

**By : DATUK SERI SYED HAMID ALBAR**  
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Ladies and Gentlemen,

May I, first of all, welcome you to Wisma Putra and to this Brainstorming Session, which the Ministry of Foreign Affairs is organising in collaboration with Aman Malaysia on the topic, "Peace for Palestine – The Way Forward and the Role of Civil Society". Let me also thank you for your participation in this session. Your presence, here, is a clear manifestation of the strong support that this initiative enjoys from you and your respective organisations. I look forward to your valuable contribution in our deliberations, today.

You will recall that the Hon'ble Prime Minister, Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, in his inaugural address during the Ministerial Meeting of the NAM Committee on Palestine on 13 May 2004 had called on the international community to manifest its solidarity with Palestine by initiating "a global people-based campaign in support of the continuing struggle of the Palestinian people and their elected leadership, akin to the global campaign against apartheid in South Africa". The Prime Minister went on to urge members of civil society within NAM to take up the challenge of "initiating a movement to champion, in a more focused and cohesive way, the cause of the Palestinian people, in the name of justice and international norms, until the attainment of their ultimate goal".

The Prime Minister had made that call in an effort to ensure that there will be no let up in the international support for the Palestinian cause at a time when there is no progress in the intergovernmental efforts towards resolving the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. This is a very critical time for the Palestinian people. Their dire plight under the continuing and increasingly oppressive Israeli occupation has become worse over time, with no relief in sight. The inter-governmental process through which efforts had been made to resolve the Arab-Israeli conflict over more than half a century have not yielded the desired results. The so-called "Road Map" for Peace in the Middle East is in limbo, if not already dead, particularly following recent pronouncements made in Israel that the Sharon Government was no longer committed to it. As Chairman of the Non-Aligned Movement and the OIC, Malaysia has embarked on a dialogue process with members of the International Quartet and the Permanent Members of the UN Security Council with a view to resuscitating the Road Map. While we will continue with these efforts with a view of exerting diplomatic pressure to save the peace process and get the Road Map back on track, in our view, the prospects of an early resolution of the conflict are very bleak indeed, given Israel's stubborn and relentless pursuit of a military solution to the problem, in spite of the obvious fact that the only viable solution is a political settlement of the conflict. It was with this situation in mind that the Prime Minister made his call for a people-based campaign in support of Palestine, in the earnest hope that serious

efforts on the part of civil society would help keep the Palestine issue alive and in the full awareness of the international community.

I should like to mention, here, that the importance of the work of NGOs, civil society organisations and peace groups in respect of the Palestinian issue has been well acknowledged by the Movement, as reflected, for instance, in the statements issued at the end of the recent Ministerial Meeting of the NAM Committee on Palestine in Putrajaya, as well as at the XIV Ministerial Meeting of the Movement in Durban in August 2004. Our own Prime Minister, in his recent speeches, including his statement at the NAM Ministerial Meeting in New York, last month, had highlighted the role of civil society organisations and had indicated Malaysia's serious intention to launch a global campaign in support of Palestine in close coordination with them.

I would like, therefore, to warmly commend Aman Malaysia for taking up the challenge posed by the Prime Minister. It is a tough challenge, fraught with many difficulties and stumbling blocks – organisational as well as political. Aman Malaysia will have to establish strategic linkages with civil society organisations around the world and to galvanise world-wide support, at the level of the people, for the Palestinian cause. This will not be an easy task as efforts will likely be made by pro-Israeli elements to frustrate such a campaign, for obvious reasons. However, I am confident that given the strong commitment of our people for the Palestinian cause and in the spirit of "Malaysia Boleh", Aman Malaysia, which groups together a great number of Malaysia's civil society organisations, with their network of friends abroad, will be able to play this role.

The purpose of this "Brainstorming" Session, today, is to generate ideas, and formulate appropriate strategies and approaches on how best to conduct this global campaign in an effective and efficacious manner. In particular, we will have to focus on the proposed upcoming International Conference of Civil society on Palestine, to be held in Kuala Lumpur next year, encompassing such issues as the theme and objective of the Conference, as well as the objectives and goals of the global campaign itself, institutional or organisational support for the global campaign, strategic linkages and partnerships, and concrete programmes of action so as to ensure its viability and sustainability over the years.

While the Government of Malaysia, through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, is taking this initiative, in collaboration with Aman Malaysia, the global campaign is intended to be largely a civil society endeavour. It is intended to complement the efforts being made at the inter-governmental process, which alone would confer legitimacy to any final peace agreement between Palestine and Israel. It is hoped that the global people-based campaign on Palestine would energise and feed into the inter-governmental process in the same way that the global campaign against apartheid had contributed enormously to the demise of that racist ideology in South Africa. Drawing from the experience of the anti-apartheid campaign, it is hoped that this new global campaign would contribute to the international efforts to free the people of Palestine from their own apartheid-like situation in Occupied Palestine and enable them to take their place as a free and independent people in the Community of Nations.

This people-based global campaign will be a clear demonstration of the fact that not only governments of the Non-Aligned countries are supportive of the Palestinian cause but also their peoples. Indeed, if this campaign proves to be truly global in character, it would manifest the broad support of the peoples of the world. Malaysia attaches particular importance to the success of this campaign for the reason that given the limitations of the inter-governmental process, on account of the power configuration in the international system, particularly in the UN Security Council, it is time to take the struggle of the Palestinian people directly to the peoples of the world. As Chairman of the Non-Aligned Movement, the success of this campaign would give us particular satisfaction as it would demonstrate, in a concrete way, the Movement's strong support for and solidarity with the Palestinian people, and would reflect positively on our leadership of the Movement.

As you may be aware, meetings on Palestine involving civil society organisations and NGOs are not unique and had been held in the past, the latest being the United Nations International Conference of Civil Society in Support of the Palestinian People in New York on 13 and 14 September 2004. While we could benefit from the outcome of these meetings and network with the organisations involved, our projected International Conference of Civil Society on Palestine, next year, would be different in that it would not be an ad-hoc arrangement or a one-off event but one that would launch a global people's campaign in support of Palestine. It is indeed a daunting prospect, but one that is worthy of our sustained support and commitment and would earn, for Malaysia and NAM, much credit and the lasting gratitude of the Palestinian people.

In closing, let me say that, although the Government has taken the initiative, it is our intention and desire to see that in the interest of its credibility, this people-based movement will be led and managed by civil society. While the Government will continue to keep a keen interest in its activities and progress and will play a supportive role, you, as representatives of civil society, will be in the driver's seat in this global campaign in support of Palestine. I wish you every success in your laudable undertaking.

Thank you.