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(PRIME MINISTER)

EVENT: THE SEVENTH ISLAMIC SUMMIT CONFERENCE

VENUE: CASABLANCA, MOROCCO

DATE: 13 DEC 1994

TIME:

It is indeed a privilege and an honour for me to be asked to speak on behalf of the Asian Group on this auspicious occasion commemorating the 25th Anniversary of the OIC.

2. We are pleased that our Summit is taking place in Morocco, the birth place of our Organisation. We share with you, Your Majesty, your pride in playing host for the third time to the Islamic Summit coinciding as it does with the twenty fifth anniversary of the founding of the OIC. Morocco under Your Majesty's wise guidance has played a leading role in advancing Islamic solidarity and cooperation. I am confident that during your tenure as Chairman of this Organisation, Your Majesty will continue to play an active and effective role in articulating the interests of the Ummah.

3. On this august occasion it is only appropriate that we should pay tribute to the founding fathers of the Organisation whose vision and foresight have given Islamic nations and the Ummah an indispensable forum to pursue their common aims and aspirations. In this regard Malaysia is proud to have been able to contribute to the Organisation during its formative years.

4. As we look back towards the past twenty-five years, we can take reasonable pride in the fact that our Organisation had been able to articulate the common concerns and interests of member states and the Ummah and had succeeded in bringing these issues to the forefront of the international agenda. Our Organisation has gained recognition in pursuing the cause of the Palestinian liberation and Al-Quds. We have been continuously engaged in trying to find peaceful solution to the conflicts and disputes which have affected many of our members. We have also evolved organisationally, from one primarily concerned with the challenge following the tragedy at the Al-Aqsa Mosque to the promotion of economic, commercial and cultural cooperation among member states. The enlargement of our membership from the initial 22 in 1969 to 52 today, including significantly those from the newly independent states of Central Asia, had further enriched and strengthened the Organisation.

5. While we have moved many steps forward, it would be wrong for us to ignore our failures. We could have done more if we are more united. We could have a stronger voice in world affairs if we are more cohesive. We would have been more credible if we are more efficient, and truly committed to our cause. Muslims would have been held in higher esteem and respect if our economies are strong and our governments are more effective and stable. It is therefore appropriate on this auspicious occasion for us to reflect on our weaknesses as well as our strengths and to reaffirm our sincere resolve to seek ways to strengthen our Organisation so that it can play the role as the credible voice of Islamic solidarity and cooperation.

6. On this occasion, it is appropriate for us to take note of the rapid transformation that is taking place following the end of the cold war. A new world order or more likely, disorder will unavoidably impact upon us and our interests. This Organisation and the Ummah need to be appropriately equipped to respond to the challenges and opportunities that the 21st century will present. We need to be more serious and committed towards enhancing the effectiveness of the Organisation when called upon to do so. It is imperative that we discard practices and values which are neither truly Islamic nor relevant and instead promote greater discipline in our observance of those Islamic virtues which in the first century of the Hijrah helped to spread the faith far and wide.

7. I am happy to note that our meeting here has taken recognition of these realities. Our Ministers have agreed to the establishment of an Eminent Persons Group to take stock of our achievements and our weaknesses and to provide guidance for the future direction of this Organisation. We, the Heads of Government should endorse it. I am confident that with Your Majesty's wisdom, we will successfully evolve a strategy for the rebirth of Islamic unity and the restoration of our credibility as a force for a more equitable and just world.

8. In the short space of time available I would like to go straight to the matters which are of concern to the Muslim Ummah and their countries.

9. We must admit that the Muslim Ummah and Muslim countries are still under threat and are very weak. We do much damage to ourselves by our lack of cooperation and our frequently violent and debilitating struggles for power in our own countries. As a result, whenever our brothers are in need of help, not only are we unable to extend meaningful help, but we are even unable to influence those agencies whose decisions and actions will affect the fate of our brothers.

10. We understand that in our society as in other societies

there are groups outside the power structure who feel strongly and are frustrated about what takes place within their societies. But extremism and violence is not the answer. Extremism begets extremism and violence begets violence. Even if they succeed in seizing power the same extremism and violence will assail them. In the end Islam and the Islamic Ummah will remain weak and continue to be pawns in other peoples' political games.

11. We cannot achieve everything that we wish to achieve overnight. The road to strength and greatness can be accelerated but it will still take time. We must accept small gains if we cannot achieve quantum leaps. Most of us I believe are unhappy with the progress of the peace process in Palestine. The Israelis have been dilatory and insincere. But wrecking the peace process will not get us anywhere. Indeed if the sabotage succeeds it will force us to begin all over again. And how can we believe that the strategy which got us nowhere after decades of costly struggle will achieve success if we begin again? I would appeal to all our Palestinian patriots of all shades and political leanings to unite and strengthen their resolve so that the small gains that they have made can be consolidated and enhanced. In time you will achieve your objective. It is absurd to think that by fighting each other you will advance your cause. You will, albeit inadvertently, be helping the Israelis and the other enemies of Islam.

12. In Bosnia-Herzegovina we must admit that we are ineffective, if not completely irrelevant. The Europeans have blatantly declared their intention to leave our Muslim brothers in Bosnia- Herzegovina at the mercy of the genocidal Serbs. If they do, we will be equally guilty. For we have left our Muslim brothers at the mercy of the Serbs long ago.

13. There is quite a lot that we can do. I need not elaborate here. It need only the political will. There is no doubt as to what Islam wants us to do. Whether we do it or not is really a measure of our commitment to our faith.

14. I am sure that we are all here because we take our responsibilities to the Muslim Ummah and to humanity in general seriously. Malaysia is ready to contribute whatever little we have to resolve the problems facing us, insya-Allah.

15. We pray that Allah Subhanahu wa Ta'ala will guide us and give us courage so that we will make the right decisions and succeed in our endeavours.

16. I thank you, Your Majesty.