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Venue : IOI MARRIOT HOTEL, PUTRAJAYA
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Title : OPENING STATEMENT AT THE EIGHTH JOINT COMMISSION MEETING BETWEEN MALAYSIA-REPUBLIC OF IRAQ

H.E. Usama Abdul Aziz Al-Najafi,
Minister of Industry and Minerals of the Republic of Iraq,

Members of the Iraqi and Malaysian Delegations

Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

On behalf of the Government of Malaysia and on my own personal behalf, let me begin by extending a very warm welcome to you and the members of your delegation to Malaysia. I am delighted that today we are able to convene the Eighth Joint Commission Meeting between Malaysia and Iraq in Putrajaya, Malaysia. This would be the first JCM to be convened after the war and under the new Government of Iraq. I consider this Meeting and your visit as an important landmark in terms of rekindling our longstanding relationship between our two countries.

2. Iraq has always been close to the hearts of all Malaysians from all walks of life. We are saddened to see so much destruction and the loss of so many human lives in Iraq. Out of sincere and genuine concern for the well-being of the people of Iraq, the Government and the people of Malaysia have extended humanitarian assistance to Iraq. This has been channelled through our NGOs, such as MERCY Malaysia and the Malaysian Red Crescent Society. Considering the gravity of the present situation faced by your people, we wish and pray for the end of violence and acts of terrorism in Iraq. We sincerely wish to see Iraq take its rightful place among the community of nations with pride and dignity that it so deserves. In this regard, Malaysia reaffirms its commitment to support Iraq's constitutional and electoral process, and in whatever way deemed appropriate we would be ready to help Iraq in its reconciliation and reconstruction efforts.

3. The promulgation of Iraq's new Constitution soon, I believe, would protect and safeguard the rights and obligations of every Iraqi citizens based on the principles of justice and fairness for all, without distinction as to their ethnic identity or religious belief. What important is that all Iraqis must feel that they are consulted and become part of the reconsolidation process. On this basis, I am of the view that Iraq could achieve lasting peace and stability, thus contributing to the peace and stability of the region and at the global level.

Your Excellency, Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,

4. The convening of this Eighth Joint Commission Meeting (JCM) between our two countries is indeed timely and appropriate. We believe that the Joint Commission

serves as the proper mechanism towards renewing our bilateral relationship and cooperation. The JCM provides us with the opportunity to consult and discuss on various strategies and approaches that would enhance cooperation between our two countries especially as Iraq is in the process of rebuilding the country. I am equally confident that this Meeting will avail to us with the opportunity to identify potential and new areas of collaboration. This meeting is thus most appropriate since the last one was held in January 2003.

5. In term of trade, Iraq has always been one of Malaysia's important trading partners in the West Asia region. Bilateral trade between our two countries, although now relatively small, had shown a significant increase in 2004. It had increased by 1,626 percent from USD 12.5 million in 2003 to USD 215.8 million in 2004. From January to July 2005, the total trade between our two countries amounted to USD 17.9 million. I am confident that we can work towards increasing further trade and economic collaboration between the two countries.

6. In 2004, passenger motor vehicles constituted the bulk of Malaysia's export to Iraq. Apart from motor vehicles, other Malaysian products with export potential to Iraq are construction materials (steel, sanitary ware and timber products), rubber and plastic products, agricultural supplies, veterinary supplies, education supplies, communication equipment, palm oil and palm oil products, medicine and medical equipment and electrical and telecommunication supplies. Malaysian companies had participated in the Rebuild Iraq 2005 Exhibition held in Amman, Jordan in April 2005. I hope that they will take the opportunity to work with their Iraqi counterparts and others to be part of the process of rebuilding your economy.

7. In the field of oil and gas, Malaysia's cooperation with Iraq has also been moving forward significantly. Our oil company, PETRONAS signed a Memorandum of Cooperation (MoC) with the Ministry of Oil of Iraq in October 2004 to formalize the cooperation established between the two parties since 1994. Following the signing of the MoC, five Joint Steering Committee Meetings have been held so far in Kuala Lumpur and Amman, Jordan. PETRONAS is keen to participate in the Ratawi Oil Field Development and Block 2 Exploration. In this regard, I hope that PETRONAS would be given special preference by the Government of Iraq to secure the contract for the projects.

8. Malaysia also encourages its private sector to participate actively in the field of construction as well as in power and utility sectors in Iraq. Our companies have developed considerable expertise in these sectors. Coming from developing countries, we understand the sensitivity of working in other developing countries. Further, considering our good brotherly relations, I hope that the Government of Iraq would give the opportunities to Malaysian companies to participate in Iraq's reconstruction projects.

Your Excellency, Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,

9. The Agenda for the Eighth Joint Commission Meeting between Malaysia and Iraq presented before us is wide-ranging encompassing. It includes trade and investment; oil and gas; finance and banking; transportation; tourism and culture; construction and housing; industry and commodity; education; higher education; agriculture; water resources; training; electricity; health; science and technology; and religious matters. I know that you are very much action-oriented that you wanted follow-up mechanism to be included in our Agreed Minutes. I am glad that such mechanism has been incorporated. This is very ambitious but we can do it if we want to do it. What we need is political will. I am confident that we will be able to reach understanding and agreement on the various issues before us as well as able to identify other areas of cooperation. Here, I would like to extend my appreciation to the senior officials of both sides for their preparatory work and efforts in ensuring that our meeting today will be fruitful and productive. I commend them for the good work done. It is now our responsibility at the Ministerial level to review their work and further discuss the agenda before us.

10. In conclusion, on behalf of the Government of Malaysia and on my personal behalf, once again I extend my sincere best wishes to you and the Iraqi delegation. Apart from having a constructive dialogue with our delegation, I hope you will bring back fond memories and pleasant experiences of Malaysia.

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