



STATEMENT BY DR. RAIS YATIM, MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS OF MALAYSIA AT THE GENERAL DEBATE OF THE 63RD SESSION OF THE UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY, NEW YORK, 27 SEPTEMBER 2008

Mr. President,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

The Malaysian delegation congratulates you Mr. President on your election as the President of the 63rd Session of the UN General Assembly.

Mr. President,

2. We are in a situation of unprecedented crisis. The sky-rocketing prices of fuel and food have caused us distress and widespread hardship. Beyond these, the present financial and climate crises continue to tear the social fabric of member states. To merely term it as an economic crisis is to understate the case. Indeed the sheer complexity and connectivity between food, fuel and energy, between finance and climate change make the task of addressing these “convergent crises” so bedeviling. It is here at the UN that these crises must be faced and resolved. If we fail to address and remedy these calamities our role and responsibility in this august body would be put to question.

3. Some have called the present situation, particularly the food crisis, as a ‘silent tsunami’. I beg to differ. It was and is not silent. Instead, the rumblings have been heard for some time, most particularly in Africa. The international community had gathered in Rome in 1974 to address the global food crisis. It was in Rome in 1996 during the World Food Summit that we dedicated ourselves to eliminate hunger and malnutrition and to achieve sustainable food security for all. We adopted seven commitments toward this end. It was estimated in 1974 that if action was not taken, there could be 680 million hungry people in the world in 2010. The latest figure shows that at present, 850 million people face hunger on a daily basis. Clearly we have failed to take heed of the warnings made 34 years ago. Can we now ask: what happened to those resolutions that we made?

4. Liberalisation has fundamentally changed the market structure for food and energy sources. This allows for greater international speculation. A clear evidence of speculation on the price of food is the dramatic fall in prices. Close to 40 percent increase was recorded within a six-month period in some cases. In view of the volatility of food prices, Malaysia is strongly supportive of efforts to promote agriculture and food production.

5. It is generally assumed that rising food prices automatically benefits all farmers equally. This is not the case. Due to the concentrated and vertically integrated nature of the global food trade, a good number of agribusiness companies controls all aspects of cultivation and distribution. We are therefore now witnessing smallholders being squeezed out. They are unable to benefit from rising prices. At the same time, ironically many have to purchase food items that are available in the market at very high prices.

6. The energy fuel crisis shares some common causes with the food situation. Under-investment is one. Expectations of continued ample supply have been dashed due to speculation and increased demand. The cause of the crises related to fuel and food and also climate change are due squarely to the

unfulfilled hopes and broken promises of sustainable development. In Rio almost a decade and a half ago, the human family agreed that we would undertake concerted action to address the sustainable development challenge, based among others, on the principle of common but differentiated responsibility. Yet we are facing a crisis that could bring about catastrophic consequences. It would appear that we have not learnt the lessons of history nor the habit of producing resolution after resolution minus the requisite pursuit and follow-up. Indeed this is the root cause of our stagnation in many areas of the UN's responsibilities.

7. The question is, therefore, what needs to be done? Allow me to make six suggestions:

One, the international community and in particular the developed world, should demonstrate greater political commitment. The focus of the developed world should be on fulfilling their 2008-2012 commitments and in so doing set a standard for the entire world, rather than on trying to pass the burden of action on to the developing world.

Two, we must find the right mix in balancing the competing interests of the three pillars of sustainable development, namely economic growth, social development and environmental protection;

Three, the optimum mix between governmental and private sector action must be found. Clearly, market forces and the private sector have a role to play in overcoming these convergent crises. However, the role of the government is critical in terms of providing policy integration as well as to balance the competing interests of the three pillars of sustainable development;

Four, create more infrastructure development and the transfer of technology as critical elements of overcoming the present crises. The developing world is still infrastructure-deficient. Pure market solutions to technology transfer cannot be regarded as effective solutions for achieving sustainable development. Government intervention is required if these technologies are to be made available at concessionary rates. If energy security is indeed a global public good, then infrastructure build-up should also be seen as such;

Five, resolve long-standing issues which lie at the heart of world geopolitics today. In particular, we must resolve the problems in the world's most volatile regions, which coincidentally are some of the world's largest producers and distribution channels of oil. The UN must play a more forward thrust in the need for peace and security. Energy and food are truly needs of humanity. As such the UN must create a synergy of human rights into the matter so that oil and food become basic rights for humanity.

Six, long-term solutions must be found for stabilizing the price of commodities. More particularly, the futures market must be organized and duly regulated so that it becomes a force of stability, not volatility in prices. This must be coupled with continued research and development for alternative energy, be it solar, nuclear or derivative fuel.

Mr. President,

8. Malaysia recognizes certain realities. In the face of vehement protests, we have taken measures to reduce the level of fuel subsidies which could in the long run be untenable. We have also undertaken measures to reduce government spending and promote greater energy efficiency. Last July, leaders of the D8 countries among whom Malaysia is now chair agreed in Kuala Lumpur to exert serious efforts to cooperate in increasing agricultural production and achieving greater food security. We urge the developed world to play their rightful, greater role in addressing these convergent crises, based on their greater wealth and capacities. The developed and less-developed worlds ought to be collectively responsible in implementing the pledges and declarations that we have made so far.

9. The present financial crisis suffered by the United States threatens to engulf the entire world although the vast majority of us did not enjoy the benefits when times were good. Somehow the US financial mantra has lost its magic. Casting our minds to the Asian Financial Crisis in 1997, we can't help but compare the scenario. The troubles of Asian companies then was the result of outside forces, while the present troubles of US financial companies are entirely of their own doing. It is to be asked, why were the actions taken by the governments of Asia, in particular that of Malaysia, to save our own companies a decade ago deemed so wrong while the present bailout of US financial companies are deemed to be right? To ensure that this debacle does not recur, let us today resolve to check the excesses of the so called 'financial wizards' whose alchemy has resulted in so much suffering. Malaysia supports the view that corporate captains should not sap their entities by having unbelievably high pay packages.

10. New threats to peace and security continue to pose additional challenges to the international community. Terrorism, transnational crimes and piracy are but a few of the challenges that confront us. Already, the scourge of terrorism and international waters piracy has taken its toll on States. Malaysia, Japan and even Russia have become victims to acts of piracy thousands of miles away from our shores. Just days ago in August 2008, two Malaysian vessels were hijacked by pirates in the Gulf of Aden. Sixty-five Malaysians and fifteen Filipinos onboard those vessels are being held hostage in Somalia. In order to secure the release of the hostages and ensure the safe navigation of our vessels in that area, Malaysia has taken steps in accordance with Security Council resolution 1816/2008 and international law. My delegation stands ready to work closely with other States, which share the same predicament. We urge the Security Council to immediately address this problem in an effective manner. My delegation also calls on States, particularly the littoral States in that region, to provide the necessary means to ensure the security of navigation in their waters.

Mr. President,

11. Democracy, human rights and the rule of law are three important pillars of our political life. These pillars, as enshrined in the Malaysian Constitution, have bequeathed upon us freedom and liberty, dignity and harmony, peace and security. Malaysia will protect and strengthen these sacrosanct pillars at all costs in order to ensure that our multi-religious and multi-ethnic society can continue to live with one another in peace, harmony, and unity while respecting diversity. To us good and harmonious relations among our various religious and ethnic groups are our greatest assets. We respect the rule of law and no one is above the law.

12. Malaysia is concerned over recent attempts by certain powerful member states to question the national laws of countries and the administration of justice under those laws. It needs to be restated - we have no right to meddle, in any form of manifestation or under any pretext or circumstances, in the conduct of the internal affairs of other countries. We could if we choose question the legal basis of the Guantanamo detention without trial, but we did not in as much as we do not question societal behaviour in other jurisdictions. While same-sex fornication and marriage are acceptable in California it does not mean that sodomy which is a crime in many countries in Asia is to be impugned or derided upon. Let us remind ourselves of the Purposes and Principles of the UN Charter as well as the relevant provisions of the 2000 Millennium Declaration and the 2005 Outcome Document of the World Summit, which should be defended and upheld. Democracy in Malaysia remains very vibrant and progressive. Basic rights continue to be guaranteed for each and every Malaysian citizen, and that the rule of law via Parliament remains central to our existence as a sovereign and independent nation.

Mr. President,

13. IT IS HERE at the UNGA that the entire world comes together in a true spirit of common resolve and partnership. This presupposes the creation of an international order and a reformed UN that reflects not only the current and future realities, but also our resolve in fulfilling each and every resolution that we have made here at the Assembly. Indeed it would be elementary at this juncture to answer the question to what extent have we fulfilled and satisfied the numerous resolutions that we have made over the decades. Lest we be blamed as a mere resolution-producing body, let us begin to act in concert to deliver the goods that we all should have delivered for the sake of the very humanity that we are charged with to safeguard. Let us plan the work and subsequently work the plan.
Thank you.