

By : DATUK SERI SYED HAMID ALBAR
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**Title : SPEECH ON THE FOREIGN POLICY OF MALAYSIA AT THE XII
GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE ORGANISATION OF THE ASIA
PACIFIC NEWS AGENCIES (OANA)**

YBhg Datuk Syed Jamil Jaafar,
General Manager of the Malaysian News Agency (BERNAMA) and
Organising Chairman of the 12th General Assembly of OANA,

YBhg. Datuk Mohd Annuar Zaini,
Chairman of Bernama,

Mr. Mikhail Gusman,
Secretary General of the Organisation of the Asia Pacific News Agencies (OANA)

Mr. Ko Yamaguchi,
Rapporteur-General OANA

Distinguished Delegates,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

At the outset, let me also welcome the delegates to the 12th General Assembly of OANA. I do hope you will find your stay in Kuala Lumpur a very pleasant one. I would also like to take this opportunity to thank Bernama in particular YBhg. Datuk Syed Jamil Jaafar, the Organising Chairman of the 12th General Assembly, for inviting me to speak on Malaysia's foreign policy.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

2. Not since the past 22 years that our foreign policy is being scrutinized closely by Malaysia-watchers locally and world-wide. This is understandable as in October 2003, the premiership was transferred to the Hon. Dato' Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi. Since then, analyses have been made by the media, think-tanks and academicians whether there has been a shift in our foreign policy. I believe after 7 months have passed, everybody here would agree that the foundation of Malaysia's foreign policy has not changed.

3. Notwithstanding this, one must also agree that as the Prime Minister himself has said, foreign policy is not cast in stone. It has to be current and must respond to current challenges. Towards that end, Malaysia's foreign policy has always been pragmatic, independent and principled – putting our national interests at the forefront while balancing with principles, norms and laws governing international relations. In this connection, our foreign policy will continue to be premised on the following principles:

- respect of the independence, sovereignty, territorial integrity and non-interference in the affairs of other nations,
- peaceful settlement of disputes, and
- peaceful co-existence and mutual benefit in relations.

At the same time, one can expect that the style and approaches in enunciating Malaysia's foreign policy may now differ in keeping with the personality of Dato' Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi.

Distinguished Delegates,

4. Malaysia is a multiracial, multi-cultural and multi-religious country. We are also the 18th largest trading nation in the world. As a small developing trading nation, our survival rests on a peaceful and just international order. In this connection, Malaysia has pursued its foreign policy on the values of humanity, justice and equality. We believe in diversity and pluralism. Our foreign policy promotes and takes into account different points of view, reflecting the rich variety of countries that make up the fabric of community of nations.

5. Since our independence in 1957, we have worked hard to develop our economy, society and system of governance to better prepare ourselves to compete at the international stage. Blessed with pragmatic leadership of our Prime Ministers, Malaysia has been able to speak with conviction and courage and to stand on our principles. We also realized that the concerns of the South in general must be highlighted at the international fora. Or else, singly, developing countries would be sidelined and further marginalized. It became clear to us that we need to rally ourselves with other like-minded countries to promote and enhance South-South Cooperation. Our propagation has always been to see a world community that is based on shared wealth, just and fair for big and small nations alike.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

6. In Malaysia's foreign policy, regional cooperation has always been our major preoccupation. ASEAN remains our cornerstone. The peace, prosperity and stability that we enjoy today are to a large extent, due to ASEAN's role as an organisation that fosters trust and confidence amongst its member states.

7. Since its establishment, ASEAN has developed and refined various mechanisms and arrangements to promote trade, investment and other collaborative activities. Much of ASEAN's attractiveness to the outside world is built on the economic success of its member states and their potential for greater growth. As ASEAN confront various challenges including international terrorism, economic slowdown, SARS and the bird flu epidemic, it is ASEAN common effort that accounted for our success.

8. In today's borderless world, changes take place at exponential speed. ASEAN must therefore come up with new vision and strategies to face new and emerging challenges. Malaysia believes that the way forward for ASEAN is for it to move towards the realisation of an ASEAN Community, as envisaged in ASEAN Vision 2020. These objectives are echoed in the Bali Concord II signed by the ASEAN leaders in Bali last October. This will pave the way towards the realisation of the ASEAN Community through the three pillars namely:

- the ASEAN Security Community
- the ASEAN Economic Community, and
- the ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community

Ladies and Gentlemen,

9. Having spoken on Malaysia's foreign policy in respect of ASEAN, I would like to touch on the current developments, particularly on the international efforts to combat international terrorism, Palestine and Iraq.

10. International terrorism will remain a common threat unless we adopt a comprehensive approach in confronting the scourge. Let me state categorically here that Malaysia condemns all acts, methods and practices of terrorism. However, I believe that we made a mistake in responding to the tragedy of 9/11. We relied heavily on a military solution to the problem without looking at the root causes of that terrorist incident. Unfortunately, we have yet to learn that security could not be achieved solely through enforcement and military solutions. We must address the underlying causes and the environment that breeds terrorism. It is also important that terrorism should not be identified with any race, culture or religion. Profiling by religion or ethnicity would heighten friction along religious lines and may breed extremism.

11. Malaysia believes that international efforts in combating terrorism should be carried out in an impartial and objective manner, in accordance with the principles of international law. We believe that a universally accepted definition of terrorism is important to enable the international community to take concerted and targeted action against those who have been defined as terrorists. Malaysia also believes that measures against international terrorism should not infringe upon the sovereignty and territorial integrity of countries.

12. Terrorism is, of course, not a new phenomenon in Southeast Asia. Militant groups espousing various causes have always resorted to terrorism to undermine peace and stability in the region. In Malaysia's case, our multifaceted approach employing not only administrative, legislative and enforcement measures but also an unrelenting campaign in winning the hearts and minds of those who felt marginalised, had enabled us to successfully put an end to the communist insurgency.

13. As part of our ongoing efforts towards counter-terrorism, Malaysia has also set up the South East Asia Regional Centre for Counter Terrorism (SEARCCT). This Centre is meant to serve as a regional centre primarily focusing on training and capacity building. The center is open to officials from South East Asian countries and countries beyond. The Centre is open to collaborative programme with other countries. Currently, we have held joint programme with the United States. Similar projects are being discussed with Japan, Australia, United Kingdom, Canada, Germany and the European Union.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

14. With regard to the situation in Palestine, it appears that the peace efforts, as you are aware, have been stalled on every front. Tensions are rising in the region and the parties involved seem to lurch from crisis to crisis. Israel continues to resort to excessive use of force, arbitrary detention, house demolition, severe mobility restrictions and closure policies, construction of separation wall, as well as massive confiscation and destruction of fertile Palestinian agricultural land. These measures are blatant violation of the 4th Geneva Convention, and resolutions of the UN General Assembly and Security Council. They reflect in our view Israeli belligerence and disregard for the rule of law.

15. The Israeli Government must be pressured to stop its current policies and use of military force and turn to dialogue with the Palestinian side. Malaysia believes that only dialogue alone could ensure a lasting peace in the Middle-East.

16. As Chairman of the 10th Session of the Islamic Summit Conference, we have undertaken various steps to look for a way out of the impasse in the current Israeli Palestinian deadlock including the hosting of the Special Meeting on the Middle East held in Putrajaya on 22nd April 2004. The Special Meeting mandated Malaysia to send a delegation to meet members of the Quartet to convey the OIC's position on developments in Palestine. So far, I have led a delegation including representative from Morocco, Palestine, Senegal and Turkey to meet the Chairman of the European Union, Russia and the Secretary General of the United Nations. We are also meeting the US Secretary of State.

17. The Special Meeting also reiterated its full support for the people and the government of Palestine under the leadership of Yasser Arrafat. It reaffirmed the Organisation of Islamic Conference commitment to the peace process in the Middle East on the basis of the full implementation of the Road Map and the Arab Peace Initiative. The meeting also expressed concern over US support for Israel's unilateral withdrawal plan which if carried out would be detrimental to the peace process.

18. In our capacity as Chairman of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), we have also hosted the Ministerial Meeting of the Non-Aligned Movement Committee on Palestine on 13th May, 2004 in Putrajaya. This meeting reaffirmed NAM rejection of the unilateral withdrawal plan of Israel as it contradicts the provisions of the Road Map. The meeting also condemned the building of the "Separation Wall" in Occupied

Territory.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

19. It is imperative for the international community to urgently address the Palestinian issue and to take all necessary measures to prevent further deterioration of the already volatile situation. Malaysia as Chairman of OIC and of NAM calls upon the United Nations to play the central role in resolving the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

20. In discussing the situation in the Middle East it would be remiss if I do not refer to the situation in Iraq. Malaysia believes that the United Nations must play the central role in restoring peace and stability to the country including the restoration of sovereignty to Iraq. We further support the view that the Iraqi people must be given the choice to determine their own future without undue external pressure. In this regard, we are pleased that the Security Council is working towards the transfer of power to the Iraqi people on 30th June this year as scheduled.

21. As regard the deployment of a multinational force after the handover of power to the Iraqi people, Malaysia believes that such a peacekeeping force should only be there at the request of the Iraqi Government and should continue to stay there for as long as the Iraqi requires their presence. On the question of the Iraqi sovereignty, it should not be compromised under the pretext of purely keeping peace and security. The ultimate outcome of peace, security and stability in the whole region would be very much dependent on how ultimately the Iraqi situation is resolved.

22. In conclusion, I would like to emphasise that Malaysia strongly believes that only the United Nations can provide legitimacy to international order. Malaysia has always been a strong advocate of multilateralism and we oppose any and all forms of unilateralism. We do not believe that unilateralism is the way forward to resolve international problems.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

23. Permit me to also touch on the role of the media in international relations. I consider that the media is a very powerful institution. It can awaken the conscience of nations and the international community as they report graphically the tragedies in different corners of the world. At the same time they could conceal the truth by their bias and slant reporting. By possessing such powers the media is in fact in a position to exert enormous pressure on Governments to moderate their policies whether domestic or foreign policies. A recent good example is the wide international media exposure of the horrifying conditions and prisoners' abuse Abu Ghraib prison which not only brought immediate relieve to the suffering prisoners there but was also instrumental for an immediate review of US policies in handling the issue

including a public apology from the President of the most powerful nation of the world.

24. Such power is frightening if it is not accompanied by a sense of responsibility and accountability. The impact of unrestrained power is more dangerous because the reach of the media has become global and more significantly it has overcome distance and time completely.

25. In discussing the question of the media, developing countries have constantly been alleged by the West of not practicing the freedom of the press. Contrary to popular view, the press in the West may have been seen as free but they also do serve the vested interests of their governments. This perception was clearly visible at times of conflict especially during the 9/11 tragedy and the war on Iraq. Using their influence, they monopolise the airwave and TV screens by airing only their side of the story. Scenes of the killings of innocent civilians in Iraq for instance were not shown to the world including their own people.

26. I agree that in Malaysia, the media would have to apply for licensing to operate in the country. However, the press is given the freedom to report on any issues contributing to the betterment of the country. At the same time, in discharging their duties they would have to be mindful of the sensitivities within the context of Malaysia being a multi-racial, multi-cultural and multi-religious country. I believe that our media has so far been responsible in their reporting without limiting their freedom to express themselves.

27. I am not advocating that the media only report the good things. All I am asking is for the media to be fair, balanced and factual in their reporting especially on events in the developing countries. The media should be circumspect of customs, traditions, practices and sensitivities of the country it is reporting. Unruly reporting would have far reaching impact on the well being of that country and its people. The media could play an effective role in promoting peace, stability, equality and a just world order.

28. I would like to wish all of you a good meeting and I do hope that you would also take the opportunity to enjoy our beautiful country.

Thank you.

Ministry of Foreign Affairs
Putrajaya, Malaysia
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