

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

EVENT: THE OFFICIAL DINNER HOSTED BY HIS EXCELLENCY  
THE PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF VENEZUELA

VENUE: CARACAS, VENEZUELA

DATE: 01 AUG 1990

TIME:

His Excellency President Carlos Andres Perez,  
and Madame Perez;  
Excellencies;  
Distinguished Guests;  
Ladies and Gentlemen.

First of all, please allow me to express my sincere appreciation to you Mr. President for your very warm words of welcome to my wife and I and to members of my delegation. We are deeply touched by the warmth of your hospitality and the friendship and kind sentiments that greet us. It is truly a pleasure to be here in this beautiful city of Caracas.

Mr. President,  
Ladies and Gentlemen.

2. Formal diplomatic ties between Venezuela and Malaysia are still very much in its infancy, having been established only in 1986. As you know, our two countries have very different cultural backgrounds, history and language. In addition, we are separated by vast geographical distance. In conventional terms there would perhaps be little reason for our two countries to have much of a relationship at all. And yet, you Mr. President have visited Malaysia twice, while this, my first visit to the continent of South America, is to Venezuela.

3. Those who would seek a rationale or perhaps an explanation for the growth of our relations need look no further than our mutual commitment to South-South cooperation and to the belief that neither distance nor cultural or linguistic differences are impediments to mutually beneficial cooperation. This mutual commitment was so aptly demonstrated in Kuala Lumpur recently when both our countries joined with other like-minded countries to chart a new course for South-South cooperation. We also proposed to go beyond eloquent statements and get on with the task of implementing practical programmes that would contribute to our respective development efforts.

4. In this spirit, our two countries have already begun negotiations on a range of agreements and issues that would

give substance to the ideals that we in the South have always cherished. The Economic and Technical Cooperation Agreement that we are discussing, together with new methods of promoting trade and investments will, I am confident, result in tangible benefits to both our countries. It is my hope that a new framework for cooperation will emerge that will serve as a model for South-South relations.

5. My Government's commitment to South-South cooperation and to developing comprehensive and mutually beneficial relations with Venezuela is fully shared by the Malaysian private sector, some of whose members have joined me on this visit. For countries such as ours which believe in the primacy of free-enterprise as the main vehicle for growth and development, the role of the private sector is vital. In this sense, our visit is at a particularly appropriate time as I understand that Your Excellency's government is also pushing ahead with free market programmes and privatisation. In the short term there may well be difficulties but from our own experience I know that the results, in terms of rapid socio-economic development, more than outweigh the problems that crop up from time to time. It is my sincere hope that the private sectors of our two countries, long separated by lack of information and by different orientations, will now forge enduring links that would help sustain the momentum of economic cooperation.

Mr. President,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

6. Our world has witnessed vast changes in recent months. The virtual elimination of super-power rivalry holds out the promise of a more peaceful era. I am not sure however whether this will translate into a more conducive environment for the South. For one thing, the collapse of Soviet power has now placed the industrialised North in a position to impose its own political and economic agenda on others. Economic assistance and access to markets are increasingly tied to the political objectives and frequently the economic needs of the North.

7. At the same time, we appear to be moving from the Cold War to a global economic struggle. The developed countries seemed determined to use every means at their disposal to block meaningful global economic reforms that are necessary if the South is to overcome its economic difficulties. Quotas, non-tariff barriers, democratic practices, human rights records, exchange rates, environment, intellectual property, treatment of illegal immigrants, classification of countries are all being used to stifle economic growth in the South. Yet when the same misdemeanours are perpetrated in the North, they are acceptable.

8. It is therefore vital for the countries of the South to evolve common strategies in dealing with the North and to collectively seek to negotiate a more favourable global economic environment. We need to coordinate our policies on

the full range of issues that confront us. Without this I fear that all our efforts at strengthening bilateral cooperation will not avail much.

9. Under Your Excellency's distinguished leadership, Venezuela has played an important role in galvanising the South to collective action. Indeed, the launching of the Final Report of the South Commission here in Caracas, bears testimony to Venezuela's role. I think it is indeed fitting that the Report is launched in Caracas some twenty-six years after the formation of the G-77 which took place in this beautiful city in 1964. I very much look forward to exchanging views with Your Excellency on these important issues.

Mr. President,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

10. Before I conclude, let me say again that we are delighted to be here in Venezuela. We are excited by the opportunities arising from a new framework of sustained economic cooperation between our two countries. My delegation and I look forward to our meetings with Your Excellency and members of Your Excellency's Government.

Ladies and gentlemen,

11. May I now invite you to join me in a toast to His Excellency, President Perez and Madame Perez and to the friendship and cooperation between Malaysia and Venezuela. Thank you.