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EVENT: KUALA LUMPUR WORLD PEACE CONFERENCE

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TIME:

It is with optimism for a better future that I welcome the inauguration of the Kuala Lumpur World Peace Conference. I congratulate the Malaysian World Peace Foundation for organising this very important conference at this critical juncture. I would also like to thank the Foundation for the invitation and honour of declaring open this conference.

2. In recent times we have seen some of the worst international violence in the history of mankind. While frustrated and angry young people crashed their aircrafts into buildings, killing a few thousand innocent people, the retaliation that this triggered is no less brutal, killing innumerable innocent people, unconnected with Sept 11. It is therefore timely that we make some effort to return to sanity, to the peaceful settlement of disputes between nations and religions.

3. But some would question why Malaysia should take this initiative. Malaysia had known wars, conventional and guerrilla. But Malaysia had striven to settle conflicts within it and between it and other countries in a peaceful way, through negotiations rather than confrontations and wars. And Malaysia has largely succeeded. We regard no one as an enemy against whom we should war. And domestically we have avoided violent confrontations between the peoples of different races.

4. If I may I would like to say that the world should take note of the way Malaysia achieves these things. I do not suggest our way is the best for everyone, but I do suggest that we are a relevant example of how the differences between people can be settled without violence.

5. I hope our foreign guests will experience this for themselves as they meet and mix with ordinary Malaysians. There is some tension, some disagreement but by and large Malaysians of every race and strata get along quite well with each other. They live

together, work together and play together. Inter-racial marriage is not common. No one seeks to assimilate anyone else. But we do seek to integrate and we have done this quite well.

6. There are very many differences within our multiracial society but we focus more on what is common than on what is different. We have learnt to tolerate each other. I apologise if I seem to be holding up Malaysia as an example of peaceful coexistence. But I have to do this because almost every report by the foreign media would begin with the famous "Although" i.e. "Although Malaysia appears to be peaceful, actually it is not." They suggest that Malaysia is about to burst in flames as the races go at each other's throats. That it has not done so for years and years does not stop them from predicting violent racial conflicts in Malaysia.

7. As I said, this conference is timely. It has brought together several of the world's prominent statesmen and thinkers to share their views on peace and lend their support to our endeavour.

8. The Malaysia World Peace Foundation has created the Kuala Lumpur World Peace Award. Malaysia is a Muslim country and we think it is appropriate that a Muslim country should initiate this Peace Award. Many may not believe it but Islam, the religion of the Muslims, means peace. When we greet each other we say "Peace be upon you". Incidentally the Jews also greet in the same way. "Shalom" means peace. If there seems to be no peace in the Islamic world, especially between Muslims and Jews it is not because of religion. It is simply because of human cussedness, contrariness.

9. You will recall the violence of Christendom as it expanded. The Jews were subjected to periodical pogroms because they were supposed to slaughter Christian children in order to use their blood for religious ceremonies. The Christians were also very intolerant of their own heretics. The Spanish Inquisition saw the fake trials and burnings at the stakes of the Christian heretics. And when Christians discovered new land, they forced the conversion of the natives on pain of death. They claim that it was their Manifest Destiny to bring Christianity and civilisation to the natives, failing which they should exterminate the heathens.

10. But we all know that there was nothing Christian in all these things that they had done. Christianity was a convenient excuse for doing un-Christian things. Similarly many Muslims invoke Islam when they commit unIslamic things. The Al-Quran is very clear. Muslims can only fight in self-defense. And when the enemy

sues for peace Muslims must respond positively.

11. It is therefore right for a Muslim country, a peaceful Muslim country, to campaign for peace and to create a World Peace Award. We have made our first award to the most deserving person in our times. President Jacques Chirac of France, the first recipient has courted unpopularity in his rejection of war as an instrument of policy. He is the only First World leader who remained in close contact with the condemned leaders of the third World and tried to reason with them. No sabre rattling. Only friendly ears. And when it came to the crunch, to be with or to be against, he chose to stand firm on his principles. It is therefore only right that he should get this first Kuala Lumpur World Peace Award.

12. If all the world leaders are like President Chirac, peace would have a better chance. But unfortunately leaders, even popular leaders, differ greatly. And so war as an instrument of national policy is still with us. It is a truism that the people who want war most are those who believe they can win the war. The least warlike are those who know they would lose.

13. Peace has to be fought for, not on the battle fields but in the conference rooms. There is no such thing as a war to end all wars, a war for permanent peace. The first and second world wars were billed as the wars to end all wars. But war is still very much with us, as we have seen recently.

14. Unfortunately to neglect defence because we believe in peace is likely to invite attacks and war. That is because we still have warlike predators in this world. The whole world must fully believe in peace before we can stop wasting money on defense.

15. The destruction wrought by the nuclear bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki frightened the world. A nuclear war can really completely destroy this world. A Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty was crafted for all to subscribe to. But the powerful countries capable of producing nuclear weapons refused to sign. They went ahead to develop and produce nuclear weapons and store enough of them to destroy all the living creatures together with this world. Today one bloc has given up. There really is no credible enemy for the winning bloc. Yet the preparation for war goes on and never and more lethal nuclear weapons are being produced and stored in readiness for war.

16. But now even the poor can produce lethal nuclear devices thanks to the warlike rich and their ingenuity. Unable to use nuclear explosives, the diabolical

scientists of the rich have coated their ordinary bullets with nuclear waste material. If the bullet does not kill immediately, the wounds would be contaminated with radio-active material to cause lethal diseases later. Obviously if the radio-active material coats even simple explosives, the effect would be more lethal than normal. And so we must now fear dirty bombs.

17. In today's war everyone is on the frontline. Ordinary non-combatants are as much the targets as are the soldiers. Their death is not even honoured. They are called collaterals. To the devastating effect of shrapnels carried by bombs and missiles, there are now the cluster-bombs dispersing bomblets over a wide area, bomblets which explode on contact, killing innocent children who picked them up.

18. To make sure that bunkers and shelters deep down in the ground are destroyed, bombs are being invented with nuclear warheads to penetrate deep into the ground before exploding. Incendiary bombs are invented so as to explode in front of caves sucking and burning all the oxygen and asphyxiating those hiding in the caves.

19. Heat seeking and laser guided missiles are supposed to be smart. But too often they hit the wrong targets. And so hospitals and schools are hit.

20. Rockets can now be fired from hundreds of miles away or indeed from more than a thousand miles away. Borders and frontline; mean nothing anymore. Everyone in a country at war is in the frontline, is the target. Still the search for more efficient so-called conventional weapons goes on. Eliminating nuclear weapons will not end wars, for conventional weapons are as much weapons of mass destruction as are nuclear weapons. And now we have gas and germs to spread death with equal efficiency.

21. The strange thing is that as soon as a new weapon is invented a defense against it would follow. Then there would be a weapon which can overcome the defense. And then a new defense system would be invented to counter the weapons which can penetrate the defense. And so it goes on, consuming huge sums of money as they are researched, tested, produced and stored or provided to the armed forces.

22. If there is no war then all these very expensive weapons would be a waste. There is therefore an itch to test these weapons in real war conditions. And so little wars are encouraged so these weapons can be tested. Off and on a fairly major war would be launched deliberately for no very good reason. And the weapons are gleefully used in these real life tests. And their effectiveness are evaluated so that they can

be improved and made even more lethal.

23. To recover some of the cost of developing these weapons, the rich countries hawk their weapons all over the world. Poor countries are advised by high pressure arms salesmen to buy and equip their armed forces with these weapons. To encourage them, it was pointed out that their neighbours have already bought or are about to buy these weapons. If attacked by their neighbours they would suffer huge losses and damage. So they must buy even if their neighbours are friendly. And when they buy, their neighbours far and near would be persuaded to buy the weapons so as not to be considered behind the times. And so the small countries expend huge sums of money, money which they can ill afford on arms, which in most instances they would never use and which would become out of date and would need to be replaced by new state of the art murder weapons.

24. The media belonging to the countries selling the arms condemn these small countries for entering into an arms race and wasting money. They never condemn the high pressure salesman or the vast sums expended in the research and production of these weapons by the rich.

25. The cost escalates all the time. A fighter aircraft used to cost a few million dollars a piece. Now they cost well over a hundred million, and more for the ground support necessary to keep them flying. Weapons may represent an investment for the security of a nation but otherwise they have no return on investment. If there is no research into newer weapons and everyone is equipped with old fashioned rifles, the winners would still win and the losers would still lose. The number of casualties would be less, and the money saved can be expended on human welfare. Whether rifles or rockets the result would be the same, one side will win, the other will lose.

26. In the old days wars were fought by armies led into battle by their generals. The chances of the generals getting killed during the battles were as good as those of their soldiers. Generals were therefore wary of wars and battles.

27. But today the generals operate from command and control centres hundreds of miles away from the killing fields. Civilian leaders actually stay at home, with armies of security guards to protect them. For the leaders making war is easy, especially war against weak and easily defeated enemies. Thus the desire to wage wars at the slightest excuse.

28. Just as no one dares to criticise an oppressive leader, no one dares to say anything against the powerful countries. The risk of being invaded and

occupied is real. Or at the very least there would be sanctions, the modern equivalent of the historical siege, when everyone, guilty or innocent would be made to suffer until they surrender.

29. Unable to win a conventional war, the weak has resorted to terror attacks. Governments may not approve of this but there is no way the governments can discipline their angry and frustrated people. If the governments try to stop their people, they, the government leaders would be killed by these people. The quandary the governments are in is obvious. It is a case of being damned if you do and being damned if you don't.

30. But is peace for the world, for the countries and the peoples of the world possible? Of course it is. It would be a sad commentary on our 21st Century civilisation if we accept that peace is impossible, that the world must always live in fear of war, must always arm to the teeth at tremendous cost and still be in fear. It is even sadder when our 21st Century civilisation accepts that the weak must continue to be bullied and hegemonised by the strong.

31. Peace is possible if we make exceptions for no one in terms of submission to the only International authority that we have, the United Nations. It is presently not a democratic organisation, prevented from being so by the very people who preach democracy. But it is still the only international authority that we have. We have to make it work. And it can work if the powerful countries restore its credibility by respecting it and the decisions made by it.

32. Secondly, peace can be had if the avaricious and the greedy are curbed. Having exploited their own countries to the maximum they are now bent on exploiting the whole world. They invent all kinds of spurious reasons to legitimise their exploitation. Despite frothing at the mouth promoting democracy, the rule of law and human rights, these same people deny democracy by insisting that the market must discipline governments, even elected governments. The market, or rather the very rich business and money manipulators are elected by no one. They may be rich and powerful but they represent no one but themselves. If we allow these greedy people to rule the world, we might as well forget about democracy.

33. Their selfish exploitation of the world has impoverished countries and people so much that a backlash by the very poor is inevitable. Unfortunately instead of dealing with this social ill, the powerful can only see democratisation and the free market as the solution. Yet these very solutions are the causes of

the extreme disparities which make peace impossible.

34. Aggression by democratic forces and the free market is no different from aggression by authoritarian and closed markets which the Communist countries once represented. Yet if the democrats are truly democratic, they can do so much to curb aggression, to be sensitive to the problems of the poor majority and to help remove the extreme disparities between rich and poor which are the causes of unrest, violence and terrorism, i.e. the absence of peace.

35. Modern nations tax the rich in order to provide for the poor, thereby reducing the disparities and the possibility of violent confrontations between rich and poor. Society becomes more stable and peaceful where there is more equitability all round.

36. Similarly in a globalised world the rich countries and the rich people must be taxed in order to alleviate the poverty of poor countries and poor people. They need not be made dependent on the rich forever but they should be helped through the provision of the necessary basic amenities for them to exploit the wealth of their countries themselves.

37. Only when wealth is fairly and evenly distributed in the globalised world community will we be free from the tensions, the bitterness and the anger which make the deprived resort to violence and terrorism, breaking the peace.

38. The disparities in the world today was once reflected in Malaysia. Wealth used to belong only to one community while the other communities remained extremely poor. The tension caused by this situation lead to racial riots, destruction of property and death of many in 1969. To avoid a recurrence the government launched an affirmative action plan designed to reduce the disparities between the races and eradicate poverty among all.

39. Over a period of time with the reduction in the disparities the tension eased. And so when the economic crisis of 1997-1998 brought great hardship to the people, there were no race riots as there were in other similarly affected countries.

40. The World needs affirmative action between countries so that the disparities between rich and poor countries worldwide are reduced and tension minimised. With this peace would be possible.

41. For the countries and peoples of the world valuing peace must be cultivated deliberately, must be made a part of the national cultures beginning in the schools

and throughout life. This culture must be adopted fully and seriously especially by the powerful countries of the world, by their people. We need a culture of Peace particularly among those who are arming themselves to the teeth, who constantly develop arms and who sell them to confronting pairs of countries.

42. This conference is timely. It is a small step but it is the correct step. The powerful are not interested in peace. Only the weak are. And the weak must together initiate and promote peace.

43. Fortunately there are many from the powerful countries who believe in peace. We should welcome their cooperation. They can help to spread the word among the people who matter, the people who are rich and powerful. In the final analysis unless the powerful reject war as an instrument of national policy peace would be impossible.

44. I welcome you to peaceful Malaysia. Many have tried to destabilise this country. But they have failed. They failed because the vast majority of Malaysians believe in peace. God willing they will always be steadfast in the struggle for peace. This conference holds a lot of meaning and hope for Malaysia, and for the weak in the world.

45. We therefore await the results of this conference and the steps that you propose to take. I wish you success in your deliberations.

46. With that I take great pleasure in declaring the Kuala Lumpur Peace Conference open.