



**Permanent Mission of**  
**Malaysia** ④  
**to the United Nations**

(Check against delivery)

**STATEMENT BY**  
**HIS EXCELLENCY AMBASSADOR DATO' KAMILAN MAKSOM**  
**AT THE**  
**HIGH-LEVEL DIALOGUE ON INTERRELIGIOUS AND INTERCULTURAL**  
**UNDERSTANDING AND**  
**COOPERATION FOR PEACE,**  
**NEW YORK, 5 OCTOBER 2007**

Mr. President,  
Excellencies,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I wish to take this opportunity to express to you, Mr. President, our appreciation for convening this High-Level Dialogue on Interreligious and Intercultural Understanding and Cooperation for Peace. May I also take this opportunity to thank the Philippines and Pakistan for initiating this Dialogue.

2. We see this as a timely effort at bringing our various cultures, religions and peoples together to dialogue amongst ourselves under the auspices of the United Nations. Malaysia is fully supportive of efforts at the international level which are designed to generate greater understanding between religions, cultures and civilizations. In fact, we have been involved at efforts to build bridges among religious, cultures and civilizations including organizing international inter-faith dialogue entitled "Who speaks for Islam? Who speaks for the West?" which was held in Kuala Lumpur in 2006 and 2007, as well as co-hosting the Second ASEM Interfaith Dialogue, with Cyprus in July 2006. Malaysia was also one of the sponsors of the Conference on Interfaith Cooperation for Peace which was held on 22 June 2005.

3. We are pleased to note the participation of the civil society including non-governmental organizations and the private sector at this dialogue, which we believe would greatly enhance our mutual efforts towards promoting inter-cultural, inter-civilizational and inter-religious understanding. This larger participation also represents the determined will of the international community to cooperate for peace. Indeed, for this sort of dialogue to be successful, the widest range of partners and stakeholders need to be involved.

Mr. President,

4. Our world continues to be besieged with conflicts; among nations and among peoples, despite our progress into modernity and democracy. Culture and religious differences are said to be the causes of our present day conflicts, when yet we know very well that they spawn from differences in our political viewpoint. When we should be celebrating the beauty of diversity amongst peoples, some quarters including zealots distract from this highlight instead cultural and religious differences and transform these differences into divisions. Moreover, self-centric societies which view other peoples and cultures from the perspective of their own benchmarks and philosophies while imposing their values onto other societies, contribute to the atmosphere of acrimony and distrust among peoples. Just as religion is taken to the extremes, so too is the notion of democracy, including freedom of speech and expression, which on many occasions are taken to the extreme and ignore the sensitivities and feelings of certain groups of people. The oppression and ill-treatment of certain groups of people by States and in some cases by people of different persuasion as in the case of the Palestinian people and Muslim minorities in certain part of the world, also contribute to the growing schism between cultures and religions, particularly between the Western world and Islam.

5. This dangerous trend of a growing schism between different cultures and religions must be addressed immediately, lest it would present a serious threat to international peace. We need to bridge this gap and narrow down any differences we have. As a multi-ethnic, multi-cultural and multi-religious country which has celebrated 50 years of nationhood, Malaysia understands very well the challenges the world would be confronted with if this dangerous trend is not reversed.

Mr. President,

6. Malaysia believes that the key to bringing all of us closer and to narrowing this gap is to build a culture of respect. Respect for one another will proliferate to understanding and tolerance. Tolerance of our rich diversity will create the understanding needed for us to bridge the gap between our cultures and civilizations.

7. Malaysia views our role today as part of our inter-cultural, inter-civilizational and inter-religious dialogue where all parties need to ensure that we multiply the bridge-builders as well as focus on the common values that we share. We need to approach dialogue with mutual respect from all dimensions, including ethnicity, culture, religion, as well as mutual respect for different countries and nationalities. Political viewpoints should not cloud our common values.

8. While we work towards fostering dialogue in this High-Level forum, of equal, if not of more importance, is to focus our subsequent work at ensuring that our interactions at this dialogue, and all other dialogues of this nature, should flow to the people at the grassroots level. Our dialogue should be people-centered and people-oriented rather than state-centric. At times our dialogue is too often couched in political or academic language and terms which become too vague or convoluted. We therefore need to translate our ideas and thoughts into practical measures and ways for the masses to understand and appreciate.

9. One way is through education. We believe that education is an essential tool towards developing greater understanding and to stem the rising tide of intolerance and distrust. Our youth should be guided into understanding the beauty of our diversity as against its contradictions. The sense of understanding, tolerance, sensitivity and awareness towards other cultures and persuasions must be instilled and fostered into each layer of the society, particularly the youth. An intermixing of young minds and ideas through unbiased and responsible guidance would promote a culture of respect, tolerance and understanding. Malaysia is convinced that through the establishment of more youth cooperation programmes, the fostering of understanding and appreciation of the values and belief systems of others will be forged.

Mr. President,

10. Malaysia recognizes the important role of the media in promoting inter and intra-faith dialogues. Unfortunately, we note that most international media tend to highlight differences rather than commonalities among our cultures and religions. We see the labeling of certain groups of people as counter-productive towards building understanding and trust among peoples. This creates confusion rather than clarity. Labeling furthermore, has the potential to be self-fulfilling since no one specific label can perfectly capture a particular human phenomenon. It is therefore important to use words and language which create confidence and take into account the sensitivities of others in order to create a culture of respect, understanding and tolerance.

11. At the same time, the international media must also give sufficient space to voices that speak of harmony, of tolerance and of moderation. The voices of facilitators and communicators that build bridges of goodwill between cultures and religions must be highlighted to muffle the voices of those who preach extremism and hatred.

Mr. President,

12. Malaysia remains committed at efforts, particularly through the United Nations, towards generating respect, understanding and tolerance among cultures, religions and civilizations. We believe that positive interaction among peoples of diverse cultures and values will help to achieve the aim of preserving and promoting global peace, stability and harmony. We are convinced that the culture of peace lies with mutual respect, understanding and tolerance among religions, cultures and peoples.

Thank you, Mr. President.