

Address at the Opening of The XIII Summit Conference of the Non Aligned Movement

24 February 2003

Your Majesties,
Your Excellencies, Heads of State and Government,
Your Excellencies Ministers, High Commissioners and Ambassadors,
Distinguished Delegates, Observers and Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen:

May I first of all extend to our host, Malaysia, our heartfelt appreciation for the generous hospitality accorded to us since our arrival in this beautiful city of Kuala Lumpur. I thank You, Mr Prime Minister, your government and the people of Malaysia for the warm and cordial welcome you have extended to us.

In returning to these Asian shores, we reaffirm the golden thread that has, since Bandung, bound us together through the Non -Aligned Movement.

It has been a privilege and honour for South Africa to discharge the responsibilities entrusted to us as Chair of the Non - Aligned Movement. We would like to pay tribute to the membership of this organisation for the confidence placed in the people of South Africa and for the cooperation extended to us during our tenure.

We are confident that Malaysia will continue to advance the objectives of the NAM and pursue the revitalisation of our Movement so that it is able to meet the challenges of the 21st Century. The Report of the Outgoing Chair, which gives a comprehensive account of the activities of the Movement since 1998, has been distributed.

Of importance, in the past decade, NAM has made significant advances at key global conferences culminating in the historic Millenium Summit Declaration. In addition, the Havana South Summit formulated a comprehensive and focused agenda, which formed the basis for interaction with the developed countries of the North.

As we agreed at the World Summit for Sustainable Development (WSSD), we need to urgently implement the Johannesburg Plan of Action, so as to make a real difference to humanity.

The Movement has intensified engagement with the countries of the North. For instance, in relation to the G8 countries, at Cologne, we concentrated on the issue of debt eradication. In Tokyo, our leadership discussed the outcomes of the South Summit. In Genoa we addressed the need for the development of a North -South partnership, which culminated last year in the Kananaskis Declaration.

The African Region has developed the New Partnership for Africa's Development (Nepad) and for its success we need to intensify South - South cooperation. It is our joint responsibility to ensure that we develop similar plans for other Regions as well.

Your Excellencies;

In his 1921 poem, "The Second Coming", the Irish Poet,

W.B. Yeats, wrote:

 ".but now I know
 That twenty century of stony sleep
 Were vexed to nightmare by a rocking cradle,

And what rough beast, its hour come round at last,
Slouches towards Bethlehem to be born?"

We too, the Non - Aligned Movement have just cause to ask the same question - and what rough beast, its hour come round at last, 'with a gaze blank and pitiless as the sun',

Slouches towards Bethlehem to be born?

Some had promised that the end of the Cold War just over a decade ago, would lead to the birth of a new world order of freedom, justice, peace and prosperity for all.

But what we have seen since then is a world torn apart by merciless conflicts that have devoured many human lives. From the genocide in Rwanda in Africa, through the deadly conflicts in the former Yugoslavia, Chechnya in Russia and Afghanistan, the death and destruction in Timor Leste, and the apparently unstoppable and costly conflicts between Palestine and Israel, it has seemed that war is destined to define the human condition, permanently.

The murderous outrage of September 11, 2001, preceded by the 1998 massacres in Nairobi, Kenya and the Dar - es -Salaam, Tanzania, and succeeded by the slaughter of the innocents in Bali, Indonesia last year, have seemed to confirm that terrorism was set to become the final arbiter with regard to the central matter of the safety and security of all human beings.

As the first decade of the post Cold -War period progressed towards its close, member countries of our Movement, especially in this region, were hit by an economic crisis that destroyed or undermined great advances that had been made to improve the lives of the people.

As the second decade of this new epoch began, millions elsewhere in the world, in Africa, had no choice but to sustain life by depending on international food aid, even as they had to contend with a burden of disease, including AIDS, that spells suffering and untimely death for millions.

The more the assertion was made that, because of a benign process of globalisation, now we all live in a global village, the more life itself made the statement that we live in two villages, one rich and getting richer, and the other poor and getting poorer.

With drought and floods alternating at an unaccustomed frequency, or simultaneously exacting vengeance in different parts of the same country, it has seemed that nature itself is refusing to accept the predictions that had been made about the post - Cold war period.

As we meet here, in this city and country that inspire hope throughout the countries of the South, the terrible promise of war hangs over the people of Iraq and the world. When and if it will break out we do not know. How many human casualties we also do not know.

But what we know is that if war does impose itself on humanity, it will claim many lives. It will increase instability in the Middle East and the world. It will deliver a deadly blow to the poor of the world, who will have to bear the additional pain of growing impoverishment.

It will entrench the tendency towards the exclusion of those who are poor and weak, such as ourselves, from participation in the formulation of a world agenda and programme of action, that relate to the central question whether we are considered human enough to decide what our own future shall be.

Peace and stability in our countries and the rest of the world demands that Iraq, a long - standing member of our Movement, should cooperate fully with the United Nations Security Council and the weapons inspectors to satisfy all humanity that she has no weapons of mass destruction.

Peace and stability in our countries and the rest of the world demands that all of us, including those who are incomparably more powerful than we are, should respect the findings of the weapon inspectors and the decisions of the United Nations Security Council fully and without reservation.

Surely, we must together make the statement that we do not want war. But we must also make the statement that neither do we want weapons of mass destruction. Both these positions have defined the purposes of our movement since its early dawn in Bandung, Indonesia, in 1955. We cannot now seek to redefine ourselves in this regard.

The Irish Poet, W.B. Yeats, wrote:

"Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,
The blood - dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere
The ceremony of innocence is drowned;"

Without claiming powers we do not have, we must insist that the centre must hold. We must position ourselves in word and deed as the enemies of anarchy. We have to act to neutralise the deadly impact of the tide hungry for human blood, which seek to celebrate a victory defined as the prevalence of an ephemeral peace whose parent is the fear of death.

I believe that the very future of our Movement rests on its response to these challenges that are central to the immediate future of all humanity. Not to respond to these in a bold, determined and united manner will spell our demise. It will also confirm the inevitability of what the poet foresaw, that a rough beast, its time come round at last, slouches towards Bethlehem to be born.

What this means practically is that we have to reaffirm the central relevance of the message of hope and the actual programmes contained in such global manifestos as the Millenium Development Goals, as well as the decisions of the World Conference against Racism, Xenophobia and related Intolerances, the World Food Summit, the Financing for Development conference, and the World Summit for Sustainable Development.

Among other things, this signifies that we must take very seriously and act consistently to implement the vision of South -South cooperation, as well as the determination we make repeatedly, to act together as we negotiate global agreements with the North. We dare not allow the global consensus to recede to the periphery of the world agenda, that the eradication of poverty is an urgent and immediate international task, and that the means exist to achieve this goal.

Our obligation to defend what we stand for requires that we reassert and vigorously defend our commitment to the peaceful resolution of international conflicts. Inherent to this is the absolute necessity that we, who proclaim these positions, must not hesitate to act to ensure such peaceful resolution, even in instances that affect our Member States.

It demands of us that we do everything we can to protect and advance the principle and practice of multilateralism, against the tendency towards unilateralism. This requires that we fight even harder for the democratisation of the international system of governance.

For us to do all this requires that we respect both the decisions we take collectively as well as ourselves as governments, states and peoples. Our resolution must have greater meaning than the mere fact that we adopted them. Our movement has to continue to exist and make its weight felt, not because it has managed to exist for a number of decades, but because it is relevant to the solution of the problems that confront all humanity during the post - Cold War period.

We meet in this city and country of hope, Kuala Lumpur and Malaysia, at a sombre moment in the evolution of human society. The task we face is to take decisions that give hope to all humanity.

Because we have neither the desire nor the means to impose our will on the unwilling, to advance our goals, we can only rely on the humane instruments of dialogue and peace. Our message, in word and deed, can only be one of dialogue, peace and a better life for all human beings, regardless of where they live on our common planet.

Let it never be said of us, as W.B. Yeats said, that "the best lack all conviction, while the worst are full of passionate intensity".

Let it never be said of us that because of what we did not do when we met in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, we merely acted as "indignant desert birds", as we permitted the rough beast, its hour come round at last, to slouch towards Bethlehem to be born.

I wish the XIII Conference of Heads of States or Government of the Non - Aligned Movement success in its important deliberations.

Thank you for your attention.

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