

**By : DATUK SERI SYED HAMID ALBAR**  
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**Title : TREATY ROOM, MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS**

Dr. Alijah Gordon  
Trustee, MSRI/Medical Aid for Palestinians

Tuan Haji Rafie Mahat  
Director General of Education

Distinguished Guests

Ladies and gentlemen

Assalamualaikum Warahmatullahi Wabarakatuh

I am greatly honoured to be given the opportunity today to launch the book, "Palestinians Speak: I Painted the Snow Black..... Because We're Afraid of the Days" compiled and edited by Dr Alijah Gordon.

2. Many who are involved in the publications of this book I am happy to note, are here this morning, specifically, the brave Malaysian medical volunteers who served in Lebanon. I understand that some are still serving in Lebanon and some have moved on elsewhere, but their contributions are very much valued and not forgotten. This occasion is not only to express our heartfelt appreciation to them, but also to those who have generously contributed their expertise, time and resources for the cause of the Palestinians.

3. Malaysians by nature, are a caring people. We are always sensitive to the plight of others. Malaysians are also increasingly aware of the plight of those who suffer from unjust deprivation due to natural or man - made disasters. Malaysians have always contributed generously to victims of disasters in Malaysia and overseas.

4. Over the last few years, I am pleased to note that more and more Malaysians are volunteering to assist others to alleviate their sufferings. The Malaysian humanitarian impulse has provided the catalyst to drive us to respond directly to the dire situation of the Palestinians living in refugee camps in Lebanon. Many Malaysians are acutely aware that the situation was so tragic that the Palestinians were forced to resort to drastic actions just to survive. We have heard of horrendous stories of Palestinians having to resort to eating dogs and cats. We have heard of how, in sheer desperation in a worsening situation, they have even sought a Fatwa to enable them to consume human flesh.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

5. The Malaysian government appreciates the commendable efforts made by Dr. Alijah Gordon in translating our humanitarian concern into concrete actions through the Malaysian Medical Aid for Palestinians and the Sponsorship of Palestinian Children. The establishment of the Trust Fund clearly indicates the support and encouragement given by the Malaysian government for her good work. In this regard the Ministry of Foreign Affairs is happy to join the Treasury and the Social Welfare Department in serving as Trustees of the Fund.

6. If I may recall, the first known Malaysian volunteers to serve overseas were the medical volunteers to the Palestinian camps in Lebanon. The Malaysian Medical Aid for Palestinians Programme ended in 1995. Yet the admirable commitment and bravery of the volunteers involved are not forgotten. Unfortunately not all the 19 Malaysian medical volunteers who served in Lebanon in such dangerous and trying conditions are able to be here today. Staff Nurse Pok Looi is still serving in a Palestinian camp and Staff Nurse Hamidah Ghazalli has settled down in Oregon.

7. The Sponsorship of Palestinian Children Programme that was established in 1988, I am pleased to note, is still ongoing. 412 Malaysians had taken part in the programme by sponsoring Palestinian orphans. My wife, Datin Seri Sharifah Aziah and I, too, have the privilege to sponsor one of these children. I note however, that since the 1997 East Asian economic crisis, it was difficult for Malaysians to sustain their humane sponsorship. The programme partially wound down as Malaysians themselves were affected by personal economic predicament.

8. Now that the Malaysian economy has rebounded, I would like to urge Malaysians to again consider the plight of the Palestinians, specifically the orphans and the fatherless children living in female headed households under less than desirable circumstances in the camps in Lebanon, and to make whatever contributions they deem fit.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

9. The plight of Palestinians living in camps in Lebanon is not alleviated today as they are prohibited from being gainfully employed. They are denied access to 72 types of occupations from the medical profession to even such basic and fundamental jobs like sweepers . Without gainful employment, without income and with the high inflation and cost of living, it certainly does not take much to realize the dire living conditions of these Palestinians.

10. For a better picture of their plight, I strongly recommend all present to read the book, "Palestinians Speak: I Painted the Snow Black.... Because We're Afraid of the Days" . The book gives the reader a moving record of the reality of the lives of Palestinians living in such untenable conditions. The recollections and testimonies of Palestinian women who lived through multiple traumas are a testimony to their incredible bravery and resilience.

11. The book is also about survival and the determination of the human spirit from the beginning of the Civil War in Lebanon in 1975, the various ensuing conflicts, tragedies and sufferings and their day-to-day struggles to survive through all these events that try the human spirit. I shall not pursue further on this tragic aspect of human survival that has been graphically recorded in the book.

12. The book itself is the brainchild of the indefatigable Dr. Alijah. Many others were also involved in producing the book. And we recognise and appreciate the contributions made by Cik Noor Khairiyati Mohd Ali, Encik Mohd. Nazri bin Asi Abu, Puan Kay Lyons, Mr. Philip Zachariah and Cik Harlizah Khairuddin.

13. I am gratified to note that Malaysians can and do make a difference. Many have generously supported the publication of this book as well as raising humanitarian awareness on the plight of the Palestinians. I am glad that the Malaysian public and students of secondary schools will benefit substantially from reading the book.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

14. As a result of Israeli intransigence, a new Intifadah is now raging in the Occupied Holy Land. Hundreds have been killed and thousands have been wounded. There is an urgent need for medicines and financial support for medical institutions. I would like to again urge Malaysians to come forward to contribute to the Malaysian Sociological Research Institute (MSRI), the Trustee actively doing the work of the Trust Fund. Funds are needed to procure medical supplies and sustain medical facilities in the West Bank and Gaza. I must stress that the funds are purely intended for humanitarian and not political purpose. A portion of the funds raised will be allocated for income generating projects for Palestinian women to alleviate their living conditions in the refugee camps of Lebanon. In this regard I wish to convey our thanks and appreciation to UPHA Corporation, Pahang Pharmacy and Duopharma as well as various individuals including Encik Hishamudin Ubaidulla, Dato' Fuad bin Dato' Haji Hassan and Mr. HRM Storey, Datin Zairin Nik Din and Datuk Dr. Syed Mohamed Alwi al-Hady for their generous contribution to the Fund.

15. With these words I now have great pleasure in launching the book "Palestinians Speak: I Painted the Snow Black ....Because We're Afraid of the Days"

Thank you and Wassalam Wabillahi Taufik Walhidayah Warahmatullahi Wabarakatuh.