



**MINISTRY OF WOMEN,
FAMILY AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT**

LAUNCHING SPEECH BY

YAB DATO' SERI DR. WAN AZIZAH DR. WAN ISMAIL

**DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER OF MALAYSIA
CUM**

MINISTER OF WOMEN, FAMILY AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

NATIONAL WELFARE FOUNDATION PALESTINE FUND

8 SEPTEMBER 2018 (SATURDAY)

DEWAN PERDANA NUR, ARAS B1

الحمد لله والصلاة والسلام على رسول الله وعلى آله وصحبه
أجمعين

SALUTASI

[Akan disediakan kemudian]

INTRODUCTION

Saya sangat berbesar hati kerana dapat bersama-sama dalam majlis hari ini. Terima kasih kepada hadirin semua kerana meluangkan masa untuk menghadiri majlis ini. Memandangkan kita mempunyai tetamu dari luar negara, izinkan saya meneruskan ucapan ini dalam Bahasa Inggeris.

Ladies and gentlemen,

1. This year marks the 70th anniversary of the An Nakba, the catastrophe that happened to the Palestinian people during the establishment of the state of Israel. It marks the start of a tragedy and the destruction of Palestinian villages and communities that had long existed before 1948.
2. No other community in the modern era had endured continuous suffering as much as the Palestinians. They were the victims of ethnic cleansing before the term was even invented. Palestinians live in apartheid conditions much longer than the blacks in South Africa.
3. This is also the month of September. Thirty six years ago this month around 3,000 Palestinians were massacred by

Israeli-backed militias in the Sabra and Shatilla refugee camps in Lebanon. Life has not changed much for Palestinians since.

LIFE FOR PALESTINIANS

4. Those living in Gaza has had it worse with the continuous blockade by Israel. Homes destroyed by Israeli bombardments could not be repaired because the Israeli blockade prevents building material from getting into Gaza. Medical services are severely strained by the lack of equipment and medicine. Sick Palestinians often die because of being denied access to medical treatment only available in Israel.

5. Palestinian children cannot play in the fields without fearing being shot by Israeli soldiers. Palestinian women cannot live a day without wondering whether their husband will be able to bring home food for their family. Palestinian fathers cannot go out of their home without wondering whether they will be subjected to arbitrary arrest. Many Palestinian women go to sleep with their hijab or head scarves on because they fear that their houses may be destroyed by Israeli bombardment. These women would like their bodies

to be recovered from under the rubble still modestly dressed.

7. The conflict in Palestine is not just about a conflict between the Palestinians and Israel. It is a conflict between our notion of decency and fairness as human beings and the Zionist's regime continued mistreatment of Palestinians. Nelson Mandela said it aptly when he stated,

"We know too well that our freedom is not complete without the freedom of the Palestinians."

8. Helping Palestinians is more about following our conscience as decent and caring people. Only those who are heartless and have no conscience can ignore the injustice in Palestine.
9. We in Malaysia have become so used to the liberties and prosperity that we enjoy that we take it for granted. It may be difficult for some of us to comprehend what the Palestinians have to endure. We do not have to fear bombs and missiles hitting our houses. Our children do not have to wonder whether their schools will still be open tomorrow.
10. When people only see despair and destitute every day, they see no hope. And when they see no hope, they'll start

believing that death is better than life. When people are constantly worried about whether what they build today will still be around next week, it is difficult to think about investing in the future. When they think they cannot have a future, they'll be wondering why their enemy should have a future.

11. Peace in Palestine will remain elusive as long as Israel continues to occupy Palestinian land. Former US president Jimmy Carter remarked, "*The pre-eminent obstacle to peace is Israel's occupation of Palestine*". Meanwhile, life will continue to remain the same for Palestinians.
12. Palestinian children are the most vulnerable group. They face their daily lives under blockade and occupation. The oppressive living conditions that they have to endure rob them of their innocence. Many have been killed and many have been maimed. Some have become orphans and have to care for their surviving siblings at a very young age.
13. For Palestinian children, the schools provide them with respite from the hardship at home. The schools give them a moment where children can be children. It also provides them with hope. Education opens the door to personal development and opportunities. Closing this door will destroy their future.

ROLE OF UNRWA

14. Since 1949, the United Nations Relief and Welfare Agency has been responsible for managing the schools and medical clinics in Gaza, the West Bank and Palestinian refugee camps. The activities run by UNRWA is funded by contributions from the international community. Today, UNRWA runs 711 schools and more than 150 clinics. More than 500,000 Palestinian children are dependent on this schooling system.
15. Early this year, President Trump cut US contribution to UNRWA from USD364 million in 2017 to only USD60 million this year. Last weekend, the US made another announcement that it is completely cutting off all contributions to UNRWA. This substantial cut threatens to undermine the schooling and medical infrastructure in Palestine. UNRWA may have to cut back on its services.
16. We need to do something to help deal with this situation. The government itself is constrained by the financial situation we inherited from the previous government. We have therefore decided to have the National Welfare Foundation initiate this fund raising campaign to help Palestinians. We urge all Malaysians to join this effort. Your contribution, no matter how small, can make a big difference to people who have nothing.

17. Malaysia as a country is going through a difficult period. But this does not mean that Malaysians cannot be generous. We can still share whatever we have. The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) taught us that even when we have a little we can still share others. Muslim narrated that the Prophet said:

“The food of one person is enough for two, and the food of two people is enough for four, and the food of four people is enough for eight.”

18. All religions teach their followers to strive to do good deeds. The National Welfare Foundation had in the past initiated campaigns to help victims of wars in other countries. In all of our campaign we relied and appealed to the conscience, generosity and desire to do more good deeds among Malaysians. We are again appealing to your generosity and conscience for this campaign.

THE PALESTINIAN ISSUE

19. The Palestinian issue is not just an issue for Arabs or Muslims. One only has to have a heart and a conscience to feel driven to do something for Palestine. We do not have to get sucked into the politics of this issue. The children who are made orphans do not understand politics. All they want

is a better future and we can help them achieve it. The widow who has to care for her children and her ill parents don't have the time to get involved in politics. What she needs is medical help. We can help provide this help.

20. To remain silent and do nothing is to allow an abnormality slowly become normal. When abuse, oppression and injustice become normal, it is a tragedy for all of humanity. Such a tragedy can spread and become new normal elsewhere. The abnormal then becomes the norm in our world.
21. We've seen how the same logic that was used by Israel in Palestine was used to justify ethnic cleansing in the Bosnia. It is also the same logic that is used to evict and persecute the Rohingyans. The world saw the same logic at work during the genocide in Rwanda. In all of these tragedies, human beings had allowed their most primitive instincts to dominate and ignored all standards of decency.
22. Do we want to let our children and grandchildren inherit a world that sees bigotry, hatred, oppression and abuse accepted as normal? Do we want to continue to see violence being used as an everyday tool to subjugate and destroy the dignity of a people? Can we do nothing and go back and sleep peacefully tonight? Let us come together as a people to support this cause.

ANSWERING CRITICS

23. I understand there are critics who question why do we help only Palestinians. As I mentioned earlier, the National Welfare Foundation has been involved in fundraising activities for other tragedies before this. It had in the past done fundraising to help the victims of conflicts in Bosnia and Iraq. The effort that we've made is not and should not be the only effort to help other hotspots. NGOs such as our strategic partners are actively involved in extending their help to these areas. Anyone desiring to help in other hotspots can get in touch with them.
24. There are also those who question whether we are doing enough to help Malaysians. Our effort as a foundation to help Malaysians has never stopped or been reduced. The National Welfare Foundation will continue to provide the various services it is offering to Malaysians and we expect to offer more.
25. Doing good deed should not be constrained by boundaries. Let us remember that when we had disasters such as during the Highland Towers tragedy and the Kelantan flood in 2014-2015 other countries extended their help and assistance to us. We are a part of a universal brotherhood and not a reclusive tribe. The Quran reminds to always do good deeds.

The example of those who spend their wealth in the way of Allah is like a seed which grows seven spikes, in each spike is a hundred grains. Allah multiplies His reward for whom He wills, for Allah is vast and knowing.

Meaning of surah Al-Baqarah 2:261

26. Doing good deeds is not about a trade-off between helping someone and not helping others. It is not a zero sum game. Doing good deeds is about sharing and helping more and more people. The more good deeds we do, the better it is for us. Confucius once said:

*If you want to have happiness for a year, inherit a fortune.
If you want happiness for a lifetime, help someone else.*

GRATITUDE

27. I am happy to note that we have with us here today Ms. Zohar Regev Chamberlain to share with us her experience as an activist in the Freedom Flotilla for Gaza movement. As someone who was born and raised in Israel she saw with her own eyes the mistreatment Palestinians were subjected to. She is now a German national and lives in Spain.

28. We also have with us Dr Ghada Al Jadba who is UNRWA's Chief Health Officer in Gaza. The suffering of Palestinians in Gaza is a part of her daily experience. She will also share with us her insights on the situation in Gaza. I would like to welcome both of them to Malaysia. I greet both of you in our traditional greeting, *selamat datang* Zohar and Dr Jadba.
29. I would also like to thank all the donors who are here today. We thank you for your empathy and generosity. I am touched and grateful by the support given by the various industry groups and chambers of commerce to this fundraising initiative. Malaysians from all ethnic backgrounds and religious persuasions have come together to support this cause. Kindness is something that build bridges between all of us and bring us together.
30. I am also grateful for the support from fellow cabinet ministers YB Lim Guan Eng, YB Fuziah Saleh, YB Teresa Kok and members of Parliament YB Fahmi Fadzil, YB Nurul Izzah and the mufti of Perlis, Dato Mohd Asri Zainal Abidin, who participated in our fund raising video campaigns.
31. Our fundraising efforts is aided by our strategic partners, MyCARE and Islamic Relief Malaysia. I would also like to thank Dorsett Hotel Putrajaya for sponsoring the accommodation for Ms. Regev Chamberlain and NNF Resources Sdn Bhd for sponsoring her air ticket.

32. The Ministry of Education Malaysia and the Ministry of Communications and Multimedia Malaysia also played important roles in supporting us. This campaign was also helped by the Prime Minister's Department, Islamic Development Department Malaysia as well as the various state religious departments. We were also serenaded today by the beautiful sound of violin played by Ms. Endang Hyder. Thank you Endang.
33. I would also like to thank the media organizations who supported this fundraising campaign. I am grateful to the Palestinian students here and their children for helping with this event. *Shukran ya shabab.*
34. There are many others who helped make this campaign a success. You know who you are and may Allah bless you all.

EPILOGUE

Finally, I will end my speech with the declaration *Bismillahi Rahman Rahim* and officially launch the Palestine Fund campaign by the National Welfare Foundation.