

**KEYNOTE ADDRESS BY
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PRIME MINISTER OF MALAYSIA
AT THE 8TH HEADS OF MISSION CONFERENCE
24 FEBRUARY 2014**

**“TRANSFORMING MALAYSIA’S DIPLOMACY TOWARDS 2020
AND BEYOND”**

YB Dato' Sri Anifah Aman
Minister of Foreign Affairs

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Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs

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Secretary General
Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Distinguished Heads of Mission

Ladies and Gentlemen

Assalamualaikum warahmatullahi wabarakatuh and Salam 1Malaysia

1. It is a pleasure to open the 8th Heads of Mission Conference and to share with you some thoughts on the future of Malaysian Diplomacy.

2. Our nation, still young by world standards, has already exerted considerable international influence; in recent years alone, we have played our part in peacekeeping and peacemaking, in healing old divisions and establishing new relationships. Credit, and thanks, belong to you - Malaysia's representatives in the world. So before I begin, allow me to pay tribute to your record, your service, and your dedication to diplomacy.

Ladies and gentlemen,

3. Over the course of your careers, that diplomacy has been shaped by three main factors. Firstly, Malaysia is a trading nation. This is set to continue: despite a challenging external environment, our trade expanded by 4.6 percent last year, and is projected to grow at 5.2 percent this year. As our economy continues to develop - as we move further up the value chain, and produce more intellectual and human capital, the goods we trade will change; with the coming of regional economic integration, so will the method. But the implications for our foreign policy remain the same. Like any trading nation, we depend on open sea lanes, general peace, and robust institutions that promote international law and support international norms.

4. Second, we are located at the heart of a strategically significant region, surrounded by current and future major powers. South East Asia's seas – through which so much global commerce pass – are reason enough for continued interest in our region. Buoyant economic growth and natural resources only serve to amplify their interest, as Asia fast becomes a new pole in a multipolar world. The most populous region on earth will soon be the most prosperous; already, it is assuming a much greater share of global attention. We welcome the spotlight – the investment and development it brings – but we are aware that it illuminates existing stresses, and we do not wish to become a centre for conflict by proxy.

5. Third, Malaysia is a multi-ethnic, multi-religious and multi-cultural country. We are a bridge between races, nations and cultures; standing at the junction between East and West, between the developed and the developing world, between Islam and other faiths. Our history and our geography mean we sit at the intersection of some of the most important questions of the age. Asia's rapid development; the relationship between Islam and modernity; the balance between diversity and stability. Each is being answered, in its own way, here in Malaysia. Our foreign policy and our diplomacy reflect and draw on this strength.

6. The factors which shaped Malaysia's diplomacy – our dependence on trade, our strategic location, and our demographics – are in turn shaped by external trends. And here the grounds beneath our feet is shifting, as old assumptions are being overturned, and new ones emerging. These global and regional trends ask that we adapt our diplomacy to fit the pressures and opportunities of a new century.

7. Traditional global hierarchies are being shaken up by economic and demographic change. The lines dividing North from South are blurring. In challenges such as climate change, we see that the interests and positions of some developing countries converge with those of some in the developed world. In a more multipolar world, even the largest and most powerful countries will seek to form coalitions comprising developed and developing countries to ensure their interests are promoted.

8. As we saw in the middle of the last century, when ideology and cultural differences are allowed to determine the relationship between major powers, the international order itself is at risk. In this context, the way Sino-US relations play out will have profound implications not only for the region, but for the wider world. While both have been at pains to assure us that their relations are founded on mutual cooperation, this is true only in the broadest sense. In some cases, there will be competition; it is how the inevitable tensions are managed that matter, with commitments to friends and allies will adding a layer of complexity to Sino-US relations.

9. Elsewhere, it seems likely that parts of West Asia will continue to be unstable, pitting groups of States – as well as different ethnic and religious groups in the region – against others. This state of uncertainty and instability is a challenge for us, as our close cultural, religious and economic ties to the region means that developments there resonate with the Malaysian public.

10. Running throughout these geopolitical developments are deeper currents of technological and social change: increasing access to information, new forms of citizen activism, higher expectations and greater accountability in an age of information.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

11. It is incumbent on us – as policymakers, diplomats and members of the international community – to respond to these changes, adapt to these trends, and to do our part to deliver a safer, more sustainable future for our people. To do so, we must remain clear-headed in pursuit of our national aims, even-handed in the service of regional ambitions, and resolute in the face of global challenges. We must react to the transformations around us with a transformation of our own: a foreign policy which will see Malaysia through to 2020; to developed nation status and beyond. There are a number things we must do.

12. First, we must embrace our position as one of the region's Middle Powers: states which rarely act alone, but which have a significant, systematic impact in a small group or through international institutions. Come 2020, Malaysia will be a developed country with far-flung and expanding interests. The international community, as well as our own public, will expect that we assume our share of the burden of responsibility and leadership. As a Middle Power, that means playing a greater part in Asia, and helping Asia play a greater part in the world – a subject I will say more about in weeks to come.

13. It also means continuing our commitment to ASEAN. We sink or swim with our region. If we do not have an influential voice here, we will not have an influential voice anywhere. We must therefore devote adequate resources to strengthening our bilateral relations with our neighbours, and continue to value ASEAN as the fulcrum of peace, prosperity and stability in the region.

14. Even as we undertake to do more, we must concentrate resources on initiatives that will generate the best returns; leading in areas that concern us the most, not aiming to be everything to everyone. We must sharpen the way we conceive and execute the cooperation and assistance programmes we provide at the bilateral, regional and multilateral levels. And we must assess the impact of such programmes more systematically, to ensure they are effective and efficient.

15. The most effective coalitions in the future will be those which involve both the developed and developing world. We therefore must be deft and nimble in building and participating in coalitions; seeking out those which share our concerns, and exercising leadership within the shared platforms that are needed to tackle multilateral problems. A stronger foreign policy establishment here in Malaysia, which brings together think-tanks, academic chairs and foundations, will strengthen our hand when it comes to building coalitions for change.

16. As we prepare for a world beyond the Millennium Development Goals, we must also be ready to share our own experience of development. Since the end of the Second World War, few countries have made the leap from developing to developed status. By and large, those who have, such as South Korea, are homogenous states. When Malaysia joins the ranks of the developed nations, our narrative will be a compelling one indeed – a young federation, originally riven by differences, working, growing and developing together.

17. As others study our development path, we can use our history and our achievements to promote issues of importance to us – such as moderation, mediation in regional disputes, and the establishment of a rules-based approach to manage inter-state relations in the region. The challenge is to package this into a compelling narrative, while at the same time avoiding hubris.

Ladies and gentlemen,

18. That seems an ambitious programme for a ministry with a small budget. But I am confident you can and will deliver. Dato' Sri Anifah's KPI has consistently been one of the highest, which means Wisma Putra is one of the most cost-efficient Ministries. I wish to commend you for this achievement, and to assure you that the government is open to requests for additional resources.

19. As Malaysia's chief representatives abroad, you each have a unique role. In your hands rests the task of ensuring that our Malaysia stands proud in the world. On past experience, I know you will rise to this challenge.

Dengan lafaz Bismillahirrahmanirrahim, it is my pleasure to declare open the 8th Heads of Mission Conference.

Thank you.