

By : DATUK SERI SYED HAMID ALBAR
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Title : WELCOMING REMARKS AT THE SEVENTH SESSION OF THE MALAYSIA – IRAQ JOINT COMMISSION

HE Muyassar Rija Shlah
Minister of Industry and Minerals, Republic of Iraq

Excellencies

Distinguished delegates

Ladies and Gentlemen

It gives me great pleasure to welcome HE Minister Muyassar Rija Shlah and other members of the Iraqi delegation once again to Kuala Lumpur for the seventh meeting of the Malaysia – Iraq Joint Commission. I hope you have had enough time to rest and recover from your long journey from Baghdad. We have drawn up a programme for you during your short stay in Kuala Lumpur, which we hope would meet your expectation. Please feel free to let us know if you need us to arrange any other programme - my officers here are at your disposal and would be glad to serve your needs to ensure that you will have a pleasant and fruitful stay in Malaysia.

Since our last meeting in October 2001, many important developments have taken place around the world which were to shape the course of our history and affect relations among countries. War on terrorism, the threat of war on Iraq and Israel's military aggression against the state and people of Palestine are the issues of the day.

As we meet this morning, we would like to express our deep concern at the recent developments that are unfolding before us in the Middle East over the allegation that Iraq continues to develop weapons of mass destruction and the subsequent threat of war by US and its allies on Iraq. Malaysia welcomed Iraq's unconditional acceptance of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1441, and subsequent full cooperation with the United Nations weapon inspectors as a positive step towards peace in the region. However, Malaysia is greatly alarmed with the military buildup by the US in the region as Malaysia is of the view that war will only further destabilize the region which is already grappling with the unjust Israeli aggression on Palestine. Malaysia strongly feels that the continued trade and economic sanctions against Iraq would only serve to perpetuate the sufferings of the people of Iraq.

On the escalation of the Israeli - Palestinian conflict, the international community cannot stand idle as violence in Palestine threatens not just regional peace but also world peace. We believe much of the root causes for acts of terrorism today are connected with the Palestinian issue and therefore there is a dire need for the international community to address this issue. On Israel's military aggression against

Palestine, we strongly condemned the use of excessive and disproportionate force against innocent Palestinians. We call on the international community to urge Israel to comply with the various UN resolutions as the only way to achieve a lasting solution to the crisis.

As Your Excellency is aware, Malaysia will be hosting this year, two very important summits namely the Non-Aligned Summit in February and the OIC Summit in October. During our tenure as chairman of both organizations, Malaysia will exert every effort in addressing growing problems and concerns of the developing and Muslim world in meeting the evolving global environment and challenges. In doing so we need the full support and cooperation of the members of the two organizations including Iraq. We are confident that the presence and participation of Iraq at these two important summit meetings is significant and would help to realize the goals and aspirations of the developing and Muslim countries.

Excellencies and distinguished delegates,

Malaysia – Iraq relations are deeply rooted as both countries share one religion, common values and similarities of views on a broad range of regional and global issues. The continued exchanges of high level visit between Malaysia and Iraq bear testimony to this. Last year Iraq's Minister of Trade made a brief stopover in Malaysia during which I had the honour to receive him. Iraq's Foreign Minister visited Malaysia in conjunction with the Special Session of Islamic Conference of Foreign Ministers on Terrorism in Kuala Lumpur. This was followed by the visit of the Minister of Awqaf and Religious Affairs who attended the Seventh Conference of Ministers of Endowments (Awqaf) and Islamic Affairs held in May 2002. On the Malaysian side, the Minister of Women and Family Development visited Iraq in May 2002 which coincided with her participation at the Seventh Baghdad Conference. Recently, our Minister of Information was also in Baghdad for an official visit and to represent UMNO at another international Conference hosted by Iraq.

Malaysia has always viewed Iraq as one of its closest friends and important trading partner in the region. Trade between our two countries may be small but has certainly shown positive sign for improvement. For the first ten months (Jan – Oct) of 2002 Malaysia's bilateral trade with Iraq increased by 145.73% from US\$27.18 million to US\$66.80 million. Malaysia participated in the 35th Baghdad International Fair (BIF) 2002 and will again participate in November of this year. Since the beginning of the OFF programme in 1996 up to the eleventh phase, Malaysian companies have been awarded contracts worth US\$953 million, the second biggest after Vietnam among ASEAN countries. It is noted that because of the UN sanction, the scope for trade relations remained restricted; nevertheless, the Government of Malaysia will continue to encourage its private sector to participate in any trade and investment opportunities in Iraq so as to enhance our economic and trade relations further. We hope the Iraqi Government would continue to facilitate and provide enhanced market access for Malaysian products and services. We are of course happy to participate and contribute, where possible, towards Iraq's economic and infrastructural reconstruction programme.

We are particularly pleased with the decision of the Iraqi Government to buy Malaysia's national car, Proton, with the delivery last year of the first batch of 5000 units of Wira under Phase 8 of the OFF program. We are equally pleased that the cars are well received in Iraq and that a further delivery of another 5000 units is expected within this year.

Excellencies and distinguished delegates,

As we go through the Agenda of the Meeting, my delegation remains at your disposal for any requests, proposals and changes your side might have. We are also open to any suggestions to make our deliberations as smooth and as productive as possible.

On that note, I once again wish Your Excellency and members of your delegation a warm welcome and look forward to a fruitful meeting.

Thank you.