

**SPEECH BY THE PRIME MINISTER OF MALAYSIA THE HON DATO SERI
DR MAHATHIR BIN MOHAMAD AT THE OPENING OF THE TENTH
SESSION OF THE ISLAMIC SUMMIT CONFERENCE AT PUTRAJAYA
CONVENTION CENTRE, PUTRAJAYA, MALAYSIA ON THURSDAY, 16
OCTOBER 2003 AT 10.00 A.M.**

Alhamdulillah, All Praise be to Allah, by whose Grace and Blessings we, the leaders of the Organisation of Islamic Conference countries are gathered here today to confer and hopefully to plot a course for the future of Islam and the Muslim ummah worldwide.

2. On behalf of the Government and the people of many races and religions of Malaysia, may I extend a warm welcome to all and everyone to this Tenth Session of the Islamic Summit Conference in Putrajaya, Malaysia's administrative capital.

3. It is indeed a great honour for Malaysia to host this Session and to assume the Chairmanship of the Organisation of the Islamic Conference (OIC). I thank the members for their confidence in Malaysia's Chairmanship.

4. May I also take this opportunity to pay a special tribute to the State of Qatar, in particular His Highness Shaikh Hamad Bin Khalifa Al-Thani, the Emir of the State of Qatar, for his outstanding stewardship of our Organisation over the past three years.

5. As host, Malaysia is gratified at the high level of participation from member countries. This clearly demonstrates our continued and abiding faith in, and commitment to our Organisation and our collective wish and determination to strengthen our role for the dignity and benefit of the ummah.

6. I would also like to welcome the leaders and representatives of the many countries who wish to become observers at this meeting because of their substantial Muslim population. Whether they are Muslims or not, their presence at this meeting will help towards greater understanding of Islam and the Muslims, thus helping to disprove the perception of Islam as a religion of backwardness and terror.

7. The whole world is looking at us. Certainly 1.3 billion Muslims, one-sixth of the world's population are placing their hopes in us, in this meeting, even though they may be cynical about our will and capacity to even decide to restore the honour of Islam and the Muslims, much less to free their brothers and sisters from the oppression and humiliation from which they suffer today.

8. I will not enumerate the instances of our humiliation and oppression, nor will I once again condemn our detractors and oppressors. It would be an exercise in futility because they are not going to change their attitudes just because we condemn them. If we are to recover our dignity and that of Islam, our religion, it is we who must decide, it is we who must act.

9. To begin with, the Governments of all the Muslim countries can close ranks and have a common stand if not on all issues, at least on some major ones, such as on Palestine. We are all Muslims. We are all oppressed. We are all being humiliated. But we who have been raised by Allah above our fellow Muslims to rule our countries have never really tried to act in concert in order to exhibit at our level the brotherhood and unity that Islam enjoins upon us.

10. But not only are our Governments divided, the Muslim ummah is also divided, and divided again and again. Over the last 1400 years the interpreters of Islam, the learned ones, the ulamas have interpreted and reinterpreted the single Islamic religion brought by Prophet Muhammad S.A.W, so differently that now we have a thousand religions which are often so much at odds with one another that we often fight and kill each other.

11. From being a single ummah we have allowed ourselves to be divided into numerous sects, mazhabs and tarikats, each more concerned with claiming to be the true Islam than our oneness as the Islamic ummah. We fail to notice that our detractors and enemies do not care whether we are true Muslims or not. To them we are all Muslims, followers of a religion and a Prophet whom they declare promotes terrorism, and we are all their sworn enemies. They will attack and kill us, invade our lands, bring down our Governments whether we are Sunnis or Syiahs, Alawait or Druze or whatever. And we aid and abet them by attacking and weakening each other, and sometimes by doing their bidding, acting as their proxies to attack fellow Muslims. We try to bring down our Governments through violence, succeeding to weaken and impoverish our countries.

12. We ignore entirely and we continue to ignore the Islamic injunction to unite and to be brothers to each other, we the Governments of the Islamic countries and the ummah.

13. But this is not all that we ignore about the teachings of Islam. We are enjoined to Read, Iqraq i.e. to acquire knowledge. The early Muslims took this to mean translating and studying the works of the Greeks and other scholars before Islam. And these Muslim scholars added to the body of knowledge through their own studies.

14. The early Muslims produced great mathematicians and scientists, scholars, physicians and astronomers etc. and they excelled in all the fields of knowledge of their times, besides studying and practising their own religion of Islam. As a result the Muslims were able to develop and extract wealth from their lands and through their world trade, able to strengthen their defences, protect their people and give them the Islamic way of life, Addin, as prescribed by Islam. At the time the Europeans of the Middle Ages were still superstitious and backward, the enlightened Muslims had already built a great Muslim civilisation, respected and powerful, more than able to compete with the rest of the world and able to protect the ummah from foreign aggression. The Europeans had to kneel at the feet of Muslim scholars in order to access their own scholastic heritage.

15. The Muslims were lead by great leaders like Abdul Rahman III, AI-Mansur, Salah El

Din AI Ayubi and others who took to the battlefields at the head of their forces to protect Muslim land and the ummah.

16. But halfway through the building of the great Islamic civilisation came new interpreters of Islam who taught that acquisition of knowledge by Muslims meant only the study of Islamic theology. The study of science, medicine etc. was discouraged.

17. Intellectually the Muslims began to regress. With intellectual regression the great Muslim civilisation began to falter and wither. But for the emergence of the Ottoman warriors, Muslim civilisation would have disappeared with the fall of Granada in 1492.

18. The early successes of the Ottomans were not accompanied by an intellectual renaissance. Instead they became more and more preoccupied with minor issues such as whether tight trousers and peak caps were Islamic, whether printing machines should be allowed or electricity used to light mosques. The Industrial Revolution was totally missed by the Muslims. And the regression continued until the British and French instigated rebellion against Turkish rule brought about the downfall of the Ottomans, the last Muslim world power and replaced it with European colonies and not independent states as promised. It was only after World War II that these colonies became independent.

19. Apart from the new nation-states we also accepted the western democratic system. This also divided us because of the political parties and groups that we form, some of which claim Islam for themselves, reject the Islam of other parties and refuse to accept the results of the practice of democracy if they fail to gain power for themselves. They resort to violence, thus destabilising and weakening Muslim countries.

20. With all these developments over the centuries the ummah and the Muslim civilisation became so weak that at one time there was not a single Muslim country which was not colonised or hegemonised by the Europeans. But regaining independence did not help to strengthen the Muslims. Their states were weak and badly administered, constantly in a state of turmoil. The Europeans could do what they liked with Muslim territories. It is not surprising that they should excise Muslim land to create the state of Israel to solve their Jewish problem. Divided, the Muslims could do nothing effective to stop the Balfour and Zionist transgression.

21. Some would have us believe that, despite all these, our life is better than that of our detractors. Some believe that poverty is Islamic, sufferings and being oppressed are Islamic. This world is not for us. Ours are the joys of heaven in the afterlife. All that we have to do is to perform certain rituals, wear certain garments and put up a certain appearance. Our weakness, our backwardness and our inability to help our brothers and sisters who are being oppressed are part of the Will of Allah, the sufferings that we must endure before enjoying heaven in the hereafter. We must accept this fate that befalls us. We need not do anything. We can do nothing against the Will of Allah.

22. But is it true that it is the Will of Allah and that we can and should do nothing? Allah has said in Surah Ar-Ra'd verse 11 that He will not change the fate of a community until

the community has tried to change its fate itself.

23. The early Muslims were as oppressed as we are presently. But after their sincere and determined efforts to help themselves in accordance with the teachings of Islam, Allah had helped them to defeat their enemies and to create a great and powerful Muslim civilisation. But what effort have we made especially with the resources that He has endowed us with.

24. We are now 1.3 billion strong. We have the biggest oil reserve in the world. We have great wealth. We are not as ignorant as the Jahilliah who embraced Islam. We are familiar with the workings of the world's economy and finances. We control 57 out of the 180 countries in the world. Our votes can make or break international organisations. Yet we seem more helpless than the small number of Jahilliah converts who accepted the Prophet as their leader. Why? Is it because of Allah's will or is it because we have interpreted our religion wrongly, or failed to abide by the correct teachings of our religion, or done the wrong things?

25. We are enjoined by our religion to prepare for the defence of the ummah. Unfortunately we stress not defence but the weapons of the time of the Prophet. Those weapons and horses cannot help to defend us any more. We need guns and rockets, bombs and warplanes, tanks and warships for our defence. But because we discouraged the learning of science and mathematics etc. as giving no merit for the akhirat, today we have no capacity to produce our own weapons for our defence. We have to buy our weapons from our detractors and enemies. This is what comes from the superficial interpretation of the Quran, stressing not the substance of the Prophet's sunnah and the Quran's injunctions but rather the form, the manner and the means used in the 1st Century of the Hijrah. And it is the same with the other teachings of Islam. We are more concerned with the forms rather than the substance of the words of Allah and adhering only to the literal interpretation of the traditions of the Prophet.

26. We may want to recreate the first century of the Hijrah, the way of life in those times, in order to practise what we think to be the true Islamic way of life. But we will not be allowed to do so. Our detractors and enemies will take advantage of the resulting backwardness and weakness in order to dominate us. Islam is not just for the 7th Century A.D. Islam is for all times. And times have changed. Whether we like it or not we have to change, not by changing our religion but by applying its teachings in the context of a world that is radically different from that of the first century of the Hijrah. Islam is not wrong but the interpretations by our scholars, who are not prophets even though they may be very learned can be wrong. We have a need to go back to the fundamental teachings of Islam to find out whether we are indeed believing in and practising the Islam that the Prophet preached. It cannot be that we are all practising the correct and true Islam when our beliefs are so different from one another.

27. Today we, the whole Muslim ummah are treated with contempt and dishonour. Our religion is denigrated. Our holy places desecrated. Our countries are occupied. Our

people starved and killed.

28. None of our countries are truly independent. We are under pressure to conform to our oppressors' wishes about how we should behave, how we should govern our lands, how we should think even.

29. Today if they want to raid our country, kill our people, destroy our villages and towns, there is nothing substantial that we can do. Is it Islam which has caused all these? Or is it that we have failed to do our duty according to our religion?

30. Our only reaction is to become more and more angry. Angry people cannot think properly. And so we find some of our people reacting irrationally. They launch their own attacks, killing just about anybody including fellow Muslims to vent their anger and frustration. Their Governments can do nothing to stop them. The enemy retaliates and puts more pressure on the Governments. And the Governments have no choice but to give in, to accept the directions of the enemy, literally to give up their independence of action.

31. With this their people and the ummah become angrier and turn against their own Governments. Every attempt at a peaceful solution is sabotaged by more indiscriminate attacks calculated to anger the enemy and prevent any peaceful settlement. But the attacks solve nothing. The Muslims simply get more oppressed.

32. There is a feeling of hopelessness among the Muslim countries and their people. They feel that they can do nothing right. They believe that things can only get worse. The Muslims will forever be oppressed and dominated by the Europeans and the Jews. They will forever be poor, backward and weak. Some believe, as I have said, this is the Will of Allah, that the proper state of the Muslims is to be poor and oppressed in this world.

33. But is it true that we should do and can do nothing for ourselves? Is it true that 1.3 billion people can exert no power to save themselves from the humiliation and oppression inflicted upon them by a much smaller enemy? Can they only lash back blindly in anger? Is there no other way than to ask our young people to blow themselves up and kill people and invite the massacre of more of our own people?

34. It cannot be that there is no other way. 1.3 billion Muslims cannot be defeated by a few million Jews. There must be a way. And we can only find a way if we stop to think, to assess our weaknesses and our strength, to plan, to strategise and then to counter attack. As Muslims we must seek guidance from the Al-Quran and the Sunnah of the Prophet. Surely the 23 years' struggle of the Prophet can provide us with some guidance as to what we can and should do.

35. We know he and his early followers were oppressed by the Qhuraish. Did he launch retaliatory strikes? No. He was prepared to make strategic retreats. He sent his early followers to a Christian country and he himself later migrated to Madinah. There he

gathered followers, built up his defence capability and ensured the security of his people. At Hudaibiyah he was prepared to accept an unfair treaty, against the wishes of his companions and followers. During the peace that followed he consolidated his strength and eventually he was able to enter Mecca and claim it for Islam. Even then he did not seek revenge. And the peoples of Mecca accepted Islam and many became his most powerful supporters, defending the Muslims against all their enemies.

36. That briefly is the story of the struggle of the Prophet. We talk so much about following the sunnah of the Prophet. We quote the instances and the traditions profusely. But we actually ignore all of them.

37. If we use the faculty to think that Allah has given us then we should know that we are acting irrationally. We fight without any objective, without any goal other than to hurt the enemy because they hurt us. Naively we expect them to surrender. We sacrifice lives unnecessarily, achieving nothing other than to attract more massive retaliation and humiliation.

38. It is surely time that we pause to think. But will this be wasting time? For well over half a century we have fought over Palestine. What have we achieved? Nothing. We are worse off than before. If we had paused to think then we could have devised a plan, a strategy that can win us final victory. Pausing and thinking calmly is not a waste of time. We have a need to make a strategic retreat and to calmly assess our situation.

39. We are actually very strong. 1.3 billion people cannot be simply wiped out. The Europeans killed 6 million Jews out of 12 million. But today the Jews rule this world by proxy. They get others to fight and die for them.

40. We may not be able to do that. We may not be able to unite all the 1.3 billion Muslims. We may not be able to get all the Muslim Governments to act in concert. But even if we can get a third of the ummah and a third of the Muslim states to act together, we can already do something. Remember that the Prophet did not have many followers when he went to Madinah. But he united the Ansars and the Muhajirins and eventually he became strong enough to defend Islam.

41. Apart from the partial unity that we need, we must take stock of our assets. I have already mentioned our numbers and our oil wealth. In today's world we wield a lot of political, economic and financial clout, enough to make up for our weakness in military terms.

42. We also know that not all non-Muslims are against us. Some are well-disposed towards us. Some even see our enemies as their enemies. Even among the Jews there are many who do not approve of what the Israelis are doing.

43. We must not antagonise everyone. We must win their hearts and minds. We must win them to our side not by begging for help from them but by the honourable way that we struggle to help ourselves. We must not strengthen the enemy by pushing everyone into

their camps through irresponsible and unIslamic acts. Remember Salah El Din and the Remember the considerateness of the Prophet to the enemies of Islam. We must do the

must be stable and well administered, must be economically and financially strong,

done and it will be time well spent. We are enjoined by our religion to be patient. Innallahamaasabirin. Obviously there is virtue in being patient.

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put our houses in order. Even today we have sufficient assets to deploy against our detractors. It remains for us to identify them and to work out how to make use of them to stop the carnage caused by the enemy. This is entirely possible if we stop to think, to plan, to strategise and to take the first few critical steps. Even these few steps can yield positive results.

46. We know that the Jahilliah Arabs were given to feuding, to killing each other simply because they were from different tribes. The Prophet preached the brotherhood of Islam to them and they were able to overcome their hatred for each other, become united and helped towards the establishment of the great Muslim civilisation. Can we say that what the Jahilliah (the ignorant) could do we, the modern Muslims cannot do? If not all at least some of us can do. If not the renaissance of our great civilisation, at least ensuring the security of the ummah.

47. To do the things that are suggested will not even require all of us to give up our differences with each other. We need only to call a truce so we can act together in tackling only certain problems of common interests, the Palestine problem for example.

48. In any struggle, in any war, nothing is more important than concerted and coordinated action. A degree of discipline is all that is needed. The Prophet lost in Jabal Uhud because his forces broke rank. We know that, yet we are unwilling to discipline ourselves and to give up our irregular and uncoordinated actions. We need to be brave but not foolhardy. We need to think not just of our reward in the afterlife but also of the worldly results of our mission.

49. The Quran tells us that when the enemy sues for peace we must react positively. True the treaty offered is not favourable to us. But we can negotiate. The Prophet did, at Hudaibiyah. And in the end he triumphed.

50. I am aware that all these ideas will not be popular. Those who are angry would want to reject it out of hand. They would even want to silence anyone who makes or supports this line of action. They would want to send more young men and women to make the supreme sacrifice. But where will all these lead to? Certainly not victory. Over the past 50 years of fighting in Palestine we have not achieved any result. We have in fact

51. The enemy will probably welcome these proposals and we will conclude that the promoters are working for the enemy. But think. We are up again
They survived 2000 years of pogroms not by hitting back, but by thinking. They invented and successfully promoted Socialism, Communism, human rights and democracy so that
qual rights with others.
With these they have now gained control of the most powerful countries and they, this
alone. We must use our brains also.

52. Of late because of their power and their apparent success they have become arrogant.

There may be windows of opportunity for us now and in the future. We must seize these

wrongs perpetrated against us, perhaps win us some sympathy and support. It may
strengthen our sp

whether we succeed or fail. We need His blessings and His help in our endeavours,

56. But it is how we act and what we do which will determine whether He would help us
-Ra'd

ummah is placing their hopes in this conference of the leaders of Islamic nations. They

to pray for Allah's blessings. They expect us to do something, to act. We cannot say we
cannot do anyth
even when faced with the destruction of our religion and the ummah.

58. We know we can. There are many things that we can do. There are many resources
that we have at our disposal. W -the will to do it, As Muslims, we

willingly and with determination. Allah has not raised us, the leaders, above the others so
we may enjoy power fo
ummah, for Islam. We must have the will to make use of this power judiciously,
prudently, concertedly. Inshaallah we will triumph in the end.

59. I pray to Allah that this 10th Conference of the OIC in Putrajaya, Malaysia will give a new and positive direction to us, will be blessed with success by Him, Almighty Allah, Arahman, Arahirn.

Prime Minister's Office
Putrajaya