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It is indeed an honour for me to be here today to deliver this speech in conjunction with the PPSEAWA conference on the 'Family and the Environment'. I wish to take this opportunity to welcome all foreign participants to Malaysia and hope their stay here will be a memorable one. Ladies and gentlemen,

2. The theme of this Conference is not only appropriate but timely given the world-wide concern about environmental degradation and the effects of global warming. While a lot have been written about the environment, most identify the various problems and address the need to preserve our natural resources. Indeed very little is written to suggest alternative behaviour for the community and the family. So, let me focus on the enormous challenges facing our nations in this region today and hopefully your deliberations will have a great impact, not only in addressing the issues concerning the family and the environment, but more significantly, on how best we could all help in alleviating the problems of environmental degradation and promoting sustainable development. As a family we have a significant role to play in preserving the environment.

3. It cannot be disputed that one of the biggest challenges facing mankind today is how best to preserve the environment without affecting the development process. While it is imperative that we develop economically, socially, and physically in terms of infrastructural development, etc, we must also ensure that such development takes into account the need to protect the environment. This is important as we recognise that environmental problems have transboundary implications.

4. Also, when we talk of the environment and the family, we cannot isolate any particular group on the basis of ethnicity, race, colour, creed or geographical habitat. The whole family of mankind is affected. A conference on the family and the environment, therefore, should focus on major issues of our time. Your presence here at this conference is indeed an opportunity for us to demonstrate our sincerity and commitment to the family and the environment and our future.

5. The 1989 Langkawi Declaration is testimony of our commitment. The heads of Commonwealth countries, representing a quarter of the world's population and a broad cross-section of global interests, meeting here on the beautiful island of Langkawi, agreed to a set of declarations to protect and conserve our environment, and, at the same time, pave the way for continued growth and development, both economic and social, to provide a secure future for us all. Those Commonwealth leaders who met in Langkawi, acknowledged that the current threat to the environment transcends national boundaries and interests, and is the direct result of decades of neglect in managing the natural environment and its resources. They

identified that the problems arising from fundamental poverty and population pressure have significantly contributed to the degradation of the environment through deforestation, soil erosion and pollution of the air and waterways. On the other hand, they also identified that uncontrolled development can lead to the destruction of the balance of 'green house' cases giving rise to the threat of severe climate changes and their life threatening consequences.

6. Economic growth however, is a compelling necessity in order to provide adequate food, water and shelter, for all members of the family. This economic challenge can only be achieved if we adhere to the principles of sustainable development as our communities progress. This requires the commitment of all levels of society - individuals and organisations - as well as industry and the scientific community.

7. The importance of sustainable development principles was again a prominent agenda item, some three years later, at the 1992 Second Ministerial Conference of developing countries, on 'Environment and Development'. It has further acknowledged, however, that respect of sovereignty of states and adherence to the principles of equity and quality among states, are fundamental to the success of any programme aimed at achieving sustainable development. While the problems are global, and global solutions and action plans are necessary, the co-operation of nations is essential to the achievement of global change.

8. To fully utilize our human resources is an important challenge. The vital roles of women and youth of the world were emphasized at the Rio Summit in 1992. It is universally acknowledged that women, as educators and community leaders, are the pivot of social change and that the creativity, ideals and courage of youth, should be mobilized in order to achieve change in our world, together with the men who occupy influential social and economic positions. Therefore, to address the environmental problems today, a collective, concerted effort of every family member working in harmony with their environment, is vital.

9. The identification of strategies for development in which the family unit can benefit from economic growth while ensuring the preservation of the family and the environment, is also a necessary challenge. Appropriate strategies should breathe life into the term 'sustainable development' in a meaningful manner, for all levels of our society. Clear economic policies ensuring employment would also underpin the success of sustainable development programmes in our countries. Increasing wealth should translate into certain basic amenities for an enhanced quality of life for everyone, through access to clean potable water, provision of adequate shelter and healthcare, and sufficiency of food and energy. However, in the heat of the debate, many experts seem intent to focus on the differences of opinion rather than to focus on what matters most -- i.e. workable solutions that can be appropriately implemented to ensure concrete steps are taken to preserve the environment. Solutions which have been determined by co-operative dialogues within communities can best be implemented by community actions, in particular, by determining what can be done in small ways in our own homes and places of work.

10. Nature is an important part of our total human heritage. In recent years we have come to understand the powerful links between spiritual values and the preservation of the environment which are at the heart of our cultural heritage that is being threatened from many sides. How should we react to the wanton destruction of the environment? Should we not examine extravagance and wastefulness? Should our lifestyles be governed more by restraint and moderation?

11. The promotion of cherished family values of love, respect for our elders and filial responsibility for our children, common to all societies, in order to prevent the weakening of the family unit as a cornerstone of our society, is becoming increasingly important. In Malaysia we have embarked on a programme to transform our nation into a developed country by the year 2020. We have outlined what we believe is an achievable economic growth target of 7.5% a year. At the same time, we are implementing programmes to ensure that this growth would not be at the expense of our environment and socio-economic development, while promoting a caring society, one that aims 'to establish a fully moral and ethical society whose citizens are strong in religious and spiritual values and imbued with the highest of ethical standards'. In addition, to establish a fully caring society and a caring culture; a social system in which society will come before self, in which the welfare of the people will revolve, not around the state or the individual, but around a strong and resilient family system.

12. I urge this conference to find effective means to promote consciousness of the natural environment, as an integral part of the value system of each society and to promote a strong sense of responsibility for it. Clear educational policies must be drawn up at all levels, particularly at the family level. We should seek to encourage changes in our lifestyles which reflect care and concern for the environment. Public awareness should be fostered at a formal level in schools, as well as informally within the family unit. In each of our communities, the architects of public awareness programmes should not only draw up a body of knowledge about environmental issues, but, should also take pains to see how this knowledge can fit in with local circumstances unique to communities in our region -be they socio-economic, political or cultural. The role of the media is particularly important in disseminating information and educating the public.

13. It is well recognized that the media perform a valuable community service by providing comprehensive reporting of family matters and environmental concerns in most societies. It is imperative therefore that the media everywhere are committed and involved in programmes related to change in our communities and families.

14. Although both parents play a crucial role in shaping children's opinions and understanding of the world around them, the mother's role is paramount. This is particularly true as the management of the household resources is commonly the woman's domain. She therefore has the opportunity to teach her family how to use, re-use, and recycle household products, and, also to reduce consumption by controlling the goods and services in her home.

15. In the context of the family and environment, are we educating our women sufficiently to cope with the rapid changes in the world today? How environmentally aware are our family members? How well have we engaged our media resources in public education programmes? How conscious are the families in our region, of the environment in which we live? Let us not have tomorrow's generations point an accusing finger at us for having neglected these responsibilities! We must first ask ourselves these questions - and answer them honestly before embarking on environmental programmes.

16. A key prong to our strategies must be the setting up of a network of organisations, at all levels, to deal with issues concerning the family and the environment. These would include government agencies and non-governmental organisations as well as working groups dealing with specific issues in each of our countries. In this way, members of PPSEAWA can share their experiences in handling problems unique to this region and benefit from each other's experience, expertise and success.

17. It is my hope that this conference will draw up clear strategies towards better co-operation. I am hopeful, too, that this conference will seek ways to identify specific responsibilities and actions to be undertaken by families and whole communities to preserve the environment. These tasks must necessarily vary according to community and country. They should be simple to comprehend and implement, affordable and generally socially acceptable.

18. I am confident that this conference will explore and deliberate on these important issues. I also hope that on your return home to your respective countries that you will take steps to pursue the recommendations you will have determined here. Let our children be proud of our work today. Let us pledge to strive for excellence together, in harmony and friendship, for a better world for the sake of the family and the environment.

Thank you.