



STATEMENT BY

**HIS EXCELLENCY DATUK JOSEPH SALANG
DEPUTY MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS, MALAYSIA**

AT

**THE COUNCIL OF MINISTERS MEETING
INDIAN OCEAN RIM ASSOCIATION FOR REGIONAL COOPERATION
TEHRAN, IRAN.**

WEDNESDAY, 21 FEBRUARY 2006

(Please Check against delivery)

Mr. Chairman,

1. First of all I would like to congratulate Your Excellency for the assumption of the Chair of the Council. On behalf of the Malaysian Delegation, I would like to express my sincere appreciation and gratitude to Your Excellency and the Iranian Government for the excellent arrangements and the warm hospitality that has been accorded to my delegation and myself since our arrival in Tehran. The excellent preparations made by the Iranian Government will undoubtedly contribute towards the success of the meeting.

Mr. Chairman and Distinguished Colleagues,

2. In the last two years, this region had experienced two major catastrophes namely, the Tsunami disaster in December 2004 and the massive earthquake in South Asia in October 2005. Sadly most of the countries which suffered from these natural catastrophes are member states of Indian Ocean Rim Association. In this connection, I would like to extend my condolences to the victims and families of these victims. Malaysia, is deeply appreciative of the immediate response of the international community in providing humanitarian assistance to the victims and their families. Malaysia is grateful to those who had extended help to Malaysians who were affected by the tsunami. The Malaysian government together with the Malaysian public, NGOs and the business community had also contributed to alleviate the sufferings of the victims not only in Malaysia but also in other affected countries.

Mr. Chairman and Distinguished Colleagues,

3. Natural disasters are increasing in frequencies, complexity, scope and destructive capacity. Thousands of people have lost their lives and many more have been traumatized by the destruction caused. I am of the view that national authorities and the international community should continue to provide practical support to the affected communities. At the same time, we need to instil in our communities a culture of disaster awareness and give emphasis on preparedness to face such eventualities. We note too that in the last few years, nations in the Indian Ocean Rim have been taking appropriate action to install and upgrade early warning systems as well.

Mr. Chairman and Distinguished Colleagues,

4. In this connection, I am pleased to inform you that Malaysia had installed the ocean buoys and tide gauge in the Indian Ocean. I would like to express our appreciation to Indonesia for allowing Malaysia to install the monitoring system in its territorial water. In addition, Malaysia is also ready to consider participating in any regional initiative that would enhance our preparation to face such natural catastrophes.

Mr. Chairman and Distinguished Colleagues,

5. While we are in the midst of recovering from the Tsunami Disaster and the South Asia earthquake, we have also had to face other challenges, including the outbreak of Avian Influenza. In fact, it is believed to have already caused many deaths in the region and appears to be spreading to other parts of the world. It is essential for IOR-ARC member states to monitor the situation and collaborate with each other and relevant international organisations such as the World Health Organisation (WHO) to meet this challenge.

6. In Malaysia, we have established a joint panel consists of the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Agriculture and Agro Based Industry to prepare for the possibility of an avian flu outbreak and to take measures to prevent it. In this connection the National Pandemic Influenza Preparedness Plan had drawn a contingency plan to prepare for any outbreak. Among others, the plan includes intensifying inspection of import and export of poultry at the borders, compensating the poultry breeders in the event that their birds are culled, stockpiling of medication and flu vaccines for at least 25 per cent of the population and intensifying awareness campaigns to inform villagers and breeders of the danger of avian flu. At the moment, the Government has spent some money to stockpile the anti-viral drugs which is sufficient for 60,000 people. The Government has also designated 21 hospitals to care for severe and complicated patients as well as centers such as the Institute for Medical Research to carry out tests for the virus

Mr. Chairman and Distinguished Colleagues,

7. As for the progress achieved by IOR-ARC since its establishment in 1997, we would have to admit our achievements are limited. During our last meeting in Colombo, 2004, we had outlined a number of projects to be embarked by IOR-ARC and the setting up of a Special Fund to implement these projects and programs. Accordingly, we should focus on resources to actualizing these projects, bearing in mind that our financial resources in the Special Fund is very modest. Malaysia looks forward to working with all our colleagues here in implementing these initiatives. On the suggestion of our distinguished colleague from Sri Lanka, Minister Fowzie, to declare 2007 the Year of Tourism for IOR-ARC. I am pleased to inform the Council that Malaysia has launched the Year 2007 as Visit Malaysia Year, which coincides with the 50th Anniversary of the Independence of Malaysia.

Mr. Chairman, Distinguished Colleagues,

8. May I conclude by reiterating Malaysia's continued commitment towards IOR-ARC so that it would truly become a successful manifestation of regional cooperation.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman