

**By : DATUK SERI SYED HAMID ALBAR**  
**Venue : BANGKOK, THAILAND**  
**Date : 5 - 6 AUGUST 1999**  
**Title : OPENING STATEMENT AT THE EIGHTH MEETING OF THE  
MALAYSIA-THAILAND JOINT COMMISSION**

His Excellency Dr. Surin Pitsuwan, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Thailand;  
Distinguished Delegates;  
Ladies and Gentlemen;

May I first of all take this opportunity to express my sincere gratitude to the Royal Thai Government for the warm reception and excellent hospitality extended to me and to the members of the Malaysian delegation. This is my second visit to Thailand since my appointment as Foreign Minister this year, which goes to reflect the importance we attached to the closeness of our bilateral relations with neighbouring Thailand.

I am pleased to note the presence of a large number of officials from both sides. Such a response not only signifies the importance of this meeting, but also demonstrates our determination to discuss and resolve issues of common concern. I am confident that we will be able to move forward to resolve long standing issues. We must work hard in the traditional spirit of good neighbourliness to ensure that tangible progress is achieved.

Even though the Joint Commission had not met much earlier, several committees and working groups have been meeting regularly and achieved commendable progress. Malaysia attaches high priority on its relations with Thailand, a neighbour sharing both land and maritime boundaries and with whom we also share common values and aspirations. Our two Prime Ministers continue to meet, and consultations at the political level are held on a regular basis. FM Surin and I have held several "mini-JCMs" of our own, the latest being in Singapore two weeks ago. During my last visit we had very productive discussion on various issues. This had facilitated the necessary push and impetus to move our relations forward.

Your Excellency,

Relations between our two countries have progressed remarkably over the years. But as neighbours sharing a common boundary, we will continue to have problems. As old issues are resolved, new problems will almost certainly crop up. Our duty and responsibility therefore is to ensure that these problems are properly managed and that they do not get out of hand. As we are all too aware, problems between neighbours have peculiar characteristics as they tend to magnify and be exaggerated. We have to be wary of this to enable us to manage any problem that we may have, efficiently and expeditiously.

Your Excellency,

We are meeting here today at the dawning of a new millennium which represents both challenges and opportunities. This is an excellent time to take stock of the existing trends in our bilateral co-operation and to explore new avenues in order to strengthen our ties. We have to be creative and chart new directions to further enhance the existing excellent relations between our two countries. The economic crisis which has adversely affected our two nations has compelled us to be more focussed on our domestic front and thus all our efforts are directed towards resuscitating the economy. Hopefully, we can now put this behind us and look forward to a future that holds more promise. During the crisis, we have often looked to each other for inspiration and support, and now, as we move towards recovery, we have to harness this same energy to strengthen existing relations. The Joint Commission meeting at this auspicious time should contribute fresh ideas and direct our energies, to achieve a more solid relationship.

After this meeting, FM Surin has arranged for a retreat at Phuket. We hope to have a frank discussion on how best to improve the already excellent ties between us. I welcome this opportunity and I am sure it would impact positively on our relations. FM Surin and I are very fortunate because both our leaders are strongly dedicated and determined to further consolidate our bilateral ties. To build upon and improve on what is already strong and solid needs vision, creativity, commitment, sincerity and trust.

Your Excellency,

The agenda before us covers a wide range of issues. It encompasses, amongst others, those related to border co-operation, land boundary demarcation, co-operation in the areas of transportation, agriculture, tourism promotion, science and technology, education, health, telecommunication, drugs suppression, joint investment and co-operation along the border. These are in fact old issues which have become complex and intricate. There are also some new items included in the agenda, such as, the Human Resource Development Fund, Malaysia-Thai Association, trafficking in women and children. To deal with the new problems, we need to view them through new prisms. Our mindset would also have to change. We must be courageous and bold to make sacrifices for mutual benefit but ultimately it would strengthen the trust and confidence between our two nations. I believe the close collaboration and co-operation between our two countries will at all times enable us to reach a mutually satisfactory resolution. It is on this note that I am approaching this Joint Commission Meeting and I am optimistic, given the positive and constructive attitudes of both sides, that we will be able to achieve our intended objectives, God willing.

Thank you.