

Dialogue on Diversity, Diplomacy and Peace: Keynote Address

Prim Minister **Mohd Najib Tun Razak** delivered the following Keynote Address at the Dialogue on Diversity, Diplomacy and Peace, on 11 November 2013 at Putrajaya. The dialogue was jointly organized by the Institute of Strategic and International Studies (ISIS) Malaysia and the Asian Peace and Reconciliation Council (APRC), in conjunction with the Inaugural General Meeting of the APRC.

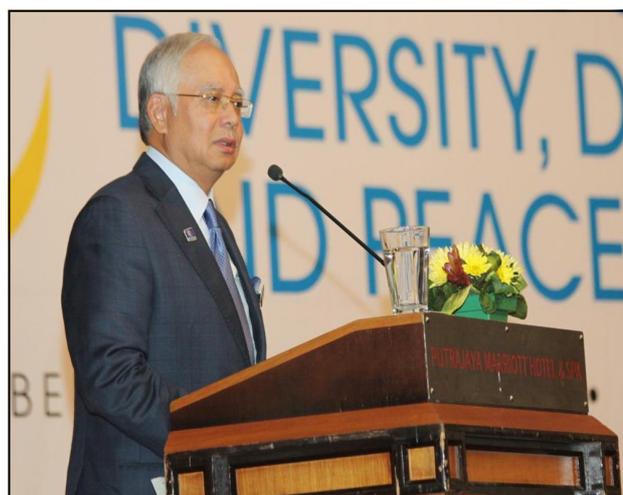
I am delighted to join you at today's Dialogue on Diversity, Diplomacy and Peace. It is especially heart-warming to see many friends and familiar faces among the distinguished members of the Asian Peace and Reconciliation Council.

I thank Yang Amat Berbahagia Tun Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, and His Excellency Dr Surakiart Sathirathai for their tireless efforts in convening the First Annual Meeting of the APRC in Putrajaya. And I commend ISIS Malaysia for co-organising today's Dialogue.

Our topics today could not be more important. Valuing diversity; privileging diplomacy; pursuing peace. Together, they could form a recipe for national success and international stability — not just in Asia, but in the wider world. So let me say a few words on each topic, starting with diversity.

Our planet is a kaleidoscope of peoples, cultures and nations. We speak in many tongues, worship in distinct ways, and live in different political and socio-economic systems. This diversity is a blessing, but it can sometimes be difficult to manage — as Asian and Southeast Asian nations, we know all too well.

Diversity is a big part of Malaysia's DNA; in many ways, it defines us. Ever since man began to set sail for distant places, the monsoon winds ensured that traders from near and far were brought to our shores. And they enriched these lands in more ways than one.



Mohd Najib Tun Abdul Razak

The Malacca Sultanate, which was a major trading centre in the 15th and early 16th centuries, would never have thrived unless it embraced with open arms a multitude of cultures.

Today, that tradition continues. Diversity is about much more than food, music or language. It also means inclusivity and our resolve to live side by side, living in harmony, trusting each other, sharing a common vision for our nation even during times of difficulty. For although we are different, we must not be divided. Malaysians of all ethnicities and religions should be bound together by respect, and the celebration of our differences.

It was with this ambition in mind that we embarked on the concept of 1Malaysia: an all-encompassing national vision to ensure that



Participants at the Keynote Address

Malaysia remains, now and forever, a harmonious and peaceful nation. 1Malaysia is not about winning the election, 1Malaysia is about nation-building.

The path is not always smooth; we must continually re-assert our commitment, not just to co-existence, but to shared prosperity. It is a positive sign that the discourse is shifting from a question of mere 'tolerance' to one of 'respect,' deep mutual respect. Malaysia is not a perfect model of multiculturalism, but our commitment and even our devotion to the principle is clear.

In fact, our belief in multiculturalism is not merely the result of a fascination with the unfamiliar. It also stems from a pragmatic realisation: that a nation whose trade is valued at about 180 per cent of its GDP must make the most of its connections to the world at large.

Malaysia is not the only country in Asia that stands to gain from multiculturalism. Yet some see diversity as a source, not of strength, but of discord. The conflict between Buddhist and Muslim communities in Myanmar is one such example. Malaysia, like the international community at large, is deeply concerned by the ongoing violence. As it assumes an important and high-profile responsibility as Chair of ASEAN, it is right for Myanmar to resolve the issue in a comprehensive manner.

Like in other countries with plural societies, nation-building in Myanmar will not be easy. But it is worthwhile: by embracing inclusion, a greater nation shall emerge.

Diversity is critical to building strong nations. But the underlying principles — i.e. of accepting our differences, embracing dialogue and defending the right to coexist — can also help us build a stronger region. It is here that I wish to turn to our second topic today: diplomacy.

Asian diplomacy has particular characteristics. Our experiences have been distinctive, shaped by our history, our culture and the challenges of our past.

Throughout history — whether as little kingdoms or great empires — Asian states have practiced different types of diplomacy. Today, we conduct international relations as modern states; observing universally-accepted principles, and still-evolving practices.

As we interact more closely with one another in a more integrated region and a more globalized world, so diplomacy has become more complex. In the past, rulers and authoritarian governments had more freedom to conduct diplomacy as they thought best; without the need to consult or to inform domestic stakeholders or external parties. Quiet diplomacy was the natural order of things.

That is no longer the case. As nations democratize, private enterprise grows and civil society expands, the pressure to engage more constituents in the making of diplomacy mounts.

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From left: Syed Hamid Albar, Mohd Najib Tun Abdul Razak, Abdullah Badawi and Mohamed Jawhar Hassan

Parliaments, chambers of commerce and wider public interest groups want their views to be heard, and acted upon.

Governments remain the primary instruments of diplomacy, but non-government institutions and citizens are playing an increasing role. Words like ‘track two diplomacy’ and ‘citizens’ diplomacy’ are not just academic buzzwords, but a growing part of modern diplomatic practice.

The changing media landscape is also changing international relations, and challenging the concept of quiet diplomacy. Journalists pursue leaders and negotiators everywhere, searching for

‘sound bites’ at the expense of the discretion and confidentiality that are critical to the success of quiet diplomacy.

The challenge is amplified by the growing influence of blogs, which often operate without much restraint, and with questionable ethics; and by the unprecedented speech and reach of platforms like Twitter, where diplomatic practice is often brought before the public eye. Conducting diplomacy away from the glare of publicity is therefore becoming ever more challenging.

Yet there is still a role for quiet diplomacy — in the prevention of conflict, the containment of hostilities and the peaceful resolution of disputes. And there is no reason that it cannot co-exist with a more open and responsive foreign policy. Our task is to understand when greater openness and engagement will yield the best results, and when to focus on the quiet negotiation that has proven so successful in the past. And as Asia’s prominence leads to growing influence, this mission assumes a greater importance.

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From left: Surakiart Sathirathai, Mohd Najib Tun Razak , Abdullah Badawi and David Kennedy

The international media is filled with glowing headlines about Asia's rise. We are, as many put it, at the beginning of an Asian Century, one driven by unprecedented economic development.

Over the last three decades, Asia has indeed seen a remarkable modernization. But we must not allow ourselves to be seduced by hubris, or to fall into complacency.

For each family that escapes the clutches of poverty, far too many continue to be left behind. For all the wealth that has been created, far too little has found its way into the hands of the many.

According to the Asian Development Bank, 1.6 billion people in Asia live on less than US\$2 a

day. That is three times the population of South East Asia as a whole.

Poverty has hardly become history in Asia: in fact, our societies have become more unequal. Since the 1990s, the Gini coefficient for Asia has risen from 33.5 to 37.5. If this is to be an Asian century, we must make sure that economic growth brings opportunities for all — not just a few.

This is not simply a matter of economic justice, it is also one of national stability. Poverty

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Poverty and inequality have a destabilising and corrosive effect on societies

and inequality have a destabilising and corrosive effect on societies. Why should law and order mean anything to people who hardly benefit from them? Why should the marginalized support a political system if it only widens the gap between the rich and the poor?

For peace to prevail in Asia, we must set our minds towards levelling the field of competition, and creating opportunities for people to realize their dreams, irrespective of their economic backgrounds. That will do much to check the forces of instability which have wracked much of the Middle East and North Africa. But we must also confront one of the greatest threats to global peace and security: extremism.

We cannot afford to allow the voices of extremism to dominate the political discourse. It is time for the silent majority to drown out the calls to violence — to reject extremism.

We should not be cowed or held to ransom by elements that prefer to pursue their political goals and grievances outside the accepted norms of civilized society. Just as we abhor violence, so we must also stay firmly within the boundaries of international law in the persecution of extremism and terrorism.

Violence is not always the best tool with which to neutralize extremism. Although I wouldn't rule out that legitimate and lawful use of force is sometimes necessary, too often violence simply begets violence. A militarized response to extremism can feed a vicious cycle of revenge, and further inflame existing animosities. We believe that the main battlefield lies in the political sphere.

Taking out the leadership of extremist groups, or disrupting their supply of weaponry will not always bring a lasting solution; often, it is a case of treating the symptom and not the disease. A better approach would be to undermine their very reason for being. We should be unafraid to use the power of persuasion to counter the misguided rallying calls of the extremists.

It was with this purpose in mind that we called for a Global Movement of the Moderates: a plea for the silent majority to stand up to extremism, and to support non-violence in conflict resolution.

It was the latest of a series of initiatives through which we have attempted to exercise a positive impact on the world. Malaysia's contribution to international peace and security can be traced back to the formative years of our nation. The first Malaysian peacekeepers served with distinction in the United Nations Mission in the Congo, from 1960 to 1963. We have since served in 13 other UN peace missions. Our commitment to the United Nations remains strong; our belief in its ideals unrelenting.

We have had the honour of serving in the United Nations Security Council three times previously, and, with the support and trust of the international community, we stand ready to serve a fourth term. We thank our friends who pledged their support for our bid for a non-permanent seat on the Security Council in the 2015-2016 term.

Closer to home, Malaysia played a key role in the Mindanao Peace Process and has begun to collaborate with Thai counterparts to begin laying the groundwork for peace in Southern Thailand.

If Mindanao is any indication, we expect that the road to stability in Southern Thailand will be a long and winding one. Nevertheless, we are committed to working with the government of Thailand to bring about meaningful peace in an area that has known violence and instability for far too long.

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All states, including Malaysia, accord the highest priority and importance to the preservation of peace and security. I wish to register once more our gratitude to the men and women in law enforcement, and the security forces, whose sacrifices enable us to go about our daily lives in peace.

I also wish to pay tribute to another group of dedicated people whose contributions are often overlooked. I refer to the army of diplomats, politicians, bureaucrats, scholars and civil society advocates whose work contributes to the preservation of peace.

With this in mind, I warmly welcome the Asian Peace and Reconciliation Council, as a new regional advocate for conflict management and peace resolution.

Between the 24 distinguished members of the Council, there is a wealth of practical experience and expertise that can assist in moderating and managing conflicts. Through quiet diplomacy, the Council can supplement official and government efforts. With its reservoirs of experience and wide networks, it can play an important role in reaching out to all parties and facilitating peaceful resolution.

So let me conclude by congratulating the APRC and ISIS Malaysia for their efforts in organizing this dialogue. I am heartened to see the close cooperation between these two institutions; and honoured by your collective presence today. I look forward to your support in keeping us on the path of moderation, peace and stability.



Council Members of the APRC with the Prime Minister of Malaysia