



Malaysia ⁵²

Permanent Mission to the United Nations

STATEMENT BY

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PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF MALAYSIA
TO THE UNITED NATIONS

ON

AGENDA ITEM 39:

STRENGTHENING OF THE COORDINATION OF HUMANITARIAN AND
DISASTER RELIEF ASSISTANCE OF THE UNITED NATIONS,
INCLUDING SPECIAL ECONOMIC ASSISTANCE

AT

THE PLENARY OF
THE 59TH SESSION OF THE UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY
NEW YORK

TUESDAY, 18 JANUARY 2005

[Please check against delivery]

Mr. President,

My delegation welcomes the convening of this resumed session of the 59th General Assembly today. My delegation, representing both a country affected by the tsunami and a member of ASEAN, fully associates itself with the statement made by the Lao PDR on behalf of ASEAN

Malaysia believes that the convening of this resumed session marks another crucial step in the follow-up efforts undertaken by the international community, led by the United Nations, to address the medium and long term humanitarian, rehabilitation and reconstruction needs of the affected countries. We hope that the General Assembly will find consensus on the draft resolution tabled by the cosponsors.

My delegation would like to reiterate our sincere condolences and deep sympathies to the governments and peoples of all the affected countries for the tragic loss of lives and the devastating socio-economic, psychological and environmental impact of the unprecedented tsunami disaster. We also extend similar sentiments to the governments and peoples of countries whose citizens also perished and suffered injuries and losses as a result of the disaster. We also like to take this opportunity to express sincere appreciation and gratitude to all who have sent messages of sympathy and condolences to Malaysia and who have offered assistance during this traumatic time.

Mr. President,

For Malaysia, the fact that the tsunami had affected us came as a national shock. The immediate priority of the Government has been that of ensuring the restoration of normalcy to the affected areas. Appropriate assistance has been provided to the victims. Malaysia suffered 68 dead and about 8000 people were displaced. Six Malaysians died in some neighbouring countries and a few remain missing.

The financial burden in dealing with the effects of this disaster is quite heavy. But the Government can cope with the situation. Malaysia feels that most of the other affected countries deserve more immediate attention than Malaysia. We are doing our part to assist them as well.

Malaysia has dispatched humanitarian, medical and search and rescue teams, with supplies, heavy equipment and helicopters to Aceh. The Royal Malaysian Air Force has utilized C-130 and CN-235 aircraft to ferry medicine, medical supplies and communications equipment. The Royal Malaysia Navy deployed a ship carrying 500 tonnes of humanitarian aid such as food, baby food, drinking water, medicine and medical supplies as well as heavy equipment, including two bulldozers, three excavators and six 3-ton trucks to Aceh to assist the people in the affected areas there.

Malaysian airports have also been used as staging points for the delivery of goods and other materials to the affected countries, especially Indonesia. Malaysia has also set up an "Asian Tsunami Disaster Fund" to enable the Malaysian people and corporate sector to contribute money for the relief of tsunami victims in other countries. So far more than 12 million Ringgit in cash, including a 5 million Ringgit contribution from the Government, has already been extended to Indonesia, Maldives and Sri Lanka. As of 14 January, public contributions for the domestic tsunami victims have exceeded 53 million Ringgit .

Mr. President,

It is not entirely possible to prevent natural disasters from occurring. However a lot can be done to mitigate their devastating effects. In this regard, it is necessary to set up early warning systems that would not only exclusively focus on tsunami, but also other equally destructive natural disasters. The scale of the recent tragedy might not have been as enormous had the appropriate systems been in place. For now, Malaysia and many other countries do not have such alert systems. We are ready to extend our fullest cooperation and take part in any initiative aimed at providing the necessary capabilities in this matter.

Malaysia also looks forward to learning and working closely with other countries or international bodies, which have the expertise in early-warning systems. Malaysia is fully aware of the high costs in setting up such infrastructure. It may in fact be prohibitive to many developing countries. We believe that only the United Nations can gather the resources, expertise and capacity to undertake this massive endeavor in the region. As such, Malaysia is of the view that the United Nations must be fully involved if any such initiative is to succeed. Besides that Malaysia also hopes that the developed countries will show equal commitment to cooperate to establish an effective regional natural disaster monitoring system.

At the national level, the Government of Malaysia has approved an initial allocation of 19 million Ringgit to establish an early warning system for the country. The operational cost is estimated at 3.5 million Ringgit per year. However, the Government had yet to decide on the type of system to be used. We are now gathering information from countries which have had more experience in dealing with catastrophes caused by tsunami.

Other than the establishment of early warning systems, Malaysia is also convinced that there are certainly many ways of alleviating the hardships of the tsunami affected countries and assisting them in their gigantic tasks of reconstruction. One concrete proposal relates to the cancellation or review of their international debts. Malaysia hopes the countries in a position to do so should seriously consider taking this far-reaching step of noble statesmanship in the name of humanitarianism.

Thank you.