community directly. Needless to say, the commitment to serve as a member of the South Commission imposes an additional responsibility on each and everyone of them in the noble endeavour to advance the cause of cooperation among the countries of the South. I have every confidence that the exceptional qualities and the invaluable experience that they bring with them will stand the Commission in good stead.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

5. The Commission is set up to study and propose practical solutions to the multifarious economic maladies confronting the countries of the South. This is by no means a simple task. For decades the countries of the South have been struggling to look for ways and means that would help them to eliminate the inequities and impediments which exist in the world economy. We have rallied together in our effort to redress the imbalance in the world's economic pattern through our call for the New International Economic Order. While it did initially stir some interest in the international community and secured a faint response from some countries of the North, nothing concrete has been achieved. And today, fifteen years after the call for the New International Economic Order was made, we continue to find ourselves enmeshed inextricably in external debts, frustrated by extensive and growing protectionism, bedevilled by fluctuations of commodity prices in favour of the developed countries of the North, and tossed about by volatile interest and exchange rates.

6. Against the backdrop of a devastating economic recession, a future which holds no prospect for improvement and against negative responses to the call for a New International Economic Order, the countries of the South began to look at each other, in search of potential complementarities in our own economies. This awareness motivated the spirit for closer cooperation among countries of the South. Hence we met in Mexico City nearly twelve years ago to chart the first programme for economic cooperation among the developing countries. The scope for South-South Cooperation and its implementation mechanism was further expanded and refined through the adoption of the Arusha Plan of Action for collective self-reliance.

7. Countries of the South were becoming more convinced of the need for closer cooperation among developing countries as a means of achieving economic and social advancement in addition to promoting a healthy and more equitable economic interaction with the advanced countries of the North. Efforts for further collaboration were further explored and intensified. Strongly committed to the ideal of South-South Cooperation, we congregated again in Caracas. The scope for South-South Cooperation was reviewed, expanded and fine-tuned to cover all major areas of fundamental economic cooperation.

8. It is manifestly clear that for decades the countries of the South have seriously searched for some workable solutions. Nobody could accuse us of being idle and leaving the future of our nations passively to fate. We have broached the concept of cooperation among the South when our attempt for North-South Cooperation met responses too far short of our expectations. However, while everyone is agreed on the need, progress from that understanding to the taking of positive action has been much too slow. The setting up of the South Commission has taken us a while. Should the Commission fulfil its task, and I have no doubt that it will, the action that has to be taken to implement any recommendation is going to be even more time consuming and frustrating. We must therefore be prepared to soldier on and to overcome repeated failures and disappointments. The fact is that the obstacles are not going to be just the political will of the countries of the South. We are up against the traditional patterns of economy set by history.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

9. The South Commission has come into being at a most crucial time in the struggle of the developing countries for economic development and progress. It is established at a time when the search for solutions in our negotiations with the developed economies of the North has practically grounded to a halt. It is established at a time when multilateralism is severely under attack and protectionism is rampant. It is established at a time when indebtedness of developing countries is paralysing their economies. In short, it is established at a time when developing countries of the South are faced with massive economic problems which threaten to nullify their independence, gained by some only recently at tremendous sacrifices.

10. The establishment of the South Commission in itself is not meant to replace the efforts being undertaken by the countries of the South individually or groups to ameliorate their economic position. The attack against the problem must be multipronged. But the South Commission must constitute a major assault strategy which must receive the positive support of everyone.

11. Although the task to be undertaken by the Commission is a daunting one, it should feel encouraged and inspired by the full backing and support which it has received from all the countries of the South. If we fail then we are going to suffer a severe setback, for it is unlikely that another concerted approach can be attempted for a very long, long time.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

12. Permit me at this juncture to unburden myself of some thoughts which the Commission might find useful. We have in

the South many success stories and failures. These are usually more relevant than most analysis on how the developed countries achieved their present level of development. It would be very worthwhile for members of the Commission to be fully briefed by independents on the results of the many different policies and approaches adopted by the countries of the South since the end of World War II for example. In this exercise, we have to be absolutely honest with ourselves.

13. Obviously some ideas or approaches can be implemented earlier than others. The longer we wait, the more complex and difficult the situation will be. Perhaps it would be worthwhile if the Commission can indicate certain measures which can be implemented even before the Commission's work is over. Perhaps, the solutions or approaches may seem imperfect, but it is worthwhile to remember that there are no perfect solutions. All approaches will yield good and bad results. What is significant is the balance between the two. An imperfect solution implemented is better than the perfect solution unimplemented.

14. The idea of setting up in the South institutions of higher learning is one approach which can be implemented early. We already have numerous institutions in place in the developing countries. Indeed, they are already being utilised by many of us. What is needed is to identify suitable institutions which could then immediately take in students from the South. There is bound to be tremendous savings as the cost of education in developing countries is usually much lower than in developed countries. Additionally the foreign exchange will stay in the South.

15. Mwalimu once maintained that ignorance about each other is one of the factors that impedes a closer and more dynamic cooperation among countries of the South. I agree entirely with him. We should therefore establish as many lines of communication as we can between developing countries. The news agencies of countries of the South should be linked to each other. Our newspapers, radios and television should give priority and place for news emanating from national sources or from agencies of the South. Reporting should be fair and should avoid sensationalism. International news should not be monopolised by the three or four dominant news agencies of the West. We should balance them against those of our agencies and leave it to the readers to judge.

16. Apart from the news agencies, centres should be set-up in strategic parts of the world to collect and disseminate news of economic importance to the South. Contracts and demands for supplies of commodities and manufactured goods must be readily available from these centres. So must the national policies, laws and procedures required by countries and Governments in the South.

17. The countries of the South being the primary intended

beneficiaries of the work of the Commission, should be aware that the responsibility for the success and effective implementation of the findings of the Commission rests with ourselves. However, this must not be taken to mean that the South Commission should be perceived as autarchic or as a substitute for North-South economic relations. Rather, it should be considered as a complementary effort and strategy which would benefit the entire system of international economic relations.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

18. I cannot but stress that the work of the South Commission deserves the full support of the entire international community, particularly in this period of economic crisis which requires commitment and imagination to transform serious challenges into opportunities for development. The international community, in giving their support to the work of the Commission should therefore return to the spirit of the 60s and early 70s which witnessed considerable practical support for efforts at economic integration and cooperation among developing countries.

19. In this respect, I fervently hope that the formation of the South Commission would make a valuable contribution towards the revitalization of North-South Cooperation by recommending a practical and meaningful agenda for negotiation. Such an approach, I believe, should strike a responsive chord among the developed countries of the North whose understanding and support would be essential.

20. The South Commission is essentially an exercise in self-help. It is not too much an exaggeration to say that the eyes of the world, in both North and South, are upon the Commission. Let us demonstrate through the effective and successful implementation of the findings of the Commission that the countries of the South are capable of looking after themselves.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

21. I now have great pleasure in declaring open the Second Meeting of the South Commission and wish our esteemed Commissioners every success in their deliberations.