

PRESENTATION BY

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ON

“MULTICULTURALISM IN THE LIFE OF A SOCIETY”

**AT THE BAKY INTERNATIONAL HUMANITARIAN FORUM
ORGANISED BY THE MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS OF
AZERBAIZAN**

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INTRODUCTION

LET ME FIRST OF ALL TAKE THIS OPPORTUNITY TO THANK THE MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS OF AZERBAIJAN FOR INVITING ME TO THIS BEAUTIFUL CITY OF BAKU AND FOR GIVING ME THE OPPORTUNITY TO SPEAK TO THE VERY DISTINGUISHED GATHERING HERE TODAY.

I ALSO WISH TO EXPRESS MY THANKS AND APPRECIATION FOR THE WARM HOSPITALITY EXTENDED TO ME AND THE EXCELLENT ARRANGEMENTS MADE FOR THIS FORUM.

MY PRESENCE HERE SIGNIFIES THE CLOSE AND FRIENDLY RELATIONS THAT EXIST BETWEEN OUR TWO COUNTRIES. IN THIS REGARD, I AM PLEASED TO INFORM YOU THAT THE INSTITUTE OF DIPLOMACY AND FOREIGN RELATIONS OF MALAYSIA (IDFR), WHICH I HEAD, HAS HAD THE PRIVILEGE OF RECEIVING OFFICERS FROM THE FOREIGN MINISTRY OF AZERBAIJAN FOR ITS DIPLOMATIC TRAINING COURSES. SINCE 2010, A TOTAL OF 3 PARTICIPANTS FROM THE MINISTRY HAVE ATTENDED THE COURSES.

ON THE TOPIC, “MULTICULTURALISM AND THE LIFE OF SOCIETY” THAT I HAVE BEEN ASKED TO SPEAK ON, I FEEL THE ORGANIZERS MUST HAVE TAKEN NOTE OF THE FACT THAT MALAYSIA IS QUITE WELL KNOWN INTERNATIONALLY AS A SUCCESSFUL MULTIRACIAL COUNTRY WHERE PEOPLE OF DIFFERENT RACIAL AND RELIGIOUS AND CULTURAL BACKGROUNDS LIVE IN PEACE AND HARMONY.

IN MY TALK TODAY, I WILL BE SPEAKING MAINLY ON THE APPROACHES TAKEN BY MALAYSIA TO PROMOTE CROSS-CULTURAL UNDERSTANDING WITHIN THE COUNTRY. I WILL ALSO EXPLAIN THE ACTIVITIES UNDERTAKEN BY IDFR TO PROMOTE CROSS CULTURAL UNDERSTANDING AND THE EFFORTS BEING UNDERTAKEN BY ASEAN IN ACHIEVING ITS VISION OF A “PEOPLE-CENTERED” ASEAN COMMUNITY BY 2015. FINALLY I WILL BRIEFLY SPEAK ON THE “GLOBAL MOVEMENT OF MODERATES FOUNDATION”, A NGO LAUNCHED BY OUR PRIME MINISTER IN 2010 TO FIGHT EXTREMISM AND PROMOTE PEACE THROUGH “MODERATION” AS A WAY OF LIFE FOR PEOPLE ACROSS THE GLOBE.

MULTICULTURALISM IN MALAYSIA

BASED ON THE CENSUS CARRIED OUT IN 2010, MALAYSIA HAS A POPULATION OF 29 MILLION OUT OF WHICH 51% CONSISTS OF MALAYS, 24.6% CHINESE, 7.1% INDIAN. THE MALAYS TOGETHER WITH THE OTHER INDIGENOUS PEOPLE LIKE THE IBANS, KADAZANS, MURUTS AND OTHER SMALLER GROUPS MAKE UP 61 % OF THE POPULATION. IN ADDITION, WE ALSO HAVE A FAIRLY LARGE MIGRANT WORKER POPULATION WHO COME FROM VARIOUS PARTS OF SOUTHEAST ASIA AND SOUTH ASIA .

AS CAN BE EXPECTED, CULTURALLY SPEAKING, MALAYSIA IS A VERY COLORFUL COUNTRY THAT CAN BE APTLY CALLED A MELTING POT OF DIVERSE CULTURES AND TRADITIONS. MOSQUES, TEMPLES AND CHURCHES EXIST SIDE BY SIDE AND ONE GETS THE OPPORTUNITY TO SEE A PLETHORA OF DIFFERENT RELIGIOUS FESTIVALS BEING CELEBRATED BY THE VARIOUS RELIGIOUS AND ETHNIC GROUPS VERY OFTEN WITH THE PARTICIPATION OF THE REST OF THE PEOPLE IN THE SPIRIT OF “1 MALAYSIA”. THUS IT SHOULD NOT BE A

SURPRISE TO YOU THAT OUR TOURISM TAGLINE IS “MALAYSIA TRULY ASIA”.

SINCE OUR INDEPENDENCE IN 1957, THE COUNTRY’S POLITICAL SYSTEM AND DEVELOPMENT POLICIES HAVE ALWAYS BEEN GEARED TOWARDS FORGING NATIONAL UNITY, WHICH IS CONSIDERED AS CRITICAL FOR ACHIEVING POLITICAL STABILITY NEEDED TO BRING ABOUT ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT. AS SUCH, OUR ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL POLICIES ALWAYS TAKE INTO ACCOUNT THE NEEDS OF THE VARIOUS COMMUNITIES LIVING IN THE COUNTRY.

AND, IN ENSURING THAT NATIONAL UNITY GETS THE GOVERNMENT’S UNDIVIDED ATTENTION, A SEPARATE DEPARTMENT CALLED THE DEPARTMENT OF NATIONAL UNITY AND NATIONAL INTEGRATION HAS BEEN SET UP TO PROMOTE RACIAL HARMONY IN THE COUNTRY. THE FOCUS ON NATIONAL UNITY IS ALSO INCORPORATED INTO OUR EDUCATION SYSTEM WHERE CHILDREN FROM PRIMARY TO SECONDARY LEVELS ARE TAUGHT TO UNDERSTAND THE RELIGIONS, CUSTOMS AND CULTURES OF THE DIFFERENT PEOPLES LIVING IN MALAYSIA.

WE IN MALAYSIA CONSIDER OUR RELIGIOUS AND CULTURAL DIVERSITY AS A SOURCE OF STRENGTH RATHER THAN A WEAKNESS. AS SUCH, THE GOVERNMENT HAS ALWAYS SUPPORTED RELIGIOUS AND CULTURAL ACTIVITIES OF THE VARIOUS GROUPS IN THE COUNTRY.

THE GOVERNMENT ALSO ACTIVELY PROMOTES THE SPIRIT OF “UNITY IN DIVERSITY” THROUGH RELIGIOUS FESTIVALS OF THE VARIOUS RELIGIOUS AND ETHNIC GROUPS. INCIDENTALLY, ALL THE IMPORTANT RELIGIOUS FESTIVALS OF THE MAJOR RACIAL AND RELIGIOUS GROUPS HAVE BEEN MADE PUBLIC HOLIDAYS IN THE COUNTRY. SO, IF YOU HAPPEN TO BE IN MALAYSIA, YOU WILL GET TO ENJOY QUITE A LARGE NUMBER OF PUBLIC HOLIDAYS.

A PRACTICE THAT IS UNIQUE TO MALAYSIA IS WHAT IS KNOWN AS “OPEN HOUSE” WHERE PEOPLE CELEBRATING A PARTICULAR FESTIVAL OPEN THEIR HOMES TO PEOPLE OF OTHER RACES FOR A MONTH LONG PERIOD SO THAT THEY CAN ENJOY THE SPECIAL FOOD PREPARED FOR THE OCCASION. MANY POLITICIANS OR CORPORATE FIGURES HAVE OPEN HOUSES AT THEIR HOMES OR OTHER DESIGNATED

PLACES WHERE ANYONE CAN WALK IN AND PARTAKE IN THE FOOD BEING SERVED.

THE GOVERNMENT ALSO PROVIDES SUPPORT TO NGOS INVOLVED IN INTERFAITH DIALOGUES AND IN PROMOTING RACIAL HARMONY WITH THE VIEW TO PROMOTING UNITY AND SMOOTHENING TENSION WHENEVER THEY OCCUR IN THE COUNTRY.

ROLE OF IDFR IN CULTURAL DIPLOMACY

LET ME NOW SPEAK BRIEFLY ON THE ROLE OF IDFR, THE TRAINING ARM OF THE MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS OF MALAYSIA WITH REGARD TO CROSS-CULTURAL ISSUES AND FOR PROMOTING THE COUNTRY'S CULTURE OVERSEAS.

THE ROLE OF PROMOTING THE COUNTRY'S CULTURE OVERSEAS IS ACTUALLY CARRIED OUT BY A NUMBER OF GOVERNMENT AGENCIES, THE MAIN ONES BEING THE MINISTRY OF INFORMATION, COMMUNICATION AND CULTURE AND THE TOURISM DEVELOPMENT BOARD. THE FOCUS OF THEIR ACTIVITIES IS TO PROMOTE THE COUNTRY OVERSEAS AND DEVELOP A BETTER UNDERSTANDING OF MALAYSIA ABROAD. IT IS CLOSELY

LINKED TO MALAYSIA'S EFFORTS IN PROMOTING ITSELF AS A TOURIST DESTINATION.

IN THE CASE OF IDFR, OUR FOCUS IS MORE ON THE TRAINING OF OUR DIPLOMATS SO THAT THEY HAVE, BESIDES DIPLOMATIC SKILLS, A GOOD UNDERSTANDING OF THE COUNTRY'S CULTURE AND HERITAGE, ESPECIALLY WITH REGARD TO ITS MUSIC, DANCES, ARTS AND HANDICRAFTS, AND LOCAL CUISINES. THIS IS TO ENABLE THEM TO INCORPORATE CULTURAL ASPECTS INTO THE ACTIVITIES THEY ORGANIZE AT MISSIONS SO THAT THE MALAYSIAN CULTURAL IDENTITY AND BRAND BECOMES MORE WELL-KNOWN INTERNATIONALLY.

AMONG THE ACTIVITIES THAT ARE USUALLY INCLUDED IN THE COURSES WE ORGANIZE FOR OUR DIPLOMATS INCLUDE:

- TALKS AND VISITS TO PLACES RELATED TO CULTURE SUCH AS HANDICRAFTS CENTRES, ART MUSEUMS, CULTURAL PERFORMANCES ETC.;

- LOCAL MUSIC AND DANCES (SO THAT THEY CAN PERFORM OR ORGANIZE CULTURAL PERFORMANCES WHILE AT MISSION);
- PREPARATION AND SERVING OF LOCAL DISHES ESPECIALLY IN THE CASE OF SPOUSES OF DIPLOMATS.

IN ORGANIZING OUR TRAINING PROGRAMMES ON MALAYSIAN CULTURE, WE WORK VERY CLOSELY WITH THE NATIONAL ACADEMY OF ARTS, CULTURE AND HERITAGE.

INCIDENTALLY, THE PARTICIPATION OF DIPLOMATS TOGETHER WITH THEIR SPOUSES HAS BEEN MADE A REQUIREMENT BEFORE THEY COULD BE POSTED ABROAD. THIS IS BECAUSE THE SPOUSE PLAYS A BIG PART IN THE LIFE OF A DIPLOMAT ESPECIALLY IN ENTERTAINING GUESTS AND HELPING OUT WITH THE ACTIVITIES AT MISSIONS. BESIDES BASIC KNOWLEDGE ABOUT THE WORK AT MISSIONS, THE TRAINING PROGRAMMES FOR SPOUSES INCLUDE AREAS LIKE THE ART OF FINE DINING AND ENTERTAINING, CROSS

CULTURAL COMMUNICATIONS, AND THE ART OF CONVERSATION.

THE PURPOSE OF TRAINING IN CROSS-CULTURAL COMMUNICATION, WHICH IS AN IMPORTANT COMPONENT OF OUR DIPLOMATIC TRAINING PROGRAMMES, IS TO PROVIDE THOSE GOING ABROAD A BETTER UNDERSTANDING OF THE CULTURAL PRACTICES AND NORMS, INCLUDING THE “DO’S AND DON’TS” OF THE MAJOR RACIAL AND CULTURAL GROUPS OF THE WORLD. IT IS HOPED THAT THE TRAINING WILL ENABLE THEM TO BETTER ADAPT AND INTERACT WITH PEOPLE OVERSEAS WITHOUT MAKING UNNECESSARY BLUNDERS DUE TO IGNORANCE.

THE TRAINING COURSES I JUST MENTIONED ARE CONDUCTED FOR ALL LEVELS OF OFFICERS – FROM THE CLERICAL LEVEL TO JUNIOR, MID CAREER AND SENIOR DIPLOMATS.

THE CROSS CULTURAL COMPONENT IS ALSO AN IMPORTANT ASPECT OF OUR INTERNATIONAL NEGOTIATION COURSES WHERE A PROPER UNDERSTANDING OF THE CULTURE AND COMMUNICATION STYLES ASSOCIATED WITH THE

VARIOUS RACIAL AND CULTURAL GROUPS IS DEEMED AS IMPORTANT FOR ACHIEVING SUCCESS IN NEGOTIATIONS.

THE EMPHASIS ON PROVIDING EXPOSURE TO THE LOCAL CULTURE IS ALSO INCLUDED IN OUR TRAINING PROGRAMMES ORGANIZED FOR FOREIGN DIPLOMATS. ITS PURPOSE, BESIDES SERVING AS A SOURCE OF RELAXATION WHILE ATTENDING OUR COURSES, IS TO ENABLE THEM TO HAVE A BETTER UNDERSTANDING OF MALAYSIA AND ITS PEOPLE. THE PROGRAMME FOR THEM USUALLY INCLUDES VISITS TO MUSEUMS, HANDICRAFTS CENTERS, CULTURAL PERFORMANCES, AND SOMETIMES A HOME STAY WITH A TRADITIONAL RURAL FAMILY.

GLOBAL MOVEMENT OF MODERATES FOUNDATION

MALAYSIA HAS OFTEN BEEN CITED AS A GOOD EXAMPLE OF A COUNTRY THAT HAS BEEN ABLE TO ACHIEVE PEACE, NATIONAL UNITY AND ECONOMIC PROGRESS DESPITE BEING RACIALLY, RELIGIOUSLY AND CULTURALLY VERY DIVERSE COUNTRY. WE BELIEVE MUCH OF OUR SUCCESS IS DUE TO HAVING VERY GOOD LEADERS SINCE INDEPENDENCE WHO

HAVE ALWAYS EMPHASIZED ON THE NEED FOR RACIAL AND RELIGIOUS TOLERANCE AND TO EXERCISE “MODERATION” IN ALL ASPECTS OF LIFE ESPECIALLY IN RELIGIOUS AND CULTURAL MATTERS. INCIDENTALLY, THE CONCEPT OF MODERATION OR “WASATIYYAH” AS IT IS KNOWN IN ARABIC, IS ALSO A VALUE THAT IS HIGHLY REGARDED IN ISLAM

LOOKING AT THE WORLD TODAY, WE BELIEVE THAT MANY OF THE PROBLEMS WE FACE SUCH AS RACIAL AND RELIGIOUS CONFLICTS THAT LEAD TO TERRORISM AND ARMED CONFLICTS ARE OFTEN CAUSED BY EXTREMISTS GROUPS WHO COULD BE FOUND IN ALL RELIGIONS. BY PREACHING HATRED AND BY BEING VOCAL, THEY DROWN OUT THE VOICES OF THE SILENT MAJORITY WHO PREFER THE PART OF MODERATION AND PEACE. IT IS FOR THIS REASON THAT MALAYSIA ESTABLISHED THE GLOBAL MOVEMENT OF MODERATES FOUNDATION (GMMF) IN THE HOPE THAT BY GETTING TOGETHER “MODERATES” FROM ACROSS THE WORLD, IT WOULD BE POSSIBLE TO FIGHT EXTREMISM AND PROMOTE THE VOICES OF THE SILENT MAJORITY WHO YEARN FOR PEACE AND STABILITY WHICH IS NEEDED

FOR A BETTER WORLD FOR ALL OF US AND FUTURE GENERATIONS.

TO GIVE YOU THE BACKGROUND OF GMMF, IT IS A LOOSELY KNIT ORGANIZATION OF “INDEPENDENT INDIVIDUAL COMMITTED TO PROMOTING PEACE BY BESEECHING THE NEED FOR CRITICAL ENGAGEMENT THAT CORRESPONDS TO THE UNIVERSAL PRINCIPLES OF JUSTICE, EXCELLENCE AND EQUILIBRIUM”. IN SIMPLER LANGUAGE ITS VISION IS TO BUILD A GLOBAL MOVEMENT OF MODERATES FROM ALL FAITHS “TO RECLAIM THE AGENDA OF PEACE AND PRAGMATISM AND TO MARGINALIZE EXTREMISTS”

THE IDEA OF A GLOBAL MOVEMENT OF MODERATES (GMM) WAS FIRST MOOTED BY OUR PRIME MINISTER DATO’ SERI NAJIB ABDUL RAZAK AT THE UN GENERAL ASSEMBLY IN 2010 AND SINCE THEN IT HAS RECEIVED QUITE WIDE SPREAD SUPPORT FROM THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY. FOR INSTANCE, AT THE ASEAN SUMMIT IN 2011, ASEAN LEADERS WELCOMED THE INITIATIVE TO ESTABLISH GMM AS ONE OF ASEAN’S POSITIVE CONTRIBUTIONS IN SHAPING GLOBAL

DEVELOPMENTS. GMM HAS ALSO DRAWN THE INTEREST OF THE COMMONWEALTH WHICH HAS INCLUDED IT AS PART OF THE 2011 COMMONWEALTH HEADS OF GOVERNMENT MEETING HELD IN PERTH, AUSTRALIA. IT HAS BEEN ACCEPTED BY ASEAN AND HAS BEEN INCLUDED IN COMMUNIQUÉ OF COMMONWEALTH HEADS OF GOVERNMENT MEETING IN 2011.

MALAYSIA'S EFFORTS IN PROMOTING GMM HAS ALSO RECEIVED WORDS OF PRAISE FROM A NUMBER OF WORLD LEADERS INCLUDING BAN KI-MOON, SECRETARY GENERAL OF THE UNITED NATIONS, DAVID CAMEROON, THE BRITISH PRIME MINISTER; AND HILLARY CLINTON, THE US STATE SECRETARY. THE UN SECRETARY GENERAL WHILE GIVING A KEYNOTE ADDRESS AT IDFR SUGGESTED THAT GMMF WORK TOGETHER WITH THE UNITED NATIONS ALLIANCE OF CIVILIZATIONS (UNAOC) FOR PROMOTING THEIR COMMON AGENDA OF BRINGING PEOPLES OF DIFFERENT RELIGIONS AND CULTURES OF THE WORLD TOGETHER.

GMMF IS NOW ACTIVELY CARRYING OUT ITS PROGRAMMES AND ACTIVITIES WITH THE HOPE OF PROMOTING A MORE TOLERANT AND PEACEFUL WORLD.

ASEAN REGIONAL COMMUNITY

AT THE REGIONAL LEVEL, MALAYSIA IS NOW MOVING CLOSER TOWARDS REGIONAL INTEGRATION WITH ITS ASEAN PARTNERS AS ENVISAGED IN THE VISION TO SET UP AN ASEAN COMMUNITY BY 2015. THE ROLE OF CULTURE IN ASEAN IS STATED IN ITS DECLARATION DATED 17 NOVEMBER 2011 WHICH HIGHLIGHTS “THE IMPORTANCE OF PROMOTING AN ASEAN IDENTITY THROUGH FOSTERING OF GREATER AWARENESS OF THE DIVERSE CULTURES AND HERITAGE OF THE ASEAN REGION”. THE EMPHASIS IS FOR RESPECTING MEMBER COUNTRIES’ DIFFERENCES WHILE EMPHASIZING THEIR COMMON VALUES IN THE SPIRIT OF UNITY IN DIVERSITY.

IN THIS REGARD, THERE IS SOME CONCERN THAT THE “PEOPLE CENTERED” ASEAN AS ENVISAGED BY ITS LEADERS MAY NOT PERMEATE DOWN TO THE GRASSROOTS. TO OVERCOME THIS, VARIOUS MEASURES HAVE BEEN TAKEN TO ENHANCE MUTUAL

UNDERSTANDING AND RESPECT OF ONE ANOTHER'S CULTURES, VALUE SYSTEMS AND SENSITIVITIES. THE STEPS BEING TAKEN INCLUDE HOSTING OF CULTURAL EXCHANGES, JOINT CULTURAL ACTIVITIES, YOUTH FORUMS, SEMINARS, SPORTS, FOOD FAIRS, ACADEMIC RESEARCHES, QUIZ COMPETITION FOR THE YOUNG ETC. IT IS ALSO HOPED THAT BETTER ASEAN CONNECTIVITY WOULD LEAD TO MORE PEOPLE-TO-PEOPLE INTERACTION THEREBY INCREASING THE AWARENESS OF ASEAN AMONG THE PEOPLE.

INCIDENTALLY, ONE OF THE COURSES CARRIED OUT BY IDFR CATERS MAINLY FOR THE ASEAN COUNTRIES. THIS COURSE, WHICH IS FUNDED BY THE ASEAN SECRETARIAT, AND CARRIED OUT ANNUALLY PROVIDES DIPLOMATIC TRAINING FOR JUNIOR DIPLOMATS FROM THE ASEAN COUNTRIES. IT IS ONE OF THE WAYS BY WHICH IDFR IS CONTRIBUTING TOWARDS FORGING LINKAGES AND BUILDING THE BONDS OF FRIENDSHIP AMONG DIPLOMATS FROM THE ASEAN REGION. WE ARE NOW IN THE MIDST OF PLANNING AN ASEAN YOUTH FORUM TOGETHER WITH A LOCAL UNIVERSITY TOWARDS THE END OF THIS YEAR.

CONCLUSION

IN MY VIEW, THE PROCESS OF FORGING BETTER CROSS-CULTURAL UNDERSTANDING AND RACIAL HARMONY AMONG PEOPLE WITHIN A COUNTRY OR BETWEEN DIFFERENT COUNTRIES IS AN ONGOING ONE IN WHICH A VARIETY OF PEOPLE INCLUDING POLITICIANS, DIPLOMATS, RELIGIOUS LEADERS, EDUCATORS, AND THE PEOPLE AT LARGE ARE INVOLVED. OUR COMMITMENT TO THIS PROCESS WILL HELP US BUILD A MORE PEACEFUL AND PROSPEROUS WORLD FOR ALL OF US.

THANK YOU.