

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

EVENT: TO THE ADDRESS OF WELCOME BY THE PRESIDENT OF CYPRUS AT THE
OPENING OF THE COMMONWEALTH HEADS OF GOVERNMENT MEETING

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TIME:

President Glafcos Clerides of Cyprus;
Heads of State and Government;
Secretary-General of the Commonwealth;
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is indeed a privilege and an honour for me to be among the speakers chosen to thank President Clerides and the people of Cyprus for their warm and gracious welcome to Commonwealth leaders who are gathered here today for the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM).

2. We share with you, Mr. President, your pride in playing host to this august gathering which will mark yet another milestone in the forging of friendship among a community of nations that calls itself the Commonwealth. Having had the experience of hosting CHOGM ourselves, Malaysia is well aware of the tremendous effort that has been put in by you Mr. President, by your government and by the people of Cyprus to make our stay here a memorable and comfortable one.

3. I am sure the other Commonwealth leaders would join me in expressing our most sincere appreciation for your gracious words of welcome and for your kind hospitality. Mr. President,

4. As we look back to our last meeting two years ago in Harare, we can take pride in the fact that the Commonwealth has moved many steps forward in several areas of cooperative endeavours.

5. The priorities we agreed on at Harare in charting a path for the Commonwealth through the 1990s and beyond are now being translated into action by our officials. The Steering Committee of Senior Officials, whose first meeting was chaired by Malaysia in April this year, will provide broad operational policy and resource allocation guidance to the work of the Secretariat in the furtherance of the priorities in the Harare Commonwealth Declaration. It is my hope that the Secretary-General will, within the framework of a more streamlined structure of the Commonwealth, continue to provide direction to the Secretariat in line with the same principle of good governance which the Commonwealth is advocating among member countries.

6. Within the context of Commonwealth political cooperation, our greatest success, since Harare, has no doubt been in South Africa. The Commonwealth has long struggled to dismantle all vestiges of apartheid in South Africa. We have led the international crusade to eradicate from our midst a practice which unjustly segregates man from man because of the colour of his skin. We have, CHOGM after CHOGM, pursued the matter with relentless fervour. We have kept the issue under constant scrutiny. It is therefore with a great sense of gratification that we, in the Commonwealth, welcome the recent passage of the bill on the establishment of the Transitional Executive Council by the South African Parliament. We hail this event as an irreversible step that will bring South Africa nearer to the Commonwealth goal of a free, democratic, non-racial and prosperous country. While there is still some way to go before this goal is fully achieved, we nevertheless see this bold step taken by the South African people as a determined and genuine desire to see the end of apartheid. We are all, I am sure, ready to help South Africa recover from the after effects of sanctions.

7. Our gratification, Mr. President, at the developments in South Africa comes from the knowledge that we have succeeded in bringing justice and equality to our brothers there. Our gratification comes from the knowledge that our efforts have not been in vain. Most of all, our gratification comes from the knowledge and belief that through concerted efforts even the most intractable of political problems, apartheid, can be resolved. There is a lesson to be learnt here. World leaders, in trying to find a solution to the problems in Bosnia-Herzegovina and elsewhere, can usefully draw upon the Commonwealth experience in South Africa.

8. Just as we can join forces in bringing pressure to bear on the white South African government to tear down the walls of apartheid, so can we join forces to bring pressure to bear on the powers who hold the key to the solution of the Bosnian problem.

9. The position of Malaysia on Bosnia-Herzegovina is well known. Many are inclined to think that we are influenced by our common religion. I would like to point out that Malaysia had been equally active and as vehement in South Africa, Namibia, Cambodia and other non-Muslim communities which faced similar problems. We feel strongly when injustice and oppression are perpetrated anywhere. The incessant slaughter of innocent people, young and old in Bosnia-Herzegovina, continues under the full glare of media coverage -- served to us on our television screens together with our evening meals. The bloody massacre turns even the most sturdy of stomachs. And all for what? For the sake of territorial aggrandisement! For the sake of ethnic superiority! For the sake of a Serbian dream! Enough is enough. We in the Commonwealth must help to find an

equitable and just solution to this holocaust if we want to stand tall and uphold the very principles we had so vehemently lauded in Harare, that is:

- the protection and promotion of democracy -
the protection and promotion of fundamental human rights

10. Some of us even went so far as to say that where human rights violations are concerned we have a right to intervene even in the internal affairs of a country. Yet in Bosnia-Herzegovina, where ethnic cleansing involves blatant murders and rapes of Bosnian Muslims by Bosnian Serbs aided by the Serbian Government of rump Yugoslavia, the righteousness that some of us display over minor infringements of human rights, is remarkably absent. Instead the Serbs are to be rewarded with territories they have ethnically cleansed. Can we in the Commonwealth who had appealed for outside cooperation to help some of our members in need, ignore the Bosnian tragedy and elect to be silent simply because this is not a Commonwealth affair?

11. Elsewhere on the political and economic front, there are other crucial issues to be addressed. While we rejoice at the recent signing of the Peace Accord between Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organisation, we grieve at the news of the ongoing conflicts in Somalia, in Georgia and in other regions of the world. While we welcome the economic success of many emerging 'dragons and tigers', we worry about growing protectionism through the emergence of trade blocs. We keep hoping, as we had hoped all these years, that the Uruguay Round of trade negotiations, the guardian of free trade, will come to a conclusive end by the close of this year.

12. The CHOGM Executive Sessions that will begin this afternoon will provide us with the opportunity to deliberate at length on these issues of common concern. Since the Commonwealth's membership spans the North-South divide, I have every hope that a common position on these issues can be fully explored and exploited. Malaysia has a number of issues it intends to raise including those pertaining to Commonwealth Functional Cooperation. Malaysia will be tabling some new proposals on the Commonwealth Consultative Group on Technology Management, a project approved at the Kuala Lumpur CHOGM in 1989.

Mr. President,

13. A gathering of nations is only worthwhile if it speaks with one voice. On South Africa, the Commonwealth not only spoke with one voice but acted in unison as well. The result is clear for everyone to see. But racial intolerance is not found only in South Africa. Easy mobility of people is making many countries multiracial. While countries have a right to favour their own citizens, I hope the Commonwealth will always stand united against the many forms of religious, racial and pigmental intolerance.

14. In conclusion Mr. President, I would like to recall my statement, said tongue-in-cheek at earlier CHOGMS, that there is no common `wealth' in the Commonwealth. I would like to add a sequel to that statement here in Cyprus by saying that we can, if we want, make common `wealth' out of the Commonwealth. And this common `wealth' need not necessarily be confined to material wealth. It should transcend the material to include racial harmony and religious tolerance.

15. Once again, Mr President, on behalf of my wife and members of my delegation, I would like to thank you for your warm words of welcome and for your most gracious hospitality. I look forward to our deliberations in Limassol and Paphos under your skillful chairmanship.

Thank you.