

SPEECH BY: DATO SERI SYED HAMID ALBAR
(MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS)

EVENT: THE PRE-LAUNCHING CEREMONY OF THE IDFR CAMPUS AND THE
WELCOMING OF THE IRAQI DIPLOMATS TO THE DIPLOMATIC TRAINING
COURSE

VENUE: INSTITUTE OF DIPLOMACY AND FOREIGN RELATIONS MALAYSIA,
KUALA LUMPUR

DATE: 07 MARCH 2006

TIME:

Asalamualaikum warahmatullah hiwabarakatuh and good afternoon

Y.Bhg Datuk Rastam Mohd Isa,
Secretary-General of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs,

Officers from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs,
Participants of the Diplomatic Training Course for Iraqi
Diplomats,

Dr Fauziah Mohd Taib,
Director-General of IDFR

Distinguished guests,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

1. As I drove in through the front gate just now, I was filled with a sense of nostalgia. I saw the familiar parking lot, the front porch and this building where we are right now, and I thought how true it was when Victor Hugo wrote, All those places that we no longer see, which perhaps we shall never see again, but whose image we have preserved, assume a painful charm, return to us with the sadness of a ghost.

2. Some of you might know that it was a little over seven years ago that I first entered this complex as Malaysia's 9th Foreign Minister, taking over the helm of Malaysia's foreign policy wing from the able hands of Dato Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi.

3. Those same doors through which I was to enter the building had seen many statesmen, world leaders and distinguished politicians. I was told that the late Yasser Arafat, God rest his soul, had been no stranger to this building. Former British Foreign Secretary, Robin Cook, too, had deigned to stop by during an official visit, as had former German Foreign Minister Klaus Kinkel. A multitude of Parliamentarians, Congressmen, politicians and senior civil servants too had walked up those stairs into the lobby of the building.

4. This building and all it represents is an integral part of Malaysia's Foreign Ministry history. Like a young family who dream of owning their own house, this building was the first real home for members of the Malaysian diplomatic corp. When the Ministry moved here in 1966, it decided to name the building in honour of Malaysia's father of independence, Tunku Abdul Rahman Putra Al-Haj, whose official residence as Chief Minister of the Federation of Malaya was on this very same spot. And like most growing families, the Ministry eventually moved to a bigger complex in Putrajaya. But it never forgot its first home. That is why we carried the name Wisma Putra with us to Putrajaya.

Distinguished guests,

5. I am glad that the old Treaty Room has remained intact in the extensive renovations. The Treaty Room, so named in view of the many treaties that were negotiated and signed there, was the centrepiece of the Foreign Ministry. Foreign delegations would sit around the circular table, hammering out

minute details of treaties and agreements which today form many of the existing bilateral agreements Malaysia has in place with various countries of the world.

6. And on the Saturdays that there were no foreign delegations, or no conferences to host, the Treaty Room would bear witness to the many debates and information-sharing between Wisma Putra officials themselves. This practice, borne out of necessity but honed by successive Secretary Generals, was aptly named Saturday Morning Prayer, for the prayers that would be said by the junior officers so that they would be called upon to speak. This I share with my foreign friends in order to enable them to understand what this apparent heap of bricks and cement meant to the Foreign Service.

7. Everything has a history. This is the reason we at Wisma Putra could not let this building go for if the walls could speak, it will tell stories about how Malaysia for a young country, initiated numerous positions that now explains our foreign policy to the rest of the world. As diplomats work 24-7, some of Wisma's officers could certainly recall our former foreign ministers like King Ghaz and Pak Lah taking the lift on weekends to tie up loose ends and complete their work. So if you hear voices, they are the voices of times gone by because strong people and strong events leave impressions.

8. As we take the tour immediately following the opening, I am sure my officers will point out their former rooms, their own places of interest, and even corridors where many of them had walked with their foreign guests when the latter came to call. But that is all in the past now. Today we come together to mark the beginning of a new chapter in Malaysia's diplomatic history.

9. Established in 1991 under the Prime Minister's Department, IDFR had been sharing the premises of the National Public Administration Institute, INTAN, in Jalan Elmu for the past 15 years. Tucked away in the shadow of the INTAN building,

IDFR has been conducting a wide range of courses, workshops and seminars related to diplomacy and international relations for our local and foreign diplomats. Representatives from more than 135 countries had been trained, or had trained others, in the relatively modest offices of IDFR.

10. In 2004, the Prime Minister announced a major reorganisation of Ministries and their agencies. After almost 13 years, IDFR was to formally come under the banner of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Ladies and gentlemen,

11. Having IDFR under the Ministry's wing is like welcoming a family member home. But who could have predicted that IDFR would be such a latent force of change? If in 2004, the Institute returned to the fold, in 2005, it was to welcome its first ever female Director General. And today, it is yet again reinventing itself. Not only is IDFR moving to a new premise, it is also welcoming, with the assistance of the Economic Planning Unit, the first batch of 20 Iraqi diplomats.

12. To our Iraqi friends, I bid you welcome. You have the distinct honour of not only being the first representatives of the new Iraq in Malaysia, but also the first foreign participants of IDFR for this year, and the first ever in this new building.

13. The training of new diplomats is Malaysia's contribution to the reconstruction and redevelopment of a country torn by war or foreign occupation. In providing training opportunities for Iraqis, IDFR is continuing an age-old tradition in Malaysia's foreign policy. Others who have gone this route include Timor Leste, Afghanistan, the CIS countries and African Francophone countries.

14. I hope that you will make the most of your three-week stay in Malaysia. For most Malaysians, you will be the first contact they would have had with Iraq since March of 2003. This is indeed a heavy burden to bear, but I have no doubt that you have the strength and dignity to be an exemplar asset to your country.

15. Alexander Solzhenitsyn once said, Own only what you can carry with you -- knowledge of language, knowledge of countries, knowledge of people. Let your memory be your travel bag. In the world of the diplomatic corps, there is no substitute for being there and doing that.

16. May I take this opportunity to express my congratulations and to thank all those who were involved in the initiation, planning, construction and completion of this new IDFR campus. In particular, I wish to thank JKR Malaysia -- the project director of this new campus; Kemudi Usaha Sdn Berhad -- the design and building contractor; Akitek Suria -- the architects; Endeavour Consult -- the civil and structural engineers, Jurutera Perunding Kuasanaga -- the consultant engineers and Juru-ukur Bahan Antara -- the quantity surveyors. I also wish to thank the Treasury and the Prime Minister's Department for their support in ensuring the completion of this campus.

17. Finally, to the staff and officers of IDFR, it is my fervent hope that this building will bring you many happy memories and look favourably upon you as it did upon us.

Thank you.