

**WELCOMING ADDRESS**

**BY**

**THE HON. DATO' SERI SHAHRIZAT ABDUL JALIL  
MINISTER OF WOMEN, FAMILY AND  
COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT, MALAYSIA**

**AT**

**THE OPENING CEREMONY OF  
THE MINISTERIAL MEETING OF  
THE NON-ALIGNED MOVEMENT (NAM)  
ON THE ADVANCEMENT OF WOMEN  
BY THE RT. HON. PRIME MINISTER OF MALAYSIA  
DATO' SERI ABDULLAH HAJI AHMAD BADAWI**

**9 MAY 2005**

**PUTRAJAYA INTERNATIONAL CONVENTION CENTRE  
PUTRAJAYA,  
MALAYSIA**

Selamat Datang and a very warm welcome to The Right Honourable Prime Minister of Malaysia YAB Dato' Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi and our First Lady YABhg. Datin Seri Endon Mahmood, YABhg. Dato' Sri Rosmah Mansor, wife of the Deputy Prime Minister of Malaysia, Tun Dr. Siti Hasmah Mohd. Ali, former First Lady, Your Excellencies Honourable Ministers, senior officials, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen to this first ever Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) Ministerial Meeting on the Advancement of Women held in Putrajaya, Malaysia. Malaysia as current chair of NAM and the Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development is deeply honoured and privileged to be your host.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Since its inception in 1961, NAM has focused mainly on international political and security issues. Whilst socio-economic and development issues are an integral part of its agenda, traditionally the Movement has focused on geo-political issues because of the prevailing international political situation. Which is why, ladies and gentlemen, when The Heads of State or Government of NAM at its Thirteenth Summit in Kuala Lumpur in February 2003 agreed to Malaysia's suggestion to integrate women's perspective into NAM's agenda, history was created.

We would like to have on record our appreciation to the Heads of State or Government for their wisdom in ensuring that gender perspective is mainstreamed into NAM's agenda. Hitherto women's issues, more often than not, were regarded by many as soft issues, seldom worthy of centre stage. The approach to the status of women is likely to be one of welfare, paternalism and protection, and not often enough, one of equity and social transformation. It is usually the exception rather than the rule that women's issues, indeed even family issues, would be included in mainstream political discourses. Thankfully, as a dynamic Movement sensitive to the global realities particularly to the needs and interest of half of the world population, NAM is fully committed to addressing them.

This Ministerial Meeting with the theme "Empowering Women in Facing the Challenges of Globalization", is a forum for sharing experiences among NAM member states on best practices, achievements, gaps and challenges in the areas of gender equality, peace, and development; and to identify specific and practical projects and programmes that NAM, as a group, could implement to help promote the advancement of women in NAM countries.

There are seven sub-themes for us to deliberate, namely:

- (i) Women and Economic Development
- (ii) Women in Decision-Making
- (iii) Women and Education
- (iv) Women and Health

- (v) Women and ICT
- (vi) Women in Armed Conflict
- (vii) Violence against Women

The theme and sub themes reflect the need for NAM to intensify its efforts to ensure that growing prosperity in a globalized world is not achieved at the expense of increasing impoverishment in developing and poor countries. Gender disparities and inequalities, including the feminization of poverty; gender based violence; under-representation of women in decision-making; both in the public and private domains; and the spread of HIV/AIDS, are some of the adverse impacts of globalization that present challenges to NAM countries in achieving the goals of gender equality, development and peace. One United Nations survey concludes that it is by now considered a stylized fact that industrialization in the context of globalization is as much female-led as it is export led.

It is in this context that the empowerment of women is a critical ingredient. While its meaning may vary according to the regions, level of development and culture of the society, empowerment is an important tool that provides women the capacities, capabilities, access and control over resources, and most importantly, to have the choice and power to improve, shape and decide their own lives and destinies.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The forces of globalization should be better managed to promote a more civilized and just world. Since women make up half of the world population, the definition of civilization will never be complete and sufficient without the inclusion of women's perspective, interest, concern and contribution.

Clearly, gender equality can only be achieved through a strong commitment from all of us. The continuous will of Governments, the full and effective participation of NGOs, private sector and other stake holders, to promote equal rights, equal responsibilities, equal opportunities and equal participation of men and women, boys and girls in all sectors and at all levels, is critical.

Ladies and gentlemen,

In Malaysia under the able leadership of the Honourable Prime Minister, policies and strategies to improve the status of women are based on the concept and spirit of genuine and smart partnerships. Embodied in this concept is the shared responsibility between all stake holders, and between men and women, in the public and private spheres. The struggle for gender equality in Malaysia has never been pursued at the expense of our male colleagues. As a country that believes in the family institution as the soul of the nation, and this is very strongly supported by our esteemed First Lady, Malaysia has put strong emphasis on the sharing of tasks and

responsibilities by men and women within families, households, working institutions and communities. Our aim is to ensure that women and men are able to work together in harmony for themselves, their children, society and the whole nation to meet the demands of new and emerging challenges.

Ladies and gentlemen, we have also arranged two parallel interactive sessions i.e.

- (i) Trade-led Growth – Implications on the Empowerment of Women by the Honourable Minister of Trade and Industry Malaysia Dato' Seri Rafidah Aziz
  
- (ii) HIV/AIDS – Implications of Women's Empowerment and Gender Equality by Y.Bhg. Datin Paduka Marina Mahathir, President of Malaysian AIDS Council

I truly hope that the outcome of this Meeting, particularly the Putrajaya Declaration, will be the blue print for all of us as members of NAM in continuing our struggle to empower women. Indeed it could also be a guide in our respective countries. We, men and women, are compelled to provide the leadership and assistance for the critical mass of women out there who are not as fortunate and blessed as some of us are. The facts and figures which will be presented at this Meeting will bear testimony to this. Although women have made great strides forward, the reality is that more, much more, needs to be done for them to be equal partners to men in every which way, for the

equal rights of women is more ideal than real, constitutional safeguards notwithstanding.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Last but not least, on behalf of the Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development of Malaysia, I would like to convey our appreciation for your participation in and contribution to this Meeting. Special thanks to the Honourable Foreign Minister Dato' Seri Syed Hamid Albar for all his support, to the Organizing Committee headed by both the Secretary General of the Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development, Datuk Faizah Mohd. Tahir and Ambassador-At-Large Tan Sri Hasmy Agam of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and each and every government agency, their officers and personnel, and the private sector for their wonderful team work and commitment towards ensuring the success of this Meeting. Alhamdulillah.

To all mothers here and around the world, may I wish you Happy Mother's Day. Motherhood is not only for those who have children. It is really about love and caring and protecting and nurturing, where ever we are, who ever we may be. It is both a responsibility and a gift. Let us all embrace it with open arms, the joys it brings and sorrows we suffer. For motherhood, at the end of the day, is truly the best gift God has given us all women to cherish and to love.

To Your Excellencies and distinguished delegates, we are now a part of an inspiring journey to unravel the complexities of issues facing women in the era of globalization. Together, we can do it and we must. With the sophistication of new technology I'm sure that we are able to communicate across barriers and divides, in greater unity, towards realizing our common goals and dreams.

I hope you will bring home happy and pleasant memories of Malaysia just as we are happy and pleased to be your host. Please do come back with your families and let us make sure this tie which binds us holds us together for ever more.

Thank you.