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BTE. MOHD. ALI AT THE GATHERING  
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It is indeed a great honour and privilege for me to be invited by the President, on behalf of the Pan-Pacific and Southeast Asian Women's Association of the United States of America, Inc., to address this gathering. I wish to convey to you warm greetings from the women's organisations in Kuala Lumpur, particularly from BAKTI, the Welfare Organisation formed by wives of Cabinet Ministers and Deputy Ministers, and the wives of President of the Upper House and Speaker of the Lower House of Parliament, the Asean Women's Circle and the National Council of Women Organisations. Some of the members have been here with you as wives of the Malaysian Diplomatic Corp and participated in PPSEAWA activities during their stay here. I was made to understand that the Malaysian members were responsible for initiating the rotational tea parties that you have.

2. I understand that your Association has made immense contributions in affairs not only which affect women but also which have important bearing on humanity. Living in a world fraught with uncertainty and turbulence, women cannot afford but to be interested in world affairs. I am most impressed with your participation and contributions in major forums such as the United Nations Non-Governmental Organisation Conference on the Arms Race, and the Human Race and at World Conference on the United Nations Decade for Women at Copenhagen in 1980. I wish to congratulate you for your commendable achievements.

3. I have found it difficult to select a topic for this occasion but to be amongst you today gives me a special feeling of being a part of a big family just as every nation is a part of an inter-dependent international community.

4. Speaking of nations, while inter-dependence can have its positive version, the order of things that have come about cannot be said to be an equitable one. Everyone seems to be concerned with prolonged human sufferings inflicted on a great portion of the world and the potential destruction that mankind can inflict upon himself as a whole. Is it the size of the problem, its complexity, or could it be that we lack will power that the problem is still very much part of us? I cannot claim to be competent in world affairs and international relations and I don't even know whether I have got quite near enough to the answer. Yet, I believe, that if each nation can be left to concentrate on improving its welfare, and that if there is genuine caring and feeling among the family of nations, perhaps the world can be a better place for all.

5. I believe that there is a place for all. And for women, we do have an important role in the context of our family, society and the world at large. It is against this backdrop that I would like to share my thoughts with you on the topic of "Women in Development in Malaysia."

6. Malaysia is a federation of thirteen states and the Federal Territory with an area of 330,432 sq. km. and a population of about 14 million. Prior to our independence in August 1957 we were under the British. We have a system of parliamentary democracy with a constitutional monarchy. Our independence though often referred to as handed to us 'on a silver platter' was not without problems. Not only did the British leave us with an economy that was meant to serve them but also a population consisting of Malays, or bumiputera, and a large number of immigrants, mainly Chinese

and Indians who were brought in by the British to help exploit the economic resources of the country. Thus, on independence, Malaysia was faced with an intricate problem of bringing together the various communities who have lived separately into a nation. At the same time, communist terrorism posed a serious security problem to us.

7. But we managed. We managed to contain the menace of the communist terrorists, and we managed to set working on the goals of a united and prosperous Malaysia. The process was by no means easy. Our multiracial population was very much entangled with the delicate problem of the identification of race with economic activities and vocations. We were set on the course of development. However, in the May 1969 elections the campaign was used by certain quarters to exploit ethnic sentiments, and the jubilation of election victory by these quarters led to racial clashes. Fortunately the riots was confined to the capital city Kuala Lumpur. This incident was a painful lesson which required us to address the problems boldly at source and to seek solutions.

8. Following the incident the country was placed under emergency rule for a short spell of one and half years. When the situation improved the country reverted to parliamentary democracy charting for itself a new course of action. The disturbances, in a way, could be likened to a mild heart seizure. It afforded us time to reexamine ourselves, to reflect and to assess where we had gone wrong. Having thoroughly diagnosed the symptoms we prescribed the medication in the form of firstly, the creation of the "Rukunegara" or the national ideology which expounds the basic tenets for the development of a fair, just and equitable society, and secondly, the formulation of a New Economic Policy which aims at eradicating of poverty irrespective of race and the restructuring of society so as to eliminate the identification of race with economic

functions. The overriding objective of our efforts is national unity. Endorsed overwhelmingly by the populace, Malaysians have set for themselves a vision of the future -- the society and nation they would like to create.

9. Women have always played an important role in the various spheres of Malaysian life. Even before independence, women of various ethnic groups have been active in our economic life. Because of limited educational opportunities very few managed to enter the modern sectors. But our women, in particular Malay women, were active in politics and they were together in the struggle for independence. The women wing of the United Malays National Organisation or UMNO - the key party which ever since independence is at the helm of the Government--came into being in 1947, soon immediately after the formation of UMNO in 1946. The senior partners of UMNO, the Malaysian Chinese Association (MCA) and the Malaysian Indian Congress (MIC) also have their womens' wings.

10. The Kaum Ibu, the women's section of UMNO, the leading political party, was responsible for mobilising grassroots support of the masses, especially in the rural areas, to agitate for independence from the British. This has resulted in the present strength of woman Ministers in Cabinet, and woman Senators and Members of Parliament. Of the 23 Ministers in Cabinet, 2 are women. In addition, we also have 4 Deputy Ministers. Of the 68 Senators, 6 are women. Of the 154 Members of Parliament, 8 are women. While this number does not adequately represent the women population the situation is certainly better than in many other countries, even some of the developed ones. It is even more interesting to note that these women were chosen in the first place, by their political parties to stand in the elections not because they were women, but because as the Honourable the Prime Minister had stated, they were the

best candidates available in their areas, and would have been chosen even if they had been men.

1.1. The position of women in society has always been a major concern of ours, just as it has been of yours. In Malaysia, we have been fortunate that we have been able to develop rapidly since independence as can be clearly seen from various economic, social and health indicators. Gross National Product at current prices has increased from M\$11,617 million in 1970 to M\$49,415 million in 1980. Per capita income, again at current prices, increased from M\$1,170 in 1970 to M\$3,650 in 1980. Literacy rate has increased from 51% in 1957 to 60% in 1970 and is now estimated at about 70%. Crude death rate in Peninsular Malaysia is 5.6 in 1979 as compared to 9.8 in the US and 6.3 in Japan in 1976. Infant mortality rate is not so good, being 27 for Peninsular Malaysia in 1979 as against 5.8 for the US and 9.3 for Japan, both for 1976. Life expectancy in Peninsular Malaysia for 1979 is 67 for males and 72.5 for females, as against 68.7 and 96.5 in the US for 1976, and 72.8 and 77 for Japan for the same year. As a matter of interest, while the number of posts held by women at the upper echelons in the Civil Service are certainly not commensurate with their proportion of the population, the number is nevertheless improving. While there are no woman Secretaries General or Civil Service personnel heading the 23 Ministries, there is one Deputy-Secretary General and 4 more are of the same grading. There is one Head of Department at the National Archive and one just retired from the Welfare Services Department. The heads of 2 Federal semi-government, outonomous bodies - the National Family Planning Board and National Handicraft Development Board - are women.

12. The improved overall conditions since independence also means an improvement in the situation of women. Certain trends, as in education, clearly show the improved situation

of women. Please note that of about 14 million population of Malaysia in 1980, 48.9% are women. With increased educational opportunities and bold policies adopted by the Government, in particular the New Economic Policy, the 1970s witnessed rapid pace in the achievement of women in modern economic activities. Of course, prior to this period women had already made an entry into the traditionally male domains but Malay women, because of their rural base, were very much left behind. Today, however, we can find many women not only as teachers and nurses but also as doctors, lawyers, engineers, accountants and in the civil service. We have also now qualified agriculturalists, mathematicians, physicists, chemists and computer scientists. Women are holding positions at both the higher and lower levels of our police and the various branches of our armed forces. In the business field we have woman entrepreneurs and woman businesspersons. With our five universities, and with many Malaysians being sent overseas, we see our women playing a greater role in many more fields in the future. Women formed 35.4% of total enrolment at the 5 local Malaysian Universities.

13. Women are still housewives and mothers tending to homes and children. Woman labour force is still concentrated in agriculture. With industrialisation, those with basic qualifications are being employed as skilled and unskilled workers in firms and factories. In general, much more has to be done to see that our women have a better deal for their toils. It is not an easy thing to do but women, especially those who are in key positions, must help in ensuring improved welfare of women.

14. Our concern with the role and problems of women in development is beginning to gain greater recognition. Measures to integrate women in development in Malaysia were taken as early as the 1950s with the establishment of several nation-wide women's organisations that had

particular economic and social objectives. Additional impetus was provided with the establishment of a national machinery called the National Council on Integration of Women in Development or NACIWID in 1976. One of the outcome of NACIWID is the establishment of the Women's Handicraft Sales Organisation {KARYANEKA) which not only receives, improves and markets the products of traditional home-crafts but also helps to increase the level of income of rural women. With the Council placed under the Prime Minister's Department, and lately with a woman Deputy Minister responsible for women' s affairs, we feel that a greater momentum is on the way for the progress of Malaysian women.

15. I would like to touch on the role of women in voluntary bodies and the valuable work being undertaken by them. In Malaysia, just as in the United States, women are actively involved in a variety of voluntary bodies, religious, social or service, for example, the Muslim Women's Organisation and the Women's Institute. The National Council of Women's Organisations (NCWO) is the umbrella body to which most of the women's voluntary organisations are affiliated. These organisation not only help their members to fill up their leisure hours with useful activities, but more important, they work for the betterment of the status of v/omen in society. For example, equal pay for women is one of the concrete results of NCWO's activities.

16. For us in Malaysia, nation-building does not only require a healthy process in uniting our people but also in ensuring that everyone can be mobilised productively in the development process. Our development places equal emphasis on material progress and spiritual enlightenment based on our positive religious values. We recognise that there are basic biological and psychological differences between the sexes but we also believe that man and woman can complement each other in our pursuit for development and a better meaning in life.

17. The relatively good position of Malaysian women now in society are not only the results of education, awareness and recognition of their role in politics, social and economic development but more importantly, the recognition and encouragement from the men and Government in women's efforts to be partners in development rather than merely as a supporting group.

18. We definitely feel that we still have a lot more to achieve. With the concerted efforts made by every women's organisation in Malaysia, and encouragement from distinguished women like you, we are confident that our future generation will be a united and progressive Malaysians contributing towards peace and meaningful life in the future.

Thank you.

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