

**KEYNOTE ADDRESS BY TUN DR MAHATHIR BIN MOHAMAD
AT THE ARAB INTERNATIONAL CONGREGATION
FOR THE RIGHT OF RETURN AT DAMASCUS, SYRIA
ON 23 NOVEMBER 2008**

1. Bismillahirohmanirrohim. Assalamualaikum warahmatulla
hiwabarakatuh.

2. Firstly I would like to thank the Government of Syria for the hospitality extended to me and for its unfailing support for the Palestinian cause.

3. All Praise be to Allah by whose grace we are able to gather here today to remember, to not forget the injustice perpetrated upon our brothers and sisters, the peoples of Palestine 60 years ago, in May 1948.

4. On that infamous day in May 1948 our brothers and sisters, their fathers and mothers and their children were expelled from their country, from their land and their homes, expelled cruelly by Zionist forces as the British, the Americans and the Russians looked on and basically abetted in these heinous crimes. The rest of the world cared nothing for the catastrophe, the Nakba the tragedy that had been deliberately visited by the Zionist upon the people who had been their hosts before, who had allowed them to immigrate and settle on their land thinking that as in the past, during the great days when Muslims ruled the land, the newcomers would live in peace with them.

5. But the Jewish immigrants from Europe and elsewhere had other intentions. They came not to live in peace with the Palestinian people but to seize the country and make it their own. It was an insidious invasion no left, help by the British and the Americans.

6. Perhaps it is not strange at all to see the Americans and the British aiding and abetting the Zionists invasion of Palestine. The British and the Americans had done this same thing to a lot of other people before. In the Americas, Australia and New Zealand they had also seized other peoples' land and committed genocide in the process.

7. This is the way of the British and other Europeans. This is the way of the Americans. Seizing other people's land and setting and committing genocide is normal and proper to them.

8. It is not surprising therefore that in order to atone for their crimes against the Jews, they should abet in the seizure of the land of the Palestinians to create a Jewish state.

9. The expectation of these people who seized other people's land is always the same. They expect their past black deeds to be forgotten and their ownership of the land they had stolen would in time this forgotten, would no longer be disputed. But their seizure of other peoples land must never be forgotten. It must always be disputed until justice is done.

10. That is why this gathering is very important.

11. The Palestinians must not forget the Nakba and the world must also not be allowed to forget this injustice.

12. Today the Palestinians have to live outside their land as refugees, living mostly in makeshift camps, without proper facilities, housing etc. They are denied their rights to live like normal people.

13. There are now 4 million of them, deprived of their rights as citizens of their country. Their children do not have the same rights and future as other children.

14. The Palestine refugees are not even allowed to return to the land which was theirs before and is still by whatever criteria.

15. Everyday more and more of their land is being stolen. Illegal Jewish settlers build permanent settlements on their land. They are not even allowed to use the roads built on their land. And they are forcibly separated by walls from their own kith and kin. Even villages are split by the wall. The Jews have learnt a lot about Nazi methods. They railed against the Nazis but what they are doing is no different and no better.

16. Truly no other people have been treated the way the Palestinian people have been treated.

17. The world talks of human rights. If one Chinese man is denied the right to speak against his own Government the whole world would condemn this deprivation of a minor right of just one person. But when four million Palestinians are expelled from their own country, are not allowed to return, are frequently attacked by the Zionists and their American and British allies, the world is deathly silent.

18. There really is a lot of hypocrisy in the world today.

19. I am against violence. I am against war. But when people are violently attacked they have a right to defend themselves.

20. When people are deprived of their country and are not able to fight conventional wars to liberate their country then they will have to resort to other ways.

21. Blowing oneself up is not the most pleasant way to die. But when this is the only way to attack the oppressors, to defend yourself, then, pleasant or not you will have to blow yourself up.

22. If by doing this your enemies are blown up together with you, can these desperate suicide bombers be called terrorists? If they are terrorists because they allegedly commit acts of terror, because they terrify people, don't the people who drop bombs on innocent people, who fire missiles at people, don't they terrify their victims? If they terrify people, are not their acts also acts of terror? Are they not terrorists?

23. Actually more people, ordinary civilians are terrified of being bombed and killed by trained military murderers than are the people who are terrified and killed by suicide bombers. By any standard the bombers and people who launched missiles at human targets are worst terrorists. They do not even risk being killed or injured. Whereas the suicide bombers invariably get killed when they explode their bombs, the trained bombers will go back to celebrate over glasses of beer their murderous acts.

24. If we do not want to see suicide bombers blowing themselves up, than the people who drop bombs or launch missiles against innocent people should stop such acts of terror.

25. If we do not want to see both acts of terror, if the world abhors terrorism then the world must not close their collective eyes to the injustice perpetrated against the Palestinian people.

26. Let us not hear of the Jews being the first people in Palestine and that there never were a Palestine or Palestinian people. If the first people must be recognised as having a greater right, then let us see America, Australia and New Zealand return to the Red Indians, the aborigines of Australia and the Maoris of New Zealand their lands. If the world would not accept this kind of claim then the Jews should not use this as the basis for their claim.

27. The fact is that the Palestinian people had been living in Palestine long before the Crusades. When the Crusaders came Palestinians were under the rule of the Arabs. The people the Crusaders seized the country from were Arabs. The people who re-conquered Palestine and ruled it until after the First World War were Arabs. The Palestine that was made a Mandated territory under the British was the Palestine of the Palestinian Arabs. It was not the Israel of the Jews, though there were Jews in Arab Palestine.

28. At no time did the Crusaders or the First World War Allies deal with a Jewish Government or with Jews when they conquered Palestine, or when they made Palestine a Mandated territory.

29. The Jews who were involved in setting up Israel on Palestine soil were never the inhabitants of the land the world recognized as Palestine. They were foreigners, most of whom were citizens of European countries. And they were terrorists. The Irgun and the Haganah were terrorists led by terrorists.

30. At the time when Palestine became a mandated territory there was only a tiny number of Jews in Palestine. These were mainly the descendants of the Jews who had lived in the land they called Palestine. They never called it Israel, nor claim that the Palestinian Arabs were living in their State of Israel.

31. So how can the Jews now claim they have a legitimate right to the land of the Palestinians which they now call Israel? The State of Israel is totally artificial – a creation of people foreign to the land, a creation of non-Jews of Europe in collaboration with European Jews.

32. It is this artificial state unjustly created by foreigners on Palestine land which ever since its creation has plunged the region and indeed the whole world into violence, terrorism and wars.

33. It is this disregard for the rights of the Palestinians, in particular the right of return that has triggered off tension between people who had for centuries lived together in peace.

34. It is this gross injustice which has made a reality of the clash of civilization.

35. The clash, the tensions, the violence and the wars will not end until justice is done to the most unfortunate victims.

36. The Palestine peoples whether Muslims or Christians must continue their struggle for the right of return.

37. Theirs is a just struggle and justice must triumph finally.

38. The cost will be high for the Palestinians but the cost will be higher for those who aided and abetted in this act of injustice. For 60 years the world had to pay a price for this injustice and the price will continue to be paid as long as the Palestinian people's claims are met.

39. We are with the Palestinians in their just struggle and we will support it till justice is done.