

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

EVENT: THE PRIME MINISTER OF THE REPUBLIC OF TUNISIA HIS EXCELLENCY  
DR. HAMED KAROUI

VENUE: IN TUNIS, TUNISIA

DATE: 24 NOV 1992

TIME:

Your Excellency Dr. Hamed Karoui,  
Prime Minister of Tunisia;  
Excellencies;  
Distinguished guests;  
Ladies and Gentlemen.

May I take this opportunity to express my sincere thanks for the very warm welcome extended to me and members of my delegation since our arrival in Tunis this morning. My wife and I are indeed delighted to be here in this picturesque city of Tunis. I have been looking forward to this visit to renew my acquaintance with you, Mr. Prime Minister, to get to know your beautiful country and people and explore ways in which our two countries could be brought closer together.

2. I recall my first meeting with you, Mr. Prime Minister, during the recent Non-Aligned Summit in Jakarta during which we agreed to take steps to strengthen relations between Malaysia and Tunisia. Our two countries have much in common. We both had experienced colonial domination and achieved independence about the same time -- Tunisia in 1956 and Malaysia in 1957 and started on an active course of nation building and economic development. We both share a common faith in Islam and are today active members of the Organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC). We also share similar views on major international issues and cooperated actively in the United Nations and the Non-Aligned Movement. It is our hope that this visit to Tunisia and the discussions we have had with you and other Tunisian leaders will provide the stimulus for the expansion of relations beyond the existing contacts at international conferences and the occasional visits between officials of both countries to something more tangible, such as specific cooperation in projects that are mutually beneficial.

Your Excellency,

3. Being developing countries committed to the upliftment of our peoples' standard of living and welfare, Malaysia and Tunisia have embarked on rapid economic development and modernisation of our respective economies. Both our countries are diversifying our economies in order to reduce our dependence on traditional export products. In the case of Malaysia, we have successfully transformed our economy from one depending on traditional commodities like rubber, tin

and palm oil, to that in which manufactured goods, electronics and petro-chemicals play important roles. Malaysia today is a major exporter of electrical appliances, air-conditioners, television sets and electrical components. This transformation and development of our economy offer vast opportunities for trade and investment between our two countries. Malaysia and Tunisia today are in a position to supply each other with many of their requirements for specific items of manufactured goods and machinery produced by their respective manufacturers. I see an enormous potential to boost our bilateral trade.

4. In order to better examine the opportunities for increased trade between our two countries, I have brought with me a small group of Malaysian businessmen who, in the next two days, will establish contacts and discuss possible trade deals with their Tunisian counterparts. I welcome reciprocal visits from Tunisian businessmen to Malaysia. I am confident that with the Bilateral Payments Arrangement and the Trade Agreement that were signed between our two countries, bilateral trade will increase in the years to come.

Your Excellency,

5. The need to strengthen economic relations between developing countries has made South-South cooperation even more necessary and urgent. This is particularly true in the light of several changes taking place recently. The attention paid by the rich industrialised North to the economic reconstruction of Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union means that less attention will be paid to the developing countries of the South. The deadlock in the Uruguay Round of multilateral trade negotiations under GATT and the emergence of trade blocs with protectionist tendencies, such as NAFTA and the European Single Market, would put developing countries which depend exclusively on the North for their markets at a great disadvantage. Lately, issues of the environment, human rights and intellectual property become valid excuses for the North to erect trade barriers against the South. Against such a scenario, South-South cooperation offers an excellent avenue for defending the economic interests of developing countries.

6. I have just returned from the Summit Meeting of the group for South-South Cooperation and Consultation, also known as the Group of 15, in Senegal, where several issues affecting South-South and North-South relations have been discussed. It was agreed that further efforts should be made to encourage and expand South-South cooperation. I am happy that a project initiated by Malaysia, that is the South Investment, Trade and Technology Data Exchange Centre (SITTDEC), the aim of which is to provide information and data regarding trade and investment opportunities available in member countries, is now operational. It is our hope that Tunisia would consider joining SITTDEC and benefit from its services.

7. Apart from enhancing bilateral trade between us, other

areas of cooperation should also be identified, for Malaysia and Tunisia possess expertise in different fields of science and technology. We note the excellence of the Tunisian institutions of higher learning where Malaysian students could pursue their studies in Islam and other professional fields. Tunisian students could also enrol in our institutions of higher learning, such as the International Islamic University in Kuala Lumpur which offers courses in various disciplines.

Your Excellency,

8. We have followed with deep admiration the active role that Tunisia has played in international diplomacy, in particular your efforts to bring about peace, stability and prosperity in your region. As a member of regional organisations such as the Arab league and the Arab Maghreb Union, you have contributed your ideas and resources to regional development. You have also played an active role in promoting cooperation and solidarity among Islamic nations. Tunisia's resolute stand in helping fellow Islamic countries and its readiness to work for peace and stability between nations is indeed laudable. An example is your unqualified support for the just struggle of the Palestinian people in realising their inalienable rights to an independent homeland. This is a position that Malaysia fully shares.

9. As a country which respects international law and morality and as Muslims, we abhor the policies of genocide and 'ethnic cleansing' perpetrated by the Serbs on Bosnians. We salute Tunisia's steadfast stand on this issue and pledge to work together with you to end the aggression and atrocities committed against the Bosnians.

Your Excellency,

10. It is my earnest hope that my visit today will open a new chapter in Tunisian-Malaysian friendship, firmly based on mutual goodwill and understanding and leading on to greater interactions in the field of economic development. On our part, we welcome this opportunity to rectify the caprices of history and set our future destinies on a path of greater convergence.

11. Allow me to express my gratitude to you once again, Mr Prime Minister for your friendship and the generous hospitality extended to me, my wife and members of my delegation.