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It gives me great pleasure to greet you firstly with "Assalamualaikum" which is the Muslim way of expressing "Peace be upon you". Secondly, to greet you with "Selamat Datang" which is the traditional Malaysian greeting of welcome, to all of you.

2. To those of you who have specially come from afar to Malaysia and for the first time, the two forms of greetings I have just expressed are specially for you. I sincerely hope that apart from fulfilling your objectives of coming to Malaysia, you will have programmes that will give you opportunities to see more of our beautiful and safe country, to know its peoples and their cultures.

3. The topic chosen for this conference i.e. "Women & Global Peace" is very important. It is very timely, considering the current turmoil which is the backdrop of world events today - a backdrop which is definitely not conducive to the development of women as mothers, nor to the children, the future generation, to develop and grow into healthy adults.

4. The topic concerning "Women and Peace" also is close to my heart because, since the past few years, I have been traveling to countries affected by war and conflicts and was emotionally affected by them.

5. I was in Bosnia during the war in 1994 and after the war. I wouldn't understand the real cause of it but I saw the effects of it on the women's, girls' and children's faces. Young women, raped by their former neighbours and friends, had to bear the agony of carrying the unborn child of their enemies, to full term. They were taken to special Centres for counselling and rehabilitation from the traumatic experience they encountered. Their children were looked after by volunteer groups of Bosnian women and given the care and love they deserved. Genocide and ethnic cleansing during war times are not new. Nevertheless they should be condemned very strongly as we know women and girls are the usual victims of it.

6. In Iraq, the total comprehensive economic sanctions have created an environment which are so critical to the daily lives of women, children and the aged. Deprived of essential nutritious food, medicines and proper utilities, diseases eradicated before the Gulf War have re-emerged with vengeance and mortality rates among mothers, infants and children escalated tremendously. The education and health systems have broken down to the barest minimum and children no longer attend schools because they have nothing to learn and they need to earn money to find fend for themselves. Mothers affected by "nuclear depletion" either have stillborn babies or abortions. Children share Oxygen masks and beds in the children's wards; suffer from leukemia and congenital deformities.

7. Despite the "Oil for Food" programme, the women and children's conditions have not improved, rather they were getting worse. It was a sure, slow eradication of those weakened by the effects of the sanction. The fear of a repeat attack by the Western powers on Iraq, grouped as one of the "axis of evil" is very relevant. Nuclear weapons will surely be again used. Will we ever learn?

8. Last year I visited both Hiroshima and Nagasaki. It was my third visit to Hiroshima, specially to meet with members of Peace Link Japan, who comprised of wives of Diet Members, former Cabinet Ministers and businessmen. It still brought tears and anguish when the son of a survivor of the Atomic Bomb related the event that led to the dropping of the bomb and its deadly aftermath. The men were at the battlefield, the women and children in the factories or at home. They were killed by the thousands.

9. The same story happened 2 days after, in Nagasaki when the hydrogen bomb was dropped. I met 2 women survivors. They were just kids then, ignorant of why suddenly the sky darkened and everyone lying injured or dead around them. A sister of the survivor later committed suicide after an operation to remove her appendix because she couldn't stand the post-operative pain. The Atomic Bombs stopped the Pacific War but the women and children paid dearly for it.

10. The Second World War in Europe ended earlier than the Pacific War did. Both sides lost millions of lives. Cities were destroyed together with their inhabitants, not with Atomic Bombs but by carpet-bombing and V-bombs. I was in Berlin and Warsaw lately. These were the cities flattened in the Second World War with millions of lives lost. In Poland, where the war started, elimination of the Jews were done systematically during the war - men, women and children.

11. And now, in this 21st century, the Sept 11 attack on American soil by terrorists with the loss of more than 4000 innocent lives, have now extended to Afghanistan where thousands more innocent women and children suffer the effects of war.

12. This deliberate attempt to share with you the devastational effects of war and conflict, especially upon women and their children, will help us all focus our attention seriously in the discussion of the conference topic in the next few days. History is important and useful for as long as we learn from it and avoid the mistakes made in the past. But are we learning from the past? Or is it because human beings have very short memory and easily forget? From the events that are currently taking place, man unfortunately have not learnt from the past. We, as women, will not want to see nor allow our children and family to grow in war zones amidst daily violence.

13. Never before in the history of the world has the need to inculcate peace among neighbours, tribes, communities and nations become more urgent. Peace and love are the anguished cry of the human spirit, not hatred and revenge. I am sure this heartfelt cry for peace is in everyone of us, just as much as it is in the hearts of those women in

Afghanistan, Palestine, in Israel; amongst the Protestants and Catholic in Northern Ireland and the Hindus and Muslims in India.

14. Women are natural peace makers and peace keepers. How often have we stepped into and stopped vocal and physical fights among our children, and how often have we taken into our arms both the victor and the vanquished so that there would be peace and harmony again in the family?

15. The precepts of Peace therefore have to be taught from the cradle, especially to the younger generation who must learn not to hate or to avow revenge, as their elders have done. Reversing attitudes and hatreds that have a history is extremely difficult. Therefore it is much easier to teach and nurture the young and innocent mind with the desired values of love and harmony than to beat the prejudices borne out of experiences and past memories.

16. Women have played a vital role in the peace teaching process by raising the awareness of the need for peace and its benefits. The mother is responsible for the child's learning of tolerance, understanding, sensitivities and acceptance of each other, especially of those who seem very different from us. This is crucial in building the steps to unity and harmony, Prejudice and bigotry of colour, race, religion, gender and class have to be eliminated and old mindsets replaced by new attitudes.

17. Peace is a precious commodity. It is difficult to achieve and also difficult to maintain by any one single group or nation. Women working together can truly be the peace maker and Peace Teacher and be a fine model and example to our children and the young generation. It would be a challenge for us to reassess our own actions in everyday life and to demonstrate our sincerity, patience, respect and understanding to all around us. I truly believe that each of us is able to resolve conflict in a non-violent manner and to show grace in all that we do over and above our selfish desires and motives so that we can be truly teachers of Peace with credibility.

18. I would like to congratulate the Soroptimist for the fine work they have been doing in several projects and programmes around the world. I am touched by your position on Peace Teaching. If I may quote "Peace cannot be measured solely by the absence of conflict and that peace is inter-related with just sharing of natural resources, social and economic development and the promotion of human rights" (unquote).

19. It is the right of every nation to ensure that there will be an environment conducive for individuals to grow and live healthy, spiritually and emotionally and in harmony with members of their family, neighbours, community and citizens. Nations have to ensure optimum standards of living for its people through healthy socio-economic development, political stability that will lead to national unity and harmony, goodwill and peaceful relationships with neighbouring nations and the world.

20. I am proud to say that peace in Malaysia has been sustained by the concepts and beliefs just mentioned and also by the belief of "Prospering thy Neighbour" and smart-

partnering collaborations between the public and private sectors and between nations in this region, to share the economic wealth in a win-win situation for all parties.

21. I have confidence in women and their ability to contribute back to the community what they have gained through knowledge and experience. I can expect the so optimist to create and organise projects and programmes watered with devotion and selfless dedication towards the propagation of peace. It is a lifelong process with many challenges but if we remind ourselves constantly of what peace can give to our children and the future generation, we can endure and surpass all challenges.

22. Let me end by an appeal of a Bosnian schoolboy who sang to the Malaysian delegation at the school we built for them in Sarajevo. He sang "I do not like war, I want my books to study, I hate war. Please do not let it come again". From a small child's heart, this song for Peace and Hope for his future, chorused by 500 of his schoolmates, pierced deeply our hearts and minds.

23. I truly hope that this conference will achieve its objectives and formulate a practical and simple resolution for women to contribute to Global Peace. I wish you all success and reiterate again the hope that your stay with us in our country will be a fruitful and an enjoyable one.

24. I end with greetings of Peace again, and in the name of the Almighty Allah, I take pleasure to officially declare the Soroptimist International of South West Pacific, 13th Biennial Conference of Clubs 2002 in Kuala Lumpur open. God Bless.