



PERDANA MENTERI MALAYSIA

**STATEMENT BY THE HON. DATO' SRI ISMAIL SABRI
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THE UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY, NEW YORK
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Mr. President,
Mr. Secretary-General,
Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Introduction

I join others in congratulating you, Mr. President, on your election as President of the 76th Session of the UN General Assembly.

2. I would also like to thank His Excellency Mr. Volkan Bozkir for his dedication and leadership in successfully completing the work of the last session, which was done under difficult circumstances due to the prevailing COVID-19 pandemic.

3. Malaysia welcomes the theme of this year's General Assembly – "Building resilience through hope – to recover from COVID-19, rebuild sustainably, respond to the needs of the planet, respect the rights of people, and revitalise the United Nations". The theme serves as a stark reminder of what needs to be done and the long road we have before us.

Mr. President,

4. Malaysia is fully committed in managing, overcoming and recovering from this deadly pandemic. No one is safe unless everyone is safe. We must fight this battle together. Our common mission in these unprecedented times call us to recognize that humankind is one big extended family. It is in that spirit that we in Malaysia have very consciously referred to ourselves as 'Keluarga Malaysia'. Together, and putting aside our differences, we will protect lives and livelihoods. We will ensure that Malaysia will not only bounce back but will thrive as the world emerges from the depths of the pandemic.

5. But, Mr. President, I am not here to only speak about Malaysia. I am here to call for us to work together in the spirit of a “world family”, to address the deep-rooted challenges of inequality, political instability and global governance.

COVID-19 and Health Diplomacy

6. Last year, the international community came together with a pledge to fight COVID-19 hand-in-hand. With our unified commitment; with the aggressive rollout of vaccines; and, with the sharing and adoption of best practices, we should have been on our way to recovery. Sadly, the reality today is that we are far from winning the war against this deadly virus.

7. Our relief that vaccines were developed in record time was quickly followed by distress at its discriminatory rollout. While most vaccine producing nations as well as those that have the financial means have achieved some measure of success, the majority of the world’s population, mainly from middle income and least developed countries, remain unvaccinated.

8. Nevertheless, our focus should not just be on vaccines. There are other aspects of health that require our attention. Many health challenges transcend national borders. COVID-19 is just the latest challenge besetting us. Before that, the international community had to deal with other serious outbreaks, which had their unique security and socio-economic dimensions.

9. With the growing frequency of global health threats, this world family must come together and engage in more effective health diplomacy. We must ensure greater collaboration not just to end this pandemic but on an array of other health-related issues. These include expanding the public health capacity of nations, particularly by enhancing their access to relevant technology and knowledge.

10. We truly need to regard public health as a global public good rather than the exclusive domain of individual nations. It is because of this that Malaysia will play a more prominent role and participate more actively in health diplomacy, and our approach will be more inter-disciplinary in nature and involve more relevant stakeholders.

11. As for COVID-19, we cannot afford to wait for an even deadlier variant to emerge and claim more lives. We need to act now.

Growing inequities and achieving the SDGs

Mr. President,

12. The path towards achieving the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development was never easy to begin with. Yet, we have made steady progress. COVID-19 has, however, reversed many hard-won gains. The pandemic has amplified pre-existing inequalities and uncertainties. It has widened the gap between the "haves and the have-nots". Varying degrees of shortfalls in governance and social security have driven populations back into poverty. Needless to say, we are further away from achieving the 2030 Agenda now than we were before.

13. Like the rest of the world, Malaysia's economy has not been spared. In 2020, Malaysia's GDP contracted by 5.6%. This marks the worst decline in more than 20 years since the Asian Financial Crisis.

14. From the beginning of the pandemic, Malaysia took a whole-of-government and whole-of-society approach in addressing this unprecedented crisis. We executed a clear strategy which focused on three thrusts. Firstly, we expanded our healthcare delivery system to prevent the spread and tend to the infected; secondly, we provided strategic fiscal injections to safeguard the economy; and, thirdly, we protected the people's livelihood.

15. In doing so, we introduced economic stimulus packages worth about USD130 billion or 36% of our GDP. We ensured inclusive growth by addressing poverty, while providing a social safety net to protect vulnerable groups. These packages also play an important role in assisting enterprises to remain afloat during these difficult times.

16. Almost two years into the pandemic, we realise that we need to balance between keeping our people safe while protecting their livelihoods. As such, Malaysia introduced the National Recovery Plan as the nation's exit strategy from the pandemic. This includes speeding up vaccination rates, which stand at more than 500,000 doses daily in recent weeks. It also includes reopening key economic sectors to revive the economy. We are pleased that these efforts as well as our pursuit in attaining the 2030 Agenda on Sustainable Development were commended during our Voluntary National Review in July this year.

Climate Action

17. That said, rebuilding lives and economies after the pandemic will not come easy. The challenges are even greater for countries that are more vulnerable to natural disasters. Recovery efforts will certainly be more difficult and, thus, require more time and resources to take effect.

18. For Malaysia, mainstreaming sustainability is key in ensuring a smooth transition to a greener socio-economic ecosystem. We have set ambitious plans to facilitate the transition to a more sustainable, low-carbon, and climate-resilient future. We have introduced policies including the concept of Circular Economy, which will drive mitigation and adaptation initiatives in our cities. We are confident that they will greatly contribute towards making Malaysia a low carbon nation by 2050.

19. At the same time, developed countries have the responsibility to provide financial resources and technology transfer to the developing world to undertake sustainable initiatives. This is in line with the equity principle of 'common but differentiated responsibility'.

Nuclear Disarmament

Mr. President,

20. The development and deployment of nuclear weapons continues to be a threat to all mankind. Given the global health crisis, we find it disheartening that billions of dollars are being spent to maintain and modernise nuclear weapons, rather than on saving lives and livelihoods.

21. Malaysia supports the total elimination of nuclear weapons and the assurance that they will never be produced again. This is the only guarantee against the catastrophic consequences arising from their use. Towards this end, Malaysia welcomes the coming into force of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW) earlier this year.

22. Malaysia reaffirms its commitment to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) and as Chair of Main Committee One (1) on Nuclear Disarmament for the 10th NPT Review Conference, we will strive towards bringing State Parties together and do our best to steer deliberations towards a fruitful outcome.

Peaceful Coexistence and Global Ceasefire

Mr. President,

23. Malaysia has always been a firm believer in all efforts and initiatives that promote peaceful coexistence between nations; between different peoples; and, between different faiths and cultures.

24. As a multi-cultural, multi-racial and multi-religious country, Malaysia strongly believes what we have been practicing can also be applied to the entire world. At the same time, we are a strong proponent of multilateralism. Both multilateralism and peaceful coexistence are mutually reinforcing. We need to realise that as we progress further, we should be far more integrated and stronger as a family of nations.

25. Respect and mutual understanding must be the backbone and essence in our interactions and discourse. We believe that diversity can be a powerful source of strength and resilience. Thus, we need to take a deeper look at the many qualities that make up our family of nations.

26. It is no longer enough that we tolerate differences, but we should, instead, learn to celebrate and treat them with genuine curiosity and meaningful respect. Amid the global uncertainties, it is time for us to work and strengthen our efforts towards living together in peace and harmony.

27. As such, Malaysia will continue to do what it can in promoting peace and preventing conflict in the conduct of its foreign policy. With this approach, Malaysia will continue to uphold its fundamental principles of defending the nation's sovereignty and interest, maintaining good relations including promoting tolerance, mutual respect and understanding among all peoples and actors of all nations. As a Member State of ASEAN, Malaysia is committed in preserving ASEAN region as a Zone of Peace, Freedom and Neutrality (ZOPFAN).

28. Malaysia also reaffirms its commitment towards global peace, security and prosperity by continuing to lead on the issuance of a Joint Communique on global ceasefire in June this year. We strongly believe that the UN membership must speak with one voice on the need for an immediate cessation of hostilities in all corners of the world. This would allow governments and all stakeholders to focus their attention on combating humankind's deadliest enemy.

The Situation in Myanmar and the Rohingya issue

29. Nevertheless, Mr. President, it is unfortunate that we are far from realizing this global ceasefire. Many places are still experiencing instability. The situation in Myanmar remains of grave concern.

30. Malaysia cannot emphasize enough the importance of respecting the will and interests of the people of Myanmar. There is a need for a peaceful solution to be found, especially with a multitude of challenges besetting the country.

31. Malaysia is particularly worried about the humanitarian situation, now further aggravated by Myanmar's healthcare system, which is stretched thin. It is absolutely essential for aid to reach those in need.

32. Equally troubling is the refugee crisis that has engulfed Myanmar since the mass exodus of Rohingya in 2017. Malaysia currently hosts more than 154,000 refugees from Myanmar, comprising 86% of the refugee population in the country. More than 66% of those are from the Rohingya ethnic minority and this is just a conservative estimate.

33. ASEAN Member States have taken steps to engage key parties of this conflict to extend assistance where possible. Malaysia fully supports the work of the ASEAN Chair's Special Envoy on Myanmar. However, we remain concerned that the authorities have yet to allow ASEAN's Special Envoy to visit the country. We urge the authorities to accept the visit and assist the Special Envoy in his duties as well as expedite the implementation of the 'Five-Point Consensus'.

The Palestinian issue

Mr. President,

34. On the Occupied Palestinian Territory (OPT), Malaysia is appalled by the deaths of many Palestinian civilians, including women and children, following the brutal attacks by Israel in May this year. We strongly condemn repeated violations and aggression by Israeli forces and settlers against Palestinian worshipers in Al-Aqsa Mosque. The targeted aggression against worshippers is indeed contemptuous to all Muslims, or for any peace-loving religion.

35. In fact, let us be truly frank about what is happening in the OPT. The systematic oppression of Palestinians over many years through discriminatory policies; denial of basic civil rights; imposition of harsh conditions; large scale land confiscation; and, inhumane acts committed against them tantamount to the crime of apartheid. Yes, Mr. President, apartheid still exists in this world and most of us are just turning a blind eye to this.

36. Malaysia stresses again that Israel must be held responsible and accountable for all its wrongdoings including its flagrant violations of international law.

37. We welcome the establishment of an international commission of inquiry by the Human Rights Council to investigate violations of international human rights law during the 11-day crisis.

38. Malaysia continues to call for the deployment of a temporary international presence in the city of Al-Quds, to monitor the cessation of hostilities in the OPT. The international community must spare no effort to ensure the safety, protection, dignity and well-being of the Palestinian civilian population.

39. While generations have had to endure this oppression, it is time that we pay attention to the voices and roles of the younger generation of Palestinians. It is time to give them a better future. They have been suffering in dreadful living conditions under illegal Israeli occupation for so many years and we cannot allow this to continue indefinitely.

40. Malaysia has and will continue to lend its unwavering support and solidarity to the Palestinians.

The Situation in Afghanistan

41. Turning to the situation in Afghanistan, Malaysia is appalled by the terrorist attack outside the Hamid Karzai International Airport last month. The attack resulted in the loss of innocent lives with many more injured. Malaysia expresses its deepest condolences to the bereaved families of the victims. We also wish those injured a full recovery.

42. Malaysia condemns terrorism in all its forms and manifestations. The region cannot be allowed to be turned into a fertile breeding ground for terrorism again. The world family must come together to support Afghanistan in this time of need, including by extending humanitarian assistance to the people. On this, Malaysia stands ready to extend its assistance and do what it can.

Reform of the UN: Revitalisation of the General Assembly and the reform of the Security Council

Mr. President,

43. The UN has been in existence for over 75 years. In that time, the world has changed significantly. As such, the UN must keep pace with a rapidly changing world as it continues to face a crisis of expectations. Reform is necessary to strengthen the UN's effectiveness as a multilateral organisation, to bring more transparency to it and to enhance its credibility. On this, we must work together to reform the organisation and we hope Member States will demonstrate openness, flexibility, and political will in the interest of international peace, security, and prosperity.

Conclusion

Mr. President,

44. During its inception, we looked to the United Nations to save humanity from the scourge of war. Today, we place our resolve in the UN and its Member States to save humanity from the scourge of the global pandemic.

45. The pandemic has shown that we need to improve our resolve to strengthen international cooperation and multilateralism, and consider ourselves as a family of nations.

46. At the same time, the world family must be made a more peaceful, prosperous, sustainable and equitable one. We must close ranks and enhance our unity and cohesion. We must live in peaceful coexistence. Only then will we have a chance to succeed.

Thank you.