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CONFERENCE, 14-20 OCTOBER 2002

Excellencies,
Honorary Consuls General and Consuls,
Distinguished Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me at the outset, on behalf of the Government of Malaysia, extend to all the Malaysian Honorary Consuls General and Consuls and also their spouses, a very warm "Selamat Datang" or "Welcome" to Malaysia. I am grateful that despite the rather short notice that we gave you, you found it possible to make the necessary arrangements to travel to Malaysia for this Conference. I am aware that for all of you, Malaysia is not a new place. Nevertheless, I am sure that you would have noticed from the very moment that you landed at our ultra-modern Kuala Lumpur International Airport, that Malaysia has gone through rapid changes over the recent years. I therefore hope that as you go through this Conference, you will learn and discover more new things about this country and its people than you might have known before.

2. As we begin our Conference today, I wish to convey to you the deep appreciation and gratitude of the Government of Malaysia for the important and invaluable role that you have played as Honorary Consuls General/ Consuls in the cities and countries where you are located, in most cases in places where Malaysia does not have a diplomatic presence. You have not only represented Malaysia admirably, but you have also helped us with various consular, protocol and other functions, including of course the assistance you have always rendered Malaysian citizens. We are equally appreciative of the advice and help you have given us in the promotion of Malaysian trade, investments and tourism. We are deeply honoured that you have accepted to discharge, on behalf of Malaysia, these important functions and responsibilities and we hope that you will continue to perform them.

3. As you may be aware, this is the second time that Malaysia is hosting a Honorary Consuls General/ Consuls Conference. The First Conference was held 10 years ago in 1992. Some of you present here today might have some recollections of that Conference. Since the last Conference, dramatic changes have taken place inside as well as outside Malaysia. The rapid economic growth that we experienced was unfortunately interrupted by the Asian financial crisis in 1997. However, we are confident that we are now firmly back on the road to full recovery.

4. In the external arena too, Malaysia has been engaged in a very active foreign policy, not just in our bilateral relations but also in the region as well as multilaterally. Consequently, Malaysia today enjoys a high international standing. But the present

external environment confronts us with many new challenges. The issue of terrorism has hit international headlines. We are also now faced with the dangerous prospect of a possible war in Iraq. Many parts of the world are still embroiled in economic crises. Malaysia therefore has to deal with these fast-changing political and security challenges. We have evolved and adapted our foreign policy to cope with this new situation. We have attained many successes but at the same time we have also learnt from some of our mistakes.

5. It is against this background that we are convening this Second Honorary Consuls General/ Consuls Conference here in Malaysia. Officials of my Ministry have worked very hard in the short time available to make all the necessary arrangements to ensure that this Conference would be both productive as well as successful.

6. I would very much like this Conference to be an interactive one. The programme for this Conference has been arranged in a manner that would enable you to be fully briefed on recent political, economic, social and other developments in Malaysia. You will have the opportunity to learn and understand more of the latest Government policies as well as the manner in which we have kept abreast with developments within and outside our country.

7. At the same time, we would like you to share with us, as well as with your other colleagues present here today, your own experiences as well as problems and challenges that you might have encountered in your capacity as Honorary Consul General or Consul of Malaysia. You may be able to tap the expertise of your counterparts and also explore ways to further facilitate your effectiveness in promoting Malaysia's interests in your respective locations.

8. I hope that you will find the programme that we have arranged for you both interesting as well as exciting. We have gone the extra mile to arrange for you to meet and interact with the highest leaders in Malaysia. You will have an audience with His Majesty the Yang Di-Pertuan Agong and His Royal Highness the Regent of Perlis. You will also meet with the Honourable Prime Minister, the Honourable Deputy Prime Minister as well as with the Minister of Culture, Arts and Tourism. Apart from dialogue sessions with senior officials in the Foreign Ministry, you will also meet with other senior officials in the Government and private sector.

9. Furthermore, we have not confined you just to Putrajaya, the new administrative capital of Malaysia, and Kuala Lumpur, the national capital. We have also arranged for you to visit two of our states in the North, Penang and Perlis. Penang is indeed a microcosm of what Malaysia is all about. In Penang you will observe and experience the blending of Malaysia's past with the present; the harmony that pervades the lives of the Malays, Chinese, Indians and others and the vibrancy with which economic development is taking place.

10. You will also visit Perlis, the home state of the Yang Dipertuan Agong, on the personal invitation of His Royal Highness the Regent of Perlis.

11. This Conference will also give you an opportunity to combine work with pleasure. We hope that we have allowed you sufficient time to also learn and know Malaysia on your own.

12. It is my sincere hope that when you leave us at the end of this Conference, you will take back with you very pleasant memories of Malaysia and return to your respective countries with renewed vigour to continue performing for Malaysia the functions and responsibilities that you have so finely discharged.

13. I wish you every success in your deliberations over the next days.

Thank you.