

25/02/2014 - The Role of Malaysian Diplomats Towards Realising The National Transformation Agenda

YBhg. Datuk Othman Hashim,
Secretary-General,
Ministry of Foreign Affairs;

YBhg. Tan Sri-Tan Sri, Dato'- Dato', Datin-Datin, Ladies and Gentlemen.

Assalamualaikum warahmatullahi wabarakatuh, Salam Sejahtera and Salam
1Malaysia.

OPENING REMARKS

1. First and foremost, allow me to take this opportunity to thank Wisma Putra for inviting me to address our Heads of Mission, at this 8th Heads of Mission Conference. This Conference is an excellent platform for the Heads of Mission to be updated on the latest policies of the Government, particularly the National Transformation Agenda, towards realising Malaysia's aspiration to become a high-income developed nation by the year 2020. This Conference is also opportune as it will enable us to exchange views and ideas on how we in the public service can fulfil this aspiration, particularly in the context of your role as Malaysia's chief representatives abroad.

MALAYSIA IN TRANSFORMATION

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

2. Transformation is an inevitable part of our journey towards realising Vision 2020. "Inevitable" because as an open economy in a challenging international environment, we must remain a competitive, moderate, and dynamic nation to keep pace with the rest of the world. There is a need for us to escape

the middle-income trap and take that quantum leap into the next level. The **National Transformation Agenda** was introduced as a means for us to drive our nation to the next level. I believe the acronyms of **GTP**, **ETP**, **STP** and **PTP** are familiar to all of us here, and that there is good understanding of the objectives of these programmes towards nation-building. Hence, I will not delve into it in detail.

3. However, as the backbone of our nation's transformation agenda, we as civil servants must realise that we have a huge responsibility on our shoulders to implement the plans and initiatives outlined under the various transformation programmes. Fortunately, we have had much success in translating the plans into action by utilising the **National Blue Ocean Strategy** (NBOS). With "**low cost, high impact** and **rapid execution**" as the key words, NBOS has fostered closer coordination between Government agencies by reducing overlapping or duplication of work, and broken down the "silo mentality" that unfortunately exists. I must reiterate that NBOS is a strategy that we should continue to utilise: that we **come together and do things quickly**, in a **cost effective manner**, for the **well-being of the rakyat**, and I fervently hope that NBOS is also applied in our Missions abroad.
4. While we transform the nation as a whole, our Prime Minister, Yang Amat Berhormat Dato' Sri Mohd. Najib bin Tun Abdul Razak has also put credence on the **importance of transforming the civil service**; to **strengthen** and **restructure** the organisation to **remain relevant** in line with current developments.
5. Yang Amat Berhormat Prime Minister during his Keynote Address at this Conference yesterday, highlighted the need for us to embrace our position as one of the region's Middle Power of states that rarely act alone, but which have a significant, systematic impact in a small group or international institutions. In this regard, I believe that Wisma Putra must be proactive to the transformations around us, and to come up with a transformation of its own : a foreign policy which will see Malaysia realise its Vision 2020, to become a high-income developed nation status and beyond. The Public Service Department and the Ministry of Finance (for example) are currently undergoing transformation to improve their service delivery, and all other Ministries will follow suit soon, including Wisma Putra. May I remind that the core of this

transformation should be centred on the rakyat's need and expectations, and hence, we must change to remain relevant.

MERAKYATKAN PERKHIDMATAN AWAM

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

6. Mindful of the importance to win the hearts and minds of the *rakyat*, I introduced the concept of **Merakyatkan Perkhidmatan Awam** or “Humanising the Public Service”. This concept encapsulates our role as public officials who not only provide services to the people, but also receive services from our colleagues in the civil service. I urge Wisma Putra officials to deliver “people-centric services” to the *rakyat*, and indirectly to ourselves, based on the **six guiding principles**, namely:

- i. Openness (*Keterbukaan*);
- ii. Going to the Grassroots (*Turun Padang*);
- iii. Engagement (*Musyawaharah*);
- iv. Soft Skills or Striking a Balance between the Spiritual and the Physical Aspect (*Insaniah*);
- v. Camaraderie or Sense of Belonging (*Kekitaan*); and
- vi. Resource Sharing and Collaboration through Public-Private and Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) Partnership.

I am glad to note that Wisma Putra has introduced its own version of *turun padang* in the form of **Program Mendampingi Rakyat Malaysia** since 2009. This is an excellent example of how the Heads of Mission can be the Government's “touch points” with our citizens abroad, and how it enhances the principle of openness (*keterbukaan*). I believe the *turun padang* sessions will enable us to identify problems faced by our stakeholders and clients, apart from cultivating

and establishing networks. As Heads of Mission, I trust that you will be active in **engaging** those you meet in the course of your duty, in **explaining our policies**, as well as **coordinating efforts** among the different agencies at your respective posts to further Malaysia's interests abroad. Engagement must take place beyond the Foreign Ministry and official channels of host governments. Corporate launches, appearances in academic settings or social gatherings, and interviews with the media are among the many avenues of projecting our interests.

AUSTERITY MEASURES AND SACRIFICES

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

7. As civil servants, it is incumbent that we show an exemplary attitude to the *rakyat* and make certain sacrifices when the need arises. Recently, Yang Amat Berhormat Prime Minister announced 11 cost-cutting measures for the Government sector, which are estimated to save RM400 million this year. Indeed, these measures are evident of the sacrifices made by civil servants in order to assist the Government curb its spending.

8. Most of us recall the measures undertaken during the recession that befell us in the 1980s and during the 1997/98 Asian Financial Crisis. This latest austerity measure is nothing new and the comfort we can find in this is: we have weathered many storms before, and we will weather this one too. However, austerity measures may be seen as delimiting opportunities to carry out certain activities. This should never be cited as a reason to reduce our activities. Trying times require innovative solutions and this is where your leadership and creativity will be tested.

9. In this regard, I commend Wisma Putra for convening the 8th Heads of Missions Conference here at IDFR instead of in a hotel, in line with the austerity

measures introduced. And as highlighted by Yang Amat Berhormat Prime Minister yesterday, despite having a small budget, Wisma Putra is one of the most cost-efficient Ministries. In fact, I have discussed with your top management during my working visit to Wisma Putra in September last year that the **government is open to requests for additional resources**, and for Wisma Putra to come up with a special fund as part of its transformation.

MALAYSIA IN THE GLOBAL ARENA

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

10. Globally, Malaysia is perceived as a dynamic and competitive nation. We are ranked at:

- **6th position** in the **World Bank's Ease of Doing Business 2014 Report**, a significant improvement from our previous ranking of 23rd position three years ago;
- **24th position** in the **Global Competitiveness Report 2013**, ahead of countries such as the Republic of Korea and second behind Singapore among Southeast Asian countries; and
- **32nd position**, out of 142 countries in the **Global Innovation Index 2013**.

11. These accolades are an indication of our international standing that we must continue to improve on. We must **continue to promote confidence in Malaysia** as a politically stable country, which for decades has offered a conducive environment for business and investment.

12. Malaysia is aware that in order to develop and prosper, **we cannot do it alone**. We must seek partnership with other countries and the rest of the world. Malaysia must **accelerate its economic diplomacy**, not only at the bilateral level, but also at the regional and multilateral level, as an important dimension of its international relations, and for purposes of securing the country's wider foreign policy objectives. Malaysia must continue to **foster friendly and beneficial relations** with all countries.

13. As Malaysia is not spared from the volatility of the external economic environment, the Government will continue to take measures to strengthen its competitive advantage in wooing foreign direct investments and finding new markets for our products. Malaysia will continue to promote the participation of the private sector in developing the country.

14. And this is where I see the role of the Heads of Mission as crucial. You are the **best contact persons in disseminating information** on the opportunities available in Malaysia for investors. Thus, I hope that you will continue to develop and nurture your contacts and access to leading figures in your host country that could generate tangible benefits to Malaysia.

EXPECTATIONS

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

15. This last leg towards 2020 and beyond will be a challenging one, and it is important that we succeed. In line with the theme of this conference, **"Transforming Malaysia's Diplomacy Towards 2020 and Beyond"**, Malaysia's diplomacy must continue to spearhead and support the Government's initiatives

abroad. We must **not be complacent with our achievements** and the favourable rankings that we have achieved so far.

16. The civil service is doing well and making positive strides forward, but we certainly have the potential to do better. Therefore it is important for civil servants to operate as a **thinking public service** that is **adaptable, responsive, proactive, accountable** and **efficient** in implementing policies, so as to gain the public's confidence and dispel any negative perception of the service.

17. At this juncture, I would like to take the opportunity to put forth a **few words of advice** to all Heads of Mission, and Malaysian diplomats in dispensing your duties overseas:

- i. **Acquire new skills**, be it in the form of a foreign language, or enhancing your negotiation skills, as these will indeed be useful for a successful diplomatic career;
- ii. Ensure that there is **no room for integrity issues to surface** in the course of dispensing your duties, that may mar the good image of our King and Country;
- iii. While abroad, **have respect and understanding of the rule of law** of the host country, so you may disseminate those laws to Malaysians under your care and avoid untoward incidences to happen;
- iv. Take interest in the **welfare of Malaysians** under your watch, be it your own officers and their families, students or working professionals; and
- v. **Treat and assist all visiting Government officials equally** should they be in your host country attending meetings or on official trips.

18. And I also look forward to having **more women ambassadors** in the future, in line with our Government's aspirations of at least 30% women in decision-making positions in the civil service by the year 2015.

CLOSING REMARKS

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

19. In formulating and implementing Malaysia's foreign policy, the **leadership role** of Wisma Putra will **become more important and crucial** in the years ahead as the issues we face will become more complex and multi-faceted. I am also cognisant of the fact that we are chairing ASEAN in 2015. In this regard, I have proposed for Malaysia to host the **Inaugural ASEAN Heads of Civil Service and First ASEAN Public Service Games** on the sidelines of the ASEAN Summit in 2015. I most certainly look forward to working closely with Wisma Putra in ensuring the success of these events.

20. Experience has shown that the task ahead of us is indeed challenging and demanding. I am pleased to acknowledge the presence at this Conference, a list of prominent and experienced speakers who will share ideas and lessons learnt in addressing a myriad of issues to transform Malaysia's diplomacy towards 2020 and beyond.

21. I trust your interaction with various stakeholders over the course of this Conference will provide you with valuable insights that would be useful in discharging your duties during these challenging times.

22. I look forward to a fruitful discussion with you after this, and wish you all the best when you return to your host countries.

Thank you.

