

**By : DATUK SERI SYED HAMID ALBAR**  
**Venue : WISMA PUTRA, PUTRAJAYA**  
**Date : 9 MAY 2003**  
**Title : SPEECH AT BOOK LAUNCHING OF "A DIPLOMAT ARRIVES IN WASHINGTON"**

Distinguished Guests,

Ladies and Gentlemen.

1. I remember that it was early in the Autumn of last year when I was in Washington, D.C. that Dr. Fauziah Mohamad Taib tentatively approached me about this idea of launching her book. She told me that it would be a book about her impressions and experiences in the nation's capital and I thought then – as I do now – how it would be a welcome addition to the growing number of books published by Malaysian diplomats. I asked her when she wanted me to launch it, to which she replied, "When you announce me as Ambassador".

2. Well, ladies and gentlemen, I am glad to say that Fauziah received her credentials on 9th April 2003, and as promised, here we are, bearing witness to this momentous occasion in her life. It is not everyday that a Wisma girl is appointed Ambassador, and rarer still for her to publish a book, and I am proud that she has managed to do both with dignity and persistence.

3. As far as publishing goes, Fauziah is no stranger to having published works. This book, for all its Malaysian-ness – its Malaysian perspective on American events, the distinctively Malaysian outlook and analysis on Americans and the Americas, is published in the United States. It is the second such work of Fauziah's to be deposited with the US Library of Congress. Her first book, detailing the story of a multilateral negotiation, especially the negotiations at the Rio Summit, was not only indented into the Library of Congress in 1998 but was used as a reference book by many universities in the United Kingdom.

4. I welcome the publication of "A Diplomat Arrives in Washington", and others like it, which I am sure will follow. This is not the first such book detailing the experiences a diplomat goes through in serving God and country, but unlike some of the others, this is not a memoir – far be it. For one, it is not written by a diplomat who has retired from service, nor by someone who has been through a particularly harrowing experience. This book was written to effectively journal one particular posting, at one particular time and by one particular officer. Therefore, in terms of duplication, there can be no other like it.

5. I have read this book which I find interesting and somewhat amusing and content-wise, I believe this book helps to educate the general public into the life of a diplomat. Diplomacy, as you and I know, is not about the glamour and prestige of being an international traveler and rubbing shoulders with the famous and

influential. Every single day, Wisma officers are fighting for the dignity and name of our country. Every single day, they try to reach out to yet another person in an effort for Malaysia to be heard on the international arena. As a small country the size of New Mexico and the population of Texas, as Fauziah puts it in her book, Malaysia needs to have its concerns heard and heeded.

6. I find that there is a general misconception about the work of diplomats. Everyone else only sees the good side of it – the receptions, the gala events that they are invited to, the honour of mingling with the decision-makers in a particular country. But everyone who is part of the Wisma family knows how hard diplomats work for their country to make it big in the world – how late they stay at the office poring over document after document, how they burn the midnight oil writing and re-writing papers that will become part of history, how their every word and association is strategized to ensure the maximum acclamation for the country. Only fellow diplomats know how much effort is expended for Malaysia to look good to the rest of the world. And no one knows that better than the Foreign Minister himself.

7. Which is why I am taking this opportunity, here and now, to encourage all officers in the Foreign Service, to write about the country they are living in, about the experience while at post, and about the lessons that can be learnt from making your temporary home in a strange land, and in many cases, grappling with a strange language. Only by sharing our experiences in this way, can we enlighten the officers who come after us and prevent them from repeating the same mistakes. It is time that the Malaysian Foreign Service moved on, instead of relearning again and again the same thing.

Distinguished guests,

8. Look at the diplomats of the developed countries. Why are they deemed to be much better? I don't believe my officers are any less able than other diplomats – they just don't blow their own horn as well. We Asians are too reticent in that respect, something which I believe we would do well to change. Every time a person in a developed country goes through a particularly difficult or trying experience, chances are there will be a book about that person, either written by him, or else written for him. That is how others learn what the person has gone through, and glean a better perspective from that person's insights.

9. This is what Wisma officers and staff alike should strive to do. Share their experience, teach the next generation. Our daily, weekly or even monthly reporting only tell us so much. It is the daily, personal journals which present the humanistic aspect to the experience, and by so doing, makes the learning process so much more enjoyable. You can reach only a handful of people by quoting facts and figures, by going into the bare necessities of a situation. But you can reach so many more just by giving that extra touch of perspective and insight and emotions. The reality of it is that popular fiction almost always outsells those dry, non-fiction books which give you so much information and not much else.

10. Writing is an art to be perfected. Writing well takes no small amount of skill and plenty of practice. There is no dearth of skill in this respect in Wisma Putra. My officers have continuously surprised me by what they can achieve, given the finite resources and time at their disposal. This book, of course, is by far one of the pleasant-er surprises I have received from this Ministry. I hope that this book will not just be read by diplomatic officers, but will form part of popular reading for the general populace. This is one of the books that tells people what we are about, and how we go about doing our work.

11. I urge those of you who have not picked up a copy to do so, if only to get Fauziah to sign it for you.

12. And with those words, dan dengan lafaz Bismillahirrahmanirrahim, I formally welcome this book into the realm of published works by Wisma officers.

Wisma Putra,  
Putrajaya.  
May 2003