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Venue : J.W. MARRIOT HOTEL, PUTRAJAYA
Date : 15 OCTOBER 2003
Title : SPECIAL WELCOME ADDRESS AT THE SPECIAL OIC LEADERS FORUM OF THE OIC BUSINESS FORUM 2003

Assalamualaikum and a very good afternoon

H.E. General Pervez Musharraf,
President of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan

H.E. Sulejman Tihic,
President of the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina

H.E. President Omar Hassan Ahmad al-Bashir
President of the Republic of Sudan

Mr. Mirzan Mahathir
President of Asian Strategy and Leadership Institute (ASLI)

Tan Sri Dato' Azman Hashim
President of the Malaysia South-South Cooperation cum
Chairman of AmBank Group

H.E. Dr. Abdelouahed Belkeziz
Secretary General of the OIC Secretariat

Dato' Dr. Michael Yeoh
Organizing Committee of the Chairman of the OIC Business Forum 2003

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Praised be to Allah S.W.T. for His graciousness and blessings that we are all able to gather here this afternoon.

2. Let me, at the outset, say that I am indeed honoured to be here this afternoon to address this important gathering of prominent leaders and captains of industry from the OIC countries, at this special OIC Leaders Forum in conjunction with the OIC Business Forum 2003. I would like to commend and congratulate ASLI as well as its associate organisers, the Malaysia South-South Cooperation and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, for the initiative taken in organising this event. This is the first time that such a Forum is held as a side event of the OIC Summit.

3. I personally view that the convening of the Business Forum as most timely and appropriate. It is timely because Muslims have now reached a critical juncture – a crossroads that requires all of us to consolidate efforts to meet the new challenges and opportunities ahead. With Islam being perceived more negatively than ever before, Muslims must be fully prepared and equip themselves with clear strategies to

face these new challenges, and to avail themselves of the opportunities that lie ahead.

4. The fast pace of today's world will not wait for anyone. This compels all of us to come closer together, either by forming strategic partnerships or economic alliances so as to enhance our capacity and capability to meet the new and emerging challenges.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

5. We all know that presently, trade between OIC member countries is miniscule – it constitutes only 2 percent of total global trade. Thus, there is a tremendous potential for an increase in trade amongst OIC countries. With the combined market equivalent to that of China, the OIC market can be another major world market. Moreover, being endowed with rich natural resources, OIC members have not just a lot to offer, but also a lot to gain. However, there is a lot that needs to be done before we can achieve this objective.

6. Therefore, it is imperative that the public and private sectors forge stronger alliances and partnerships to build our competitive edge as well as to allow for the efficient and effective use of the available resources. Through such alliances too, member countries of the OIC would be able to acquire technical knowledge and expertise to respond to the challenges of globalization and trade liberalization. However, OIC member countries should not restrict themselves to establishing partnerships only among themselves. OIC members should establish or enhance networking with our non-OIC partners as well.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

7. Economic matters have gained more and more significance in today's era of globalization and liberalization. In every corner of the globe, we see how poor and vulnerable countries have fallen by the wayside. It is sad to note that many of these countries are OIC Member States. Their situation is made worse by the fact that they are unable to have their voices heard or to forge a united front in their dealings with the powerful countries. More often than not, Muslim countries have become resigned to the belief that their fate lies in the hands of their powerful partners from the developed world. It is my hope that in this Forum we may be able to address some of these questions.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

8. I believe this Business Forum today can play a meaningful role to promote and to enhance business and trade relationships amongst the OIC countries. This Forum will provide an avenue for Government leaders, captains of industry as well as corporate leaders to establish useful contacts and strategic linkages among themselves. With

increased rapport and stronger collaboration among OIC members we will be well-placed to undertake economic and social development programmes for the upliftment of our people.

9. I believe this Business Forum will serve as an important starting point for the long and arduous journey ahead of us. However, it is important for us to ensure that the ideas generated at this Forum will be immediately followed up with tangible actions. I do hope the Forum will be a permanent feature at future Summits of the OIC.

10. I trust you will have a fruitful discussion this afternoon. I wish you every success in your deliberations.

Thank you.