

**SPEECH BY YAB TAN SRI MUHYIDDIN YASSIN
DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER OF MALAYSIA
AT THE 8TH HEADS OF MISSION CONFERENCE
25 FEBRUARY 2014**

***“ENGAGING AND MOBILISING THE DIASPORA TO
STRENGTHEN THE NATION”***

YB Dato' Sri Anifah Aman

Menteri Luar Negeri

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Ketua Setiausaha, Kementerian Luar Negeri

Tuan-Tuan dan Puan-Puan,

Assalamualaikum warahmatullahi wabarakatuh dan salam 1Malaysia.

Saya ingin memanjatkan syukur kepada Allah SWT kerana dengan limpah kurnianya kita berpeluang untuk sekali lagi bertemu dalam dialog seumpama ini selepas pertemuan terakhir kita pada Jun 2009.

2. Persidangan ini adalah amat bertepatan masanya kerana Malaysia telah menjalani proses pilihanraya umum pada bulan Mei 2013 yang lalu di mana rakyat terus memberikan mandat kepada kepimpinan YAB Perdana Menteri Dato' Sri Najib Tun Abdul Razak untuk memimpin Malaysia. Dalam hal ini, Kerajaan akan terus melaksanakan dasar-dasar negara yang menjamin kesejahteraan rakyat. Kerajaan juga prihatin bahawa ekspektasi rakyat terhadap penyampaian perkhidmatan dan tadbir urus negara semakin meningkat dan sebagai sebahagian daripada jentera kerajaan, perkhidmatan

awam perlu sentiasa bersedia memberi mutu perkhidmatan yang tinggi kepada orang awam.

3. Saya ingin mengucapkan syabas dan tahniah kepada Kementerian Luar Negeri di atas penganjuran Persidangan pada tahun ini. Sebagai salah satu agensi kerajaan yang memberi perkhidmatan kepada pelbagai 'stakeholder' dan pelanggan, baik di kalangan warga Malaysia mahu pun warga asing, saya yakin Persidangan ini akan dapat memberi hala tuju yang jelas kepada Tuan-Tuan dan Puan-Puan dalam melaksanakan dasar transformasi negara untuk mencapai tahap negara maju pada tahun 2020.

Ladies and gentlemen,

4. This Conference aptly themed 'Transforming Malaysia's Diplomacy towards 2020 and Beyond' presents an invaluable opportunity for you to be fully apprised on Malaysia's current policy direction, both domestic and foreign, as well as our government's efforts in addressing present and future challenges faced by the nation.

5. I will not spend too much time in talking about the Government Transformation Policy as I am sure you are well aware of the various transformation programmes introduced by the Government since 2009 in order to ensure that Malaysia remains competitive in the future.

6. As the Government's principal representative abroad, you too are aware that shifts in the global economic and political environment would inevitably have an impact on Malaysia by virtue of it being an open economy and its fortunes being dependent on trade and investments flows, tourist arrivals and so on. By introducing these policies, Malaysia is in a good position to face future challenges and move towards becoming a developed nation by 2020. One important if not the most important aspect of the National Transformation Policy is the people. We need an educated workforce and people with

specialised skills and knowledge of the technology of the future in order to realise the transformations that are needed to ensure Malaysia's continued development.

Ladies and gentlemen,

7. This is why I have chosen to speak on the importance of engaging and mobilising the Malaysian diaspora. During this session, I hope we could have an exchange of views on how best to nurture a sense of belonging amongst the Malaysian diaspora so that together we could work in building this great nation of ours.

8. In our quest to become a high income developed nation by 2020, one of the core principles of the National Transformation Programme is that of inclusiveness. All Malaysians should have a sense of belonging, feel that they have the opportunity to pursue their ambitions and achieve their full potential. Collectively we all contribute towards building a nation that is strong where the rakyat enjoys a high quality of life. Inclusiveness also means that Malaysia has to look at all sources of talents either at home or abroad to ensure that Malaysians from all walks of life will be part of this transformative journey that we had embarked on since 2009.

9. In the many visits abroad that I had undertaken, it has always been a source of pride for me to see how resilient Malaysians are – they thrive whether as students or as professionals, in many areas such as in business, arts, sports and other fields. This shows that Malaysians are outward looking, not afraid to leave the comfort of home to pursue their dreams and ambitions. At the same time, they still retain close ties with Malaysia, which I am sure many still regard as 'home'.

10. In fact, many Malaysians have achieved success abroad. Some may be famous household names. However, there are also many of those who may not be as renowned but who have established themselves as experts in their chosen fields.

11. I believe that by developing regular contacts with the Malaysian diaspora, they could assist you in making headway with the local leaders and communities as they could help to foster better understanding of the distinctiveness of local customs and the political, economic and social dynamics of your host country. Through these contacts, you too would be able to carry out your responsibilities in a much more effective way.

Ladies and gentlemen,

12. During the run-up and after the May General Elections last year, we saw the emergence and the impact of social media in shaping public opinion among Malaysians, particularly among the youth. Some argued that this is a welcome step towards a more open form of democracy, which guarantees freedom of expression. However, what the experience has taught us was that social media became an avenue that could be easily abused, in which rumours and unverified accusations spread like wildfire including among the Malaysian community living abroad.

13. We have to explain to Malaysians and foreigners alike that this is not what democracy is all about. Democracy also is about citizens having the freedom to exercise their right to vote and it also guarantees that there is rule of law and accountable governance. The fact that people were able to use the social media freely, albeit within the ambit of our laws, is an indication that a robust form of democracy is in place in Malaysia.

14. In this regard, as a responsible Government, we listen to the people. Citizens who are eligible to vote must be able to participate in the electoral process. In the last general elections, the Government took steps to make sure that Malaysians overseas were able to vote. As a result, 2013 marked the first time in our country's election history that Malaysians living abroad who are registered voters could vote and be involved in determining the future of the country. Previously, only full-time students and civil servants and their spouses were eligible to use the postal voting facility. I wish to congratulate Wisma Putra and the agencies involved in making this a reality.

15. This is an example of a Government that constantly seeks to improve its services to the public. In dealing with our clients and stakeholders abroad, there is no organisation with more experience in delivering services to Malaysians abroad than Wisma Putra. And the Heads of Mission stationed at our 105 missions worldwide have always executed their responsibilities in ensuring high quality service delivery overseas. Apart from that, as front-line representatives of the Government abroad, they have an important role in forming and influencing public opinion about Malaysia, among Malaysians and foreigners alike.

Ladies and gentlemen,

16. Your presence in your host countries enable you to engage directly with our stakeholders and clients, especially our fellow countrymen abroad. This is the reason why the Government has focused on the importance of developing close ties with our own diaspora as part of Malaysia's diplomatic deliverables. However, we cannot do this without your inputs and support as you are stationed at your respective countries and have direct and instant access to the Malaysian diaspora living in many different parts of the world.

17. Allow me to share with you some of my views on engaging and mobilising the Malaysian diaspora as they are an important asset that can help you to promote ties of mutual benefit to Malaysia and your host countries.

18. First, get to know as many Malaysians as possible in your host countries. Not all Malaysians live close to the capital, therefore the internet provides a multitude of ways to make this possible. Heads of Mission must engage regularly with Malaysians in formal or informal ways as this will be useful in times of crisis, particularly when natural disaster strikes or when social or political unrest takes place. We must ensure that Malaysians overseas are safe in these instances.

19. Second, engage the Malaysian diaspora to help in promoting various aspects of Malaysia abroad. They can help explain events or incidents that happen in Malaysia. Malaysia has done well to make itself known internationally but there are many who do not know very much about Malaysia. By keeping an open channel of communication in engaging and mobilising the Malaysian diaspora, you would be able to reach a wider group of people in your host countries and would be able to share and explain our views to more people in your host countries. As the Government's chief representative abroad, continue to project a positive image of the country at all times and communicate our position on various issues effectively.

20. Third, the country needs those with specialised skills that are required for Malaysia to move up the technology value-chain as outlined in our transformation programmes. By tapping into the experiences and expertise of the Malaysian diaspora, we can reverse the brain-drain that has affected many countries where talents leave to look for better opportunities in more developed countries. Talent Corp was set up with the aim to provide incentives to draw Malaysian experts to return home. Our diplomatic missions together with Talent Corp, should harness on each other's strength to reach out to Malaysians abroad and raise awareness about the opportunities back home. Talent Corp

would be able to provide information on the type of experts Malaysia needs while our diplomatic missions could assist in disseminating the information among Malaysians present in their host countries as well as in assisting in Talent Corp's activities overseas.

21. Last but not least, there is the question of having sufficient resources for activities related to mobilising and engaging the Malaysian diaspora. On one level, optimising existing resources such as using social media for keeping the channel of communication open between our diplomatic missions and Malaysians residing in your host countries could be done without much additional cost. On the other hand, brain gain programmes would require more resources. In this regard, Talent Corp could hold joint programmes with our diplomatic missions overseas and provide the necessary funds when required.

22. With the strength of diaspora of one million people abroad and with the strength of our worldwide network of diplomatic missions in 105 countries, we can look at practical and realistic ways to tap into the talents of the Malaysian diaspora for the good of our nation. In this regard, the establishment of Malaysian Associations overseas provide an effective platform for the Malaysian diaspora to interact with fellow Malaysians while they are living abroad. In addition to this, they could be the focal points in disseminating information on Malaysia and provide invaluable local knowledge on opportunities that could help advance Malaysia's interests and strengthen social, cultural, economic and political ties between Malaysia and other countries.

Ladies and gentlemen,

23. Before I conclude, I would like to reiterate the crucial role you have in projecting a positive image of Malaysia abroad and to instil confidence of Malaysia's continued stability and sound governance among the international community. Equally important is your role in engaging with the Malaysian

diaspora no matter where they are. They are an invaluable asset that could help you make headway in your host countries. You are also in a position do your part to actively support the Government's transformation programmes, including the Government's brain gain initiatives.

24. I wish you all the very best in your deliberations.

Thank you.