

SPEECH BY: DATO' SERI DR. MAHATHIR BIN MOHAMAD

(PRIME MINISTER)

EVENT: THE OFFICIAL DINNER IN HONOUR OF H.E. MR MELES ZENAWI,
PRIME MINISTER OF THE FEDERAL DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF ETHIOPIA

VENUE: SRI PERDANA, KUALA LUMPUR

DATE: 22 OCT 1998

TIME:

It gives me great pleasure to once again bid Your

Excellency a very warm welcome to Malaysia. We are delighted that you are able to accept our invitation. The visit gives us an opportunity to express the friendship that Malaysia has always had for Ethiopia. It also demonstrates the value of consultation in pursuit of mutually beneficial co-operation.

2. Your official visit today is of special significance to all Malaysians. It is almost three decades to the day, as it were, that His Imperial Majesty Haile Selassie was the first Head of State of Africa to visit our country in May 1968. We still cherish the memory of that landmark visit. His Majesty the Emperor's visit was a significant forerunner to closer ties not only between Malaysia and Ethiopia, but also between Malaysia and other African countries.

3. Indeed, Ethiopia was among the first countries with which Malaysia established diplomatic relations following our independence. Malaysia established our Embassy in Addis Ababa in April 1965. While Malaysia was compelled to close our Embassy there in 1983 as we, for some unknown reasons, were no longer welcomed by the regime of Mengistu Mariam, fortunately, this has not in any way diminished our sentiments towards, and solidarity with, the people of Ethiopia.

4. Malaysia understands and sympathises with the pains and deprivation that Ethiopia has suffered because of the prolonged civil war which was aided and abetted by foreign interests. From being one of the world's most renowned civilisations, it is sad and regrettable that Ethiopia was a victim of such a tragedy.

5. We, in Malaysia, have watched with interest and admiration the efforts of Your Excellency to consolidate the peace acquired through much hardship and sacrifice. We

also know that it is due to your untiring determination that Ethiopia has progressed after two decades of civil strife to become a united and forward-looking nation that it is today.

6. Although our countries have had very little contact, particularly during the past three decades, we have many things in common. We are both multi-cultural countries and we believe in power sharing as reflected in the consensus-seeking spirit underlying the concept of our governments. The success of both our peoples depends on our ability to promote positive co-operation and co-existence between all our peoples. Ethiopia and Malaysia must contend with the challenge of bridging the gap between the different segments of our societies.

7. This means that both countries attach high priority to promoting rapid and sustained economic growth for a better life for all our peoples. The key to fair income distribution is to ensure that everyone gets an equitable share of an enlarged cake - rather than trying to redistribute the crumbs of a shrinking cake more evenly. In other words, we do not deprive one segment of society in order to help another. The redistribution is from the new growth part.

8. Malaysia's relations with Africa go a long way. It began as early as 1961. Four years into our Independence, Malaysian soldiers participated in the UN peacekeeping operation in the very heart of Africa, the Congo. Since then, Malaysia has contributed to eight UN operations in Africa alone. Even today, our soldiers and police are in Africa under the Blue Beret.

9. Malaysia has also established fruitful and mutually beneficial relations with many African countries. Today, trade, investment, and development cooperation links as much as ties between and among cultural and sporting groups have increased. Malaysia's relations with fellow members of the developing world is, therefore, based on the sharing of our experience and exchange of information. We have much to gain by cooperating with one another, and in doing so, prospering together.

10. We are impressed that Ethiopia has begun in earnest to rebuild itself and is determined to lay the foundation for durable peace, both at home and in the Horn of Africa. We commend Your Excellency's role in seeking resolution to the problems in southern Sudan and in Somalia.

11. In the spirit of South-South Co-operation, Malaysia will do its utmost to co-operate with Ethiopia in its efforts at national reconciliation. Malaysia is also ready to share its experience in the development and management of Ethiopia's agricultural, agro-based,

telecommunication and hydro-carbon sectors. In this connection, we welcome Ethiopian officials to visit Malaysia to exchange views and experiences.

12. Your visit has certainly laid the basis for mutually beneficial relationship, not only between Ethiopia and Malaysia, but also between Africa, ASEAN and East Asia.

13. I would like, once again, to express our pleasure in welcoming Your Excellency and members of your delegation to Malaysia, and hope your stay in our country will be both enjoyable and memorable.