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MINISTERIAL MEETING `DISCUSSIONS ON THE NEW ASIAN-
AFRICAN STRATEGIC
PARTNERSHIP'**

Co-Chairs,

Excellencies,
Distinguished delegates,

Ladies and gentlemen,

At the outset, I would like to thank the Government and People of Indonesia for the excellent arrangements and kind hospitality extended to my delegation and I. My thanks also go to the Co-chairs for the Draft Joint Ministerial Statement on the New Asia-Africa Strategic Partnership (NAASP), which Malaysia supports.

2. We are gathered in Indonesia to commemorate a historic event, namely the Bandung Conference. We should do more than merely commemorate and celebrate – we must reflect, particularly on where have we moved in history since then. The Bandung Conference and its principles were significant not only for galvanizing newly independent countries, but also those who had aspired for independence. It had talked not only of political independence, but also freedom from economic, intellectual and moral dependence on our erstwhile colonial masters. At the same time, it marked the beginning of what we now know as South-South cooperation. Therefore, I firmly believe that at the Golden Jubilee of this historic occasion, we must take stock of how far have we come in fulfilling these aspirations.

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

3. The world has evolved since the historic meeting. So have cherished concepts such as South-South cooperation, which in the beginning was based on the notion of `collective self-reliance'. However, it is clear that in this age of globalization, characterized as it is by interdependence and interrelatedness, this notion too needs, and has, evolved. In order for us to achieve independence as comprehensively conceived in 1955, engagement with the wider world is required. But the terms of engagement must be favourable to us, and to our benefit. How we achieve this, is I firmly believe, the key challenge facing South-South cooperation.

4. We in the South have demonstrated our ability to evolve with the times. This can be proven if one were to conduct a historical survey of initiatives under South-South cooperation, which reflect our collective attempts to square up to the challenges facing us. For example, the creation of UNCTAD at the behest of countries of the South was a manifestation of our desire to create a fairer international order based on trade and development. Other initiatives such as the establishment of the Economic Cooperation among Developing Countries (ECDC), the Group of 15 and the Common Fund for Commodities all reflect our desire to come to terms with a changing world. For Malaysia, we take pride in the fact that we too have contributed to these efforts to shape and mould the world in which we live in.

5. In this context, Malaysia as the Chairman of the NAM has undertaken various steps to strengthen the Movement to better enable it to defend our collective interests. Initiatives such as the convening of the NAM Business Forum as well as the convening of the NAM Ministerial Meeting on the Advancement of Women, to be held in Putrajaya from 7 to 10 May 2005 are but two examples of Malaysia's attempts to have the NAM engaged in areas not traditionally within its domain, as a means to ensure its continued relevance.

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

6. We therefore view the Asian-African Summit and the New Asian-African Strategic Partnership as part of this historical evolution of South-South cooperation. While we all realize the importance that the NAASP should complement and strengthen, rather than detract from current initiatives on south-south cooperation, it can nevertheless add value to these initiatives by strengthening inter-regional cooperation among the countries of Asia and Africa, thus filling a lacuna that has existed for 50 years.

7. The NAASP can also add value by focusing its attention on certain key areas, some of which have already been included in the Draft Joint Ministerial Statement and Draft Declaration which we have before us. Of particular note is the emphasis on capacity building. Certainly, studies by bodies as diverse as the UNDP, UNCTAD, the Bretton Woods Institutions as well as the Sachs Report have conclusively proven that those countries which have invested in building capacities be it in education, health and social services are those which are better able to reap the rewards of globalization.

8. The NAASP can therefore play a useful role in helping to forge partnerships geared towards capacity building, strengthening public infrastructures and government institutions and structures, through the exchange of experiences. In this connection, Malaysia has, within the context of the Malaysian Technical Cooperation Programme (MTCP) since its establishment in 1980, shared its experiences in various fields with other developing countries. Currently, there are 135 countries which are listed as MTCP recipient countries out of which 46 are from Africa.

9. At the same time, Malaysia will continue to explore new and innovative approaches to exchange ideas aimed at increasing national capacities. Malaysia as the Chairman of the OIC is currently embarking on the Capacity Building Programme for OIC Countries (CBP4OICC) which was launched on 29 March 2005. The main objective of the Programme is aimed at the eradication of poverty through the creation of economic opportunities in the less developed and low-income OIC member countries. It is our hope that sufficient momentum will be generated which would enable the scope and number of projects to be expended in the near future.

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

10. In order to survive and prosper in an increasingly competitive world, other than building capacities, it is also essential that we put in place governance structures based on the rule of law, which can best respond to the needs of its citizens. Further, engagement with civil society is essential in order to be able to respond to the needs and aspirations of our citizens.

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

11. Before I conclude, in the interest of time, allow me to touch briefly on Asian-African Cooperation on Disaster Reduction. Malaysia considers that the Asian-African cooperation on disaster reduction as another form of cooperation that would go towards strengthening the bonds between the two continents. Our cooperation could take the form of Asian-African capacity building programme on post-disaster management, an Asian-African mechanism for the sharing of seismic data or an Asian-African rescue operations mechanism. This could be done with the cooperation and expert assistance from the United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (UNISDR) and other disaster relief organisations. In short, the Asian-African cooperation on disaster reduction should eventually complement all other existing initiatives on disaster reduction at the international level.

12. At this juncture, it is pertinent to take note of the initiatives and actions plans that are already being undertaken at a number of international fora. These include the ASEAN Tsunami Early Warning Centre, the Mauritius Strategy for the further Implementation of the Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States and the Hyogo Framework for Action 2005-2015 to name a few. However, Malaysia would like to stress that it is imperative for us to ensure that there would be no duplication of initiatives that would unnecessarily drain precious resources.

13. In conclusion, I look forward to the success of this initiative as a means of reinvigorating the longstanding bonds of friendship which exist between our two continents, through practical and concrete steps.

Thank you.