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Assalamu'alaikum Warahmatullahi Wabarakatuh

Salam Bahagia

YAB Dato' Seri Abdullah Hj. Ahmad Badawi
Prime Minister of Malaysia

Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen

On behalf of the organizers, I wish to warmly welcome YAB Dato' Seri Abdullah Haji Ahmad Badawi, Prime Minister of Malaysia and all of you to the National Colloquium on ASEAN jointly organized by Wisma Putra, Institute for Diplomacy and Foreign Relations and UiTM.

2. I deeply appreciate your kind presence here today, particularly on a weekend, to share with us your thoughts and views on the future directions of ASEAN.

3. I am particularly grateful that YAB Dato' Seri has found the time to deliver the keynote address to our National Colloquium. As all of you are aware, YAB Dato' Seri was my illustrious predecessor in Wisma Putra for nine years.

4. During his tenure as Foreign Minister, there were many major developments and achievements in Malaysia's foreign policy. YAB Dato' Seri was intimately involved in strengthening regional ties, establishing ties with developing countries, and in promoting an activist role and profile for Malaysia at the multilateral level. He is therefore a familiar figure with a steady hand at all levels of diplomacy - bilateral, regional and global. We are therefore highly fortunate to have him with us this morning to set the tone, structure and content for our discussions.

5. This Colloquium is to commemorate ASEAN Day which falls on August 8, as well as to seek suggestions and ideas on ASEAN from a cross section of Malaysians who are generally au fait with ASEAN matters. These inputs would be extremely useful in our preparations for the 11th ASEAN Summit which Malaysia would host in 2005 under the Chairmanship of YAB Dato' Seri.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

6. The thrust of this National Colloquium is to identify the do-able activities which Malaysia could promote during our Chairmanship. Yet at the same time, we need to

constantly remind ourselves that ASEAN is a grouping of ten sovereign nations. It is therefore important for us to factor this consideration as we begin the preparations for our Chairmanship.

7. With the above in mind, and taking into account the keynote address by YAB Dato' Seri, we would endeavour to discuss at some depth and length, the three pillars of the ASEAN Concord II, namely, the ASEAN Security Community, the ASEAN Economic Community and the ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community. We have also included a topic on ASEAN's External Relations and on the ASEAN's Institutional Processes and Structures. Prominent individuals, with expertise in these fields, hailing from the public and business sectors as well as from the think tanks and civil society have been invited as panellists and participants to discuss and present their perspectives on these issues. In this regard too, I wish to acknowledge with deep appreciation the presence of my Cabinet colleague here today, whom have agreed to chair one of the sessions.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

8. The recently concluded 37th ASEAN Ministerial Meeting (AMM) in Jakarta was a success. We are indeed pleased with the progress of the meeting where our proposal to host the first East Asia Summit in 2005 was generally well received by the rest of the ASEAN countries. ASEAN countries have agreed that the first East Asia Summit should be held in an ASEAN country. This shows a rise in the comfort level among the ASEAN countries, in matters dealing with East Asian Cooperation.

9. Among the other major issues discussed at the 37th AMM were ASEAN Security Community Plan of Action and the ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community Plan of Action, review of the ASEAN Institutional Framework, the ASEAN-Australia-New Zealand Commemorative Summit and the issue of ASEM membership.

10. During the Meeting too, five important documents were signed namely, "The Declaration of the Elimination of Violence Against Women, The ASEAN-Australia Joint Declaration for Cooperation to Combat International Terrorism, The ASEAN-Russia Joint Declaration for Cooperation to Combat International Terrorism and The Accession of Japan and Pakistan to the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation".

11. Apart from that, I am also pleased to inform that Malaysia would be the host for the ASEAN-Russia Summit in 2005, once endorsed by the upcoming Vientiane Summit this November. At the end of the year, we will be hosting the second East Asia Forum, which is scheduled on 6-7 December in Kuala Lumpur.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

12. Let me recall an excerpt from a speech which YAB Dato' Seri made in his capacity as Malaysian Foreign Minister at the opening of the 30th ASEAN Ministerial Meeting on 24th July 1997 in Malaysia as it is very relevant to our Colloquium today.

Quote :

We should take pride in the way that ASEAN evolved over the years, and ASEAN can only grow stronger with the two additional members which have just been admitted. The future of ASEAN 9 will be full of challenges. With our 30 years of experience and continued commitment to ASEAN Cooperation we can overcome any challenge. Our responsibility is to chart a course for ASEAN that will ensure its place as the pre-eminent organization in this region, respected both at home and abroad. ASEAN member states, both old and new, must now resolve that thirty years from now existing problems between them should disappear and new ones prevented from emerging. I would like to wish that when ASEAN celebrates its 60th Anniversary, every child in the ASEAN region will have a school to go to and be able to read and write. I would like to imagine that disease and hunger have become unknown. I would like to hope that these dynamic group countries would no longer have any disputes over territories between them. I would like to see a region fully at ease with Information Technology and exploiting to the fullest all the potentials that technology and has to offer – but most of all, I hope to see an ASEAN region maintaining its polite culture and traditions in the conduct of relations with one another. **Unquote.**

13. This was the vision of ASEAN expressed by YAB Dato' Seri nearly 7 years. No doubt his keynote address today will provide us with future insight and guidance on how we can promote and strengthen ASEAN.

14. With that note, I have great pleasure to now invite The Honourable Prime Minister to deliver the keynote address and to declare open the National Colloquium.

You have the floor, Sir.