

**RETHINKING DIPLOMACY:
NEW APPROACHES AND DOMESTIC CHALLENGES
BY
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Distinguished Heads of Mission

Ladies and Gentlemen

*Assalamualaikum Warahmatullahi Wabarakatuh, Good morning
and Salam 1Malaysia.*

It gives me great pleasure to be here this morning at the 8th Heads of Mission Conference. I would like to wish a warm welcome to all Heads of Mission. I am pleased that we have this opportunity to

meet and deliberate on issues pertinent to Malaysia and the conduct of foreign relations and diplomacy.

2. The last Conference was held in 2009, shortly after I had assumed my position as Minister in Wisma Putra. Since then, I have had the opportunity to experience for myself the intricacies and complexities of managing foreign relations with other countries on one hand, and working with you in articulating our position on issues at the international fora on another. Indeed Malaysia should be proud of its fine reputation among the international community. Over the years Malaysia has won many friends and is well regarded and respected internationally, and this is in no way possible without the work that you and your predecessors have put into making this possible.

Ladies and gentlemen,

3. This Conference is timely after a hiatus of five years for two reasons:

First: it comes after the 13th General Elections that took place in May 2013, in which the Barisan National was once again given the mandate by the rakyat to govern the country. Thus, this Conference offers an excellent opportunity to you to listen to our leaders on the policy direction of the Government, particularly on the National Transformation Policy, and the role of Wisma Putra and our diplomatic missions in making sure that these policies are understood and well executed;

Second: it would enable you to gain an insight through discussions with the Ministry's stakeholders from former Malaysian Ambassadors, the media, think tanks, civil society, as well as through deliberations on the core business of the Ministry, as inputs that could be beneficial in terms of improving or transforming the way diplomacy is conducted by Wisma Putra.

4. As we know, the next six years are important years for Malaysia. Together with other Government agencies, Wisma Putra will be doing its part in assisting Malaysia to achieve high-income developed status in 2020.

5. The next six years are also significant for Wisma Putra as Malaysia will be chairing and hosting several regional and international meetings. In 2015, Malaysia will assume the chairmanship of ASEAN and look forward to the possibility of joining the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) for the 2015-2016 term. Then, in 2019, Malaysia would host the next Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM).

6. Dealing on a daily basis with matters connected in some way or the other to the outside world, you are well aware of global issues and the changing dynamics in the international environment that impact directly on Malaysia. Given the interconnectedness of the world today brought upon by rapid changes due to globalisation and technological advancement, Malaysia as a small trading nation, and very much integrated into the global economy, has to continue to implement policies that would ensure that Malaysia

continues to grow as a country and continue to provide a high level of development for the country.

Ladies and gentlemen,

7. Malaysia's strategic location at the centre of one of the world's busiest sea passages, coupled with our stable political, economic and social institutions have given credence to Malaysia as a strategic partner that many Great Powers have continued to be interested in. Malaysia's place in the world is not shaped by sheer accident but by through carefully crafted policies and the political will of its leaders.

8. Malaysia will always be an open trading nation and has to always take into account its own socio-economic endowments in terms of ethnic, religious and cultural diversity, when considering its domestic and foreign policy priorities.

9. Malaysia's unique way of accommodating the interests of our diverse population in our own unique way has been rewarded by a stability that is uncommon among developing countries. As we all know, however, in recent years there have been many challenges in the domestic front. Many have demanded for more democratic space and have taken their opinion into the virtual world by criticising each and every policy the Government makes. What some of them fail to understand is the complexity of our political, economic and social realities and that some things would never or would probably take generations to change, and that all Malaysians

must make constructive contributions to ensure that Malaysia continues to enjoy peace and stability for generations to come.

10. These realities together with the external regional and global environment in turn shape our foreign policy. Our foreign policy has been characterised by pragmatism and a principled position on issues. Since independence there has been continuity in our foreign policy and this is another indicator of the stability of our political, economic and social institutions. Our foreign policy evolution has also been seamlessly tied to the leadership of the country.

11. We are familiar with the narrative – how as a newly independent state led by Tuanku Abdul Rahman, we retained our friendly ties with Britain and the West.

12. Then under Tun Abdul Razak, Malaysia began to exert its independence and found common ground with other post-colonial and developing states to be part of the Non-Aligned Movement during the period of Cold War.

13. With Tun Hussein Onn we began planting the seeds for regional cooperation with the founding of ASEAN.

14. Under Tun Mahathir, Malaysia broke many new grounds in advocating a greater economic orientation and in forging close ties with other developing countries in the conduct of our foreign relations.

15. Tun Abdullah Ahmad Badawi's time as Prime Minister saw Malaysia further promoting a progressive form of Islam, consolidating its ties with ASEAN, and the propagation of a rule-based society both at home and in ASEAN.

16. Previous leaderships had provided the foundation of our current foreign policy under the present leadership of Dato' Sri Najib Tun Abdul Razak. Since Dato' Sri became Prime Minister and introduced the National Transformation programmes, Malaysia has been able to draw on the goodwill and friendly relations developed over the past fifty years.

17. Looking at the global political and economic environment, Malaysia needs to keep ahead of the competition or it will flounder as a middle-income country, and not be able to enjoy the continuous development that we know today.

Ladies and gentlemen,

18. Wisma Putra has been part and parcel of the nation's foreign policy evolution. Your predecessors have laid a strong foundation and tradition of excellence in the pursuit of Malaysia's national interest.

19. Many refer to the legacy of Tun Muhammad Ghazali Shafie affectionately known as King Ghaz who played a pivotal role in laying the foundations of Malaysia's foreign policy. He was involved in the formation of Malaysia as a state, the founding of ASEAN,

OIC and the International Islamic University of Malaysia and is known for the tight ship he commanded as Foreign Minister and Permanent Secretary of External Affairs.

20. While many keep referring to the “Old Glory Days of Wisma Putra”, we must not forget that times have changed since then. The advent of ICT and globalisation has culminated into completely different rules of the game in the conduct of diplomacy and the terrain of international relations. Wisma Putra has grown too - the physical presence, the number of departments in the Ministry, and the number of Missions abroad have grown, and so have the challenges that come with it.

21. Our foreign policy considerations however remain the same. We are an open trading nation, therefore robust economic cooperation is important and so is a predictable and rules-based legal and business environment. As we are a diverse country, our positions at the international fora also reflect this reality. The role of consular services has also expanded as more Malaysians travel and live abroad. These are the realities, and as a Ministry, Wisma Putra must look at its strengths and weaknesses and transform the way things are done so as to meet these future challenges.

22. The Prime Minister had mooted the Global Movement of Moderates (GMM) in 2010. This initiative has not only been accepted by ASEAN but also by NAM, CHOGM, ASEM, D8 and the OIC. It has also caught the imagination of many countries that recognize that multiculturalism is a common denominator in every

corner of the world and that dialogue and a moderate position would help mitigate extremism at home as well as internationally.

23. We now live in an era where security issues are no longer also the sole concern of individual countries but that of the international community as a whole. The peace agreement between the Philippines Government and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) in Southern Philippines facilitated by Malaysia is testament of moderation in practice.

24. As Malaysia becomes a high-income developed nation, such initiatives must be identified as niche areas that Malaysia could focus on in the pursuit of foreign policy at the regional and global levels.

Ladies and gentlemen,

25. In line with the first of the transformational policies of the Government to focus on the delivery service of the public sector, I had initiated in 2010 the Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) for Heads of Missions. I am very pleased to note that all Heads of Mission now have their own KPIs which are customised to suit the types of Mission and the realities on the ground. I believe that this is an endeavour that we can be proud of as a Ministry and I am sure we are one of the pioneering countries to undertake such a project as a means to measure and monitor the performance of Heads of diplomatic missions. Indeed, there are many intangible components of our work at the Ministry that cannot be measured.

However, we can measure specific activities that contribute towards achieving our objectives of protecting and projecting Malaysia's many interests abroad.

26. Sceptics could be critical about the effectiveness of the KPIs, particularly in accurately measuring the performance of Heads of Mission. Let me explain the rationale behind the KPIs. Over the years Wisma Putra has grown in terms of its physical presence in Putrajaya as well as its vast network of now 107 diplomatic missions. In terms of scale, compare this to a country of the size of India that has about 160 diplomatic missions abroad. Indeed we must be proud that Malaysia, despite its relatively small size geographically and population-wise has such a wide network of diplomatic presence in all corners of the world. However, the physical growth and global reach of the Ministry do pose certain challenges in terms of resources especially in terms of financial resources and human resource capacity.

27. The KPIs therefore is a means to provide in very clear terms a set of guidelines that set out the expectations of the Ministry on the Heads of Mission in carrying out their role as the Government's chief representative abroad. Given the growth that Wisma Putra has experienced particularly in the 1990's when many diplomatic missions were established in the countries of the South, the KPIs are useful tools for the Ministry to set out the objectives for each Head of Mission to achieve.

28. In this day and age where time is a precious commodity, the Minister, the Ministry's top management and even the respective Desks, do not have the time to go into great detail into the work that each Head of Mission need to carry at his or her post. As such, the KPIs serve as a manual of activities for Heads of Mission to execute in order to meet the targets, which in actual fact reflects the expectations of the Ministry. Through the KPIs, the HQ would be able to gauge the level of work at the Mission. However, the KPIs at present primarily provide a measure of the quantity of work and not the quality.

29. This is where the next challenge lies. A measurement mechanism that could provide an accurate measure on the quality of performance of a Mission be it in terms of reports and the impact they have on shaping Malaysia's position on an issue, for example, or level of effectiveness of consular services provided by Missions, should be the next step in improving the delivery system of the Ministry.

30. The setting of standards based on specific measurement criteria are well worth studying and developing and then implemented. This I believe will revolutionise and transform the Ministry by coding the high standards that are universally expected of Foreign Ministries and diplomats anywhere into a performance management mechanism.

31. After being Foreign Minister for near to five years, I have witnessed first-hand the dedication, the grit and the determination of our officers in executing their work. I fully appreciate the challenges and difficulties that you go through on the front line in flying Malaysia's flag high in your respective host countries or at the international organisations you are accredited to.

32. Defending Malaysia's interests, providing quality services to the public, and projecting a positive image of Malaysia are akin to the air that you breathe, as these are ingrained in you from the moment you became a diplomat in your formative years at the Ministry. I have been told that diplomats are a special breed and I could attest to that, I do see that in you.

33. It is for this reason that Wisma Putra must continue to develop its human capacity to be able to meet the challenges of the future and continue to excel in what it was set up to do. Wisma Putra is involved in both high politics and soft diplomacy and thus its officers must be well equipped to handle all aspects of diplomacy.

Ladies and gentlemen,

34. In this day and age, modern diplomacy does not only require the mastery of words but also the ability to be forward-looking, innovative and take quick action and decisions. These are traits that would ensure the relevance and survival of the diplomatic service in this age of instantaneous information. Diplomats provide

analysis of situations or events that have ramifications on their country or citizens' interests.

35. The media can only provide instantaneous reports but it is the analysis of the diplomat on the ground that makes a difference to the way a country views a particular situation and the position the country would take vis-à-vis that situation. Therefore, ladies and gentlemen, Wisma Putra must be able to do just that and do it well.

36. I must say throughout my time here, there have been instances that I have been concerned by the time taken for Wisma Putra to respond to some situations as well as the quality of advice that have been given to me. Good advice is important in order for the Government to make decisions on issues. In order for officers to provide good advice, they must have a good understanding of issues. As diplomats, Wisma Putra officers must continuously develop their knowledge and understanding of international issues and skills in writing, articulating views and negotiating.

Ladies and gentlemen,

37. I am impressed by the calibre of many officers at the Ministry who have honed their diplomatic, people and communication skills throughout their careers. This is why I have always given the latitude to Heads of Mission and senior officers of the Ministry to make public statements but they must take responsibility for what is published or quoted.

38. I have also introduced a new practice with regard to Pre-Council briefings to YAB PM, where I ceded that privilege to the KSU, respective TKSUs, DGs and Heads of Mission in order to give them the opportunity to interact directly with the Prime Minister. By doing so, the Prime Minister, who is one of our principle stakeholders, will be better acquainted with our most senior officials, and create that rapport that goes a long way in helping Wisma Putra to produce work that meets the expectations of our stakeholders , including the Prime Minister.

39. It also provides the opportunity to the Prime Minister to gauge the capabilities of our senior government officials. Many senior government officials are given the honour to continue serving the Government upon retirement. This is a reflection of the Government's appreciation for their expertise, talents and capabilities. In the case of Wisma Putra, this would relate to the officer's ability to continue providing their insights and policy advice to the Government on international issues of strategic importance to Malaysia. However, this does not mean that such appointments are automatic as consideration is based on merit and not to be taken for granted as a given practice.

Ladies and gentlemen,

40. To be able to be an effective foreign ministry, Wisma Putra must ensure that it invests in developing the knowledge and skills of its officers and staff so that they would be able to continuously improve themselves and contribute to a solid, performance and

results-oriented work culture that would determine Wisma Putra remains at the forefront of international relations as the custodian of Malaysia's Foreign Policy. I have confidence that Wisma Putra has the ability to harness the talents it has and to meet the high expectations of its stakeholders and clients.

41. Another important aspect of diplomacy is to cultivate and gain an in depth understanding of the political, economic and social dynamics in the host country. As such, I would encourage you to engage with civil society organisations, the academia, media think tanks, the business community, and not forgetting the Malaysian diaspora wherever you are posted to. These diverse groups would be able to provide different perspectives on issues which could assist you to provide a balanced and comprehensive view on issues and shape your policy recommendations to the Government. Your interaction with them and to get to know them well is critical. At the same time, you will be able to reach a wider group of people as part of your public diplomacy efforts.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

42. As I have earlier mentioned, Wisma Putra would be facing challenging times ahead, especially with Malaysia's Chairmanship of ASEAN in 2015, our bid to the non-permanent seat of the UN Security Council for 2015-16, and the hosting of the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting or CHOGM in 2019. I look forward to having a fruitful dialogue with you on rethinking diplomacy and finding new approaches to diplomacy in

supporting the National Transformation Programmes to achieve our goals to become a high-income developed country by the year 2020.

Wabilllahitaufikwalhidayah,wassalamualaikum
warahmatullahiwabarakatuh.

Thank you.