

By : DATUK SERI SYED HAMID ALBAR
Venue : PUTRAJAYA
Date : 13 MAY 2004
**Title : WELCOMING REMARKS AT THE OFFICIAL OPENING OF THE
MINISTERIAL MEETING OF THE NAM COMMITTEE ON PALESTINE**

The Honourable Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, Prime Minister of Malaysia,

Honourable Ministers, Deputy Ministers, and other Distinguished Guests,

Distinguished Members of the NAM Committee on Palestine, Members of the NAM
Caucus of the UN Security Council and other Distinguished NAM Representatives,

Excellencies, Members of the Diplomatic Corps,

Ladies and Gentlemen:

I would like to express my profound thanks and gratitude to The Honourable Prime Minister, Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, for having consented to officiate at this official opening of this Ministerial Meeting of the Committee on Palestine of the Non-Aligned Movement, this morning. Your presence with us, here, Sir, means a great deal to the Members of the Committee and reflects Malaysia's and your own personal commitment to the Palestinian cause.

I would like also take the opportunity to welcome the distinguished Members of the Committee, the Non-Aligned Members of the UN Security Council, which by tradition, have always been invited to attend meetings of the Committee on account of their important role in the Security Council, as well as representatives of a number of NAM Member States who are playing important roles in the peace process. Malaysia is deeply appreciative of their participation at this important meeting, in spite of the short notice and the vast distances they have to travel. Last, but certainly not least, I would like to thank all of you, Excellencies, Distinguished Guests, and Ladies and Gentlemen, for your kind attendance at this opening ceremony this morning.

The Committee on Palestine of the Non-Aligned Movement is an important Committee of NAM, charged with the responsibility to monitor developments pertaining to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict and to take appropriate measures in support of the Palestinian people's struggle for their inalienable rights, including their right to an independent and sovereign State. The Committee is being convened, today, in order to address the grave and deteriorating situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territories, as well as recent developments and trends which are most worrying to the international community, particularly the members of the Non-Aligned Movement of which Palestine is an important member. The security situation in the Territories has worsened, with an increased level of violence which is threatening to plunge the region into an endless spiral of even more violence in the coming weeks and months. The humanitarian situation is appalling and getting worse by the day, with very little prospects of relief in sight. The situation has been made

worse by a number of recent developments, all of which portend more problems and difficulties for the future.

On the political front, these negative developments do not contribute to creating a climate of confidence in the region, which is vitally necessary for the peace process. What is particularly worrying is the absence of any movement or prospects of a political settlement in sight. The "Road Map" for Peace in the Middle East has, to all intents and purposes, been derailed and now lies in tatters, in spite of Israeli claims to the contrary. In the absence of any forward movement towards peace, there is a deepening sense of hopelessness and despair on the part of the Palestinian people. The overall situation is very bleak indeed and threatens to get worse over time unless serious efforts are made to arrest the slide towards further disorder and lawlessness. It is, therefore, imperative that the international community does all it could, individually and collectively, to support efforts that would lead to a political settlement of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, within the context of a comprehensive settlement of the conflict in the Middle East.

The Meeting of the NAM Committee on Palestine, today, will discuss the situation in all its aspects, consider appropriate approaches and measures that could be taken by the Committee as well those that could be taken by the Movement as a whole, within the framework of NAM's continued strong support for, and solidarity with, the Palestinian people. What is vitally important is the urgent need to save the Road Map and to keep alive hopes for peace through a political settlement of this long and protracted conflict. This is important because the alternative would be a deepening spiral of violence, indefinitely, or, worse, full-scale war, with all the repercussions to peace and security in the region—which we must avoid at all cost.

Clearly, the path pursued by Mr. Sharon — which, his own party has rejected, out of its narrow and parochial interests — is a path that leads nowhere. It is intended to continue with the status-quo, deny the Palestinian people of their inalienable rights and keep them under Israeli control and domination. This path has been rejected by the Palestinians, as well as by the international community, except for a very few.

Therefore, every effort must be made to keep the peace process alive. It is hoped that in considering the grave situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territories, the Committee will be able to come up with ideas and approaches that will contribute to supporting and strengthening that process. We hope to have a fruitful exchange of ideas and look forward to the contribution of all members of the Committee, as well as the NAM Members of the Security Council and those countries who play important roles in the peace process.

With those brief remarks, I would like to thank the Honourable Prime Minister, once again, for his presence. I am confident, Sir, that the important address you are about to make to us this morning will provide us with important pointers for our deliberations.

Thank you.