

# OPENING REMARKS BY H.E DATO' HUSSEIN HANIFF, AMBASSADOR OF MALAYSIA TO BELGIUM, LUXEMBOURG AND HEAD OF MISSION OF MALAYSIA TO THE EUROPEAN COMMUNITIES AT THE INAUGURAL MEF-BRUSSELS SPRING ROUNDTABLE 2009

## "TOWARDS SUSTAINABLE BUSINESS"

THURSDAY, 30 APRIL 2009, BRUSSELS

Yang Berbahagia Tan Sri Rafidah Aziz

Advisor and Patron of

The Malaysia-Europe Forum,

Distinguished Members of the European Parliament,

Honoured Guests,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am very pleased to be here with you today and would like to thank the Malaysia-Europe Forum, for kindly inviting me to deliver the opening remarks at this inaugural Roundtable session of the Malaysia-Europe Forum. I congratulate the organisers for successfully hosting this event in Brussels, which I believe will contribute to raising Malaysia's profile especially in the capital of Europe and help to expand bilateral relations with the European Community.

I would also like to express our sincere gratitude to the European Parliament for providing the conference facilities for the event. Your gesture certainly signifies the importance that the EU attaches to the relations with Malaysia.

We are honoured today that we have with us a very prominent and eminent Malaysian, Y. Bhg Tan Sri Rafidah Aziz, who have served in the Malaysian Cabinet for many years and was the Minister of International Trade and Industry for 21 years. Tan Sri Rafidah certainly has a lot to say with authority on the subject of Sustainable Business and we look forward to listen to your keynote address shortly.

Ladies and Gentleman,

This forum with the theme Towards Sustainable Business is more than opportune, at this point in time, when the world is going through an unprecedented global financial and economic slowdown, that demands a coordinated action between Asia, Europe and other international partners. Even Malaysia has not been left unscathed, with projected growth this year falling between -1% to 1%.

Nevertheless, the Central Bank of Malaysia anticipates the Malaysian economy to perform better in the second half of 2009, as domestic demand offsets external contractions, supported by the effects of the Government's two stimulus packages already being implemented, worth RM67 billion (Euro 13.8 billion).

Just a few days ago, the Prime Minister of Malaysia has announced bold steps to enhance competitiveness by liberalising the services sector beyond the overall commitments made under the Asean ambit and at multilateral context. The measure including the liberalisation on equity ownership in 27 services subsectors; and the liberalisation plan for the financial services sector, which include measures raising foreign equity participation in investment banks and insurance companies, to a limit of up to 70 per cent, from 49 percent. This is in line with the Government's vision towards achieving a developed economy status, by catalysing services sector as a new economic growth area, which is to contribute to 60 per cent of GDP by the year 2020.

On our part, the Malaysian Government has been monitoring the global economic developments closely, even in Europe and have devised appropriate response strategies and

measures to address the various concerns and difficulties faced by Malaysians. Under the guidance and leadership of our new Prime Minister, The Honourable Dato' Sri Mohd. Najib bin Tun Haji Abdul Razak, Malaysia hopes to weather through the ongoing economic crisis, as we have done in the past, through confidence, pragmatism and optimism.

The new Prime Minister has also coined a new "One Malaysia" concept, reflecting the reality of a harmonious multi-racial, multi-cultural and multi-religious society in Malaysia, with each community respecting the rights of the others.

At the same time, the Malaysian government would continue with its "pro-business policy", which has proven to be so successful in the past.

Ladies and Gentleman,

Allow me to provide you with a glance at the relations between Malaysia and the EU, to date.

Malaysia has a long-standing relationship with the EU. At present, bilateral relations are largely dominated by trade and investment. The EU27 is currently Malaysia's fourth largest trading partner and Malaysia is the EU's second leading trading partner in ASEAN.

Malaysia and EU have also established and continue to work together at both regional and international fora such as within the ASEAN-EU framework, Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM), the United Nations and World Trade Organisation.

Malaysia remains open to the outside world and views the EU an important player in the world today. In terms of bilateral relations, Malaysia looks forward to engage the EU further in the many areas for mutual benefit and in finding solutions to issues of common concern affecting the world today.

Ladies and Gentleman,

Given the current global economic situation, Malaysia and the EU have massive challenges in the years ahead. It is thus opportune that both sides collaboratively undertake sharing of ideas on the way forward particularly in one of the major topics of today namely towards sustainability of business.

I believe that the strong business participation today clearly demonstrates that sustainability is not a threat to business. In fact, businesses can be part of the solution to the challenges of globalisation. Sustainability is indeed a responsibility that needs to be shouldered by all stakeholders, from the policy makers, regulators, businesses and the whole community.

Today's forum would help to further elaborate the way forward on this important issue. For the EU participants, it will also be an opportunity for you to have the benefit of the perspective from a developing economy such as Malaysia.

Ladies and Gentleman,

Let me conclude by saying I do hope the contacts forged here today will provide new valuable links between Malaysia and the EU. I for my part, and the Malaysian community as a whole, stand ready to assist you in furthering these contacts. I wish you success and productive outcome.

Thank you for your attention.