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**STATEMENT BY
THE HONOURABLE MR. AHMAD SHABERY CHEEK
PARLIAMENTARY SECRETARY
MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS, MALAYSIA
AT THE HIGH-LEVEL SEGMENT OF
THE FIRST SESSION OF THE HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL
MONDAY, 19 JUNE 2006**

GENEVA

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Mr. President

Madam High Commissioner

Excellencies

Ladies and Gentlemen,

This is an historic moment for the international community, and indeed a coming of age for the United Nations. And so today, we witness the coming into being of a new human rights body, holding out the renewed promise of “promoting universal respect for the protection of all human rights and fundamental freedoms for all, without distinction of any kind and in a fair and equal manner”.

2. The Malaysian Delegation extends to you, Ambassador De Alba, our congratulations on your election as the first President of the Human Rights Council. Indeed, the

responsibilities you bear are heavy, and my delegation will extend to you every assistance in your endeavour to make this first session a successful one.

3. Our congratulations also go to other members of the Bureau on their election. Together with other delegations here, we will work with you and your Bureau to ensure a fruitful outcome of the Council's deliberations.

4. Allow me also to extend our felicitations to Madam Louise Arbour, the High Commissioner for Human Rights. We follow with keen interest her efforts to further strengthen her Office, and will continue to support her work in fulfilling its mandate.

Mr. President,

5. Malaysia is indeed honoured to have been elected to this Council. We highly value the support and confidence manifested by Member States in Malaysia. The direct election of Council members by the UN General Assembly signifies the desire and earnest will of the international community for a fresh approach in promoting and protecting human rights worldwide. Malaysia takes this as a great challenge and will exert all efforts to live up to our responsibility.

6. Malaysia's commitment to the promotion and protection of human rights is rooted in our rich cultural heritage and in our firm belief in the inherent dignity of the human person and respect for the principles of equality, freedom and justice. Our efforts in this regard go hand in hand with the prominence we devote to the promotion of racial harmony and equitable socio-economic development while taking into account both individual rights and the general well-being of society as a whole. In our action, we have consistently maintained the need for a comprehensive approach to human rights and not to merely single out any specific approach. We have made considerable progress since our independence; however, we are mindful that we still have much more work ahead of us.

7. Indeed, Mr. President, we have arrived at a critical juncture in the continuing global efforts towards the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms for all. Our meeting here today has heightened expectations of multi-stakeholders that the United Nations will deliver on the commitments made towards ensuring effective enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms everywhere. The victims of human rights violations, in particular the millions of people still living in poverty, fear, injustice, oppression, violence, torture and foreign occupation as well as those confronting discrimination, racial and religious hatred and

preventable diseases look to the Council for direct and positive impact on their daily lives.

8. Delivering on these promises is obviously a heavy responsibility which requires commitment and cooperation from all concerned. It also requires a change in the mindset and culture of those involved in the promotion and protection of human rights as institutional reform in itself will not advance human rights. We have a collective responsibility to work together to nurture a conducive environment which will enable this new human rights body to function as it has been mandated to.

9. And so, as we chart the future course of the Council, we must heed the lessons from the six decades of work of its predecessor, the Commission on Human Rights. We agree that we must build on its many achievements and strengths, which we have cause to take pride in. Just as importantly, we must be mindful to avoid its shortcomings, particularly that of practising double standards, selectivity and politicisation that had marred much of its later existence.

10. In our work, we must be guided by the principles of universality, indivisibility, inter-relatedness and interdependence of all human rights which we have continuously reaffirmed. We

believe the Council should serve as a useful forum to enhance dialogue, broaden understanding and promote mutual respect for all coming from different civilizations, cultures and religions, with various particularities and backgrounds. Distinct national circumstances and varying levels of development too, inevitably will impact on our efforts in this area.

11. The fresh beginning that so many of us have yearned for is certainly within our reach, now more so than ever before, provided we anchor our methods of work on genuine cooperation and dialogue. We should aim at strengthening the capacity of Member States to meet their human rights obligations through technical cooperation and assistance, bilaterally and collectively. This will go a long way towards reaching out to those whose human rights and fundamental freedoms the Council seeks to protect and promote without any distinction and exception.

12. We are convinced that this inter-governmental Council stands to benefit from the participation of civil society, with their broad and diverse expertise in the various fields. We strongly encourage NGOs in the fields on development, environmental protection and disarmament to raise their concerns from the human rights perspective so as to inform and enrich the work of

this Council. We must set new international norms through consensus building.

Mr. President,

13. Given the limited time available to us in this first session, we agree on the importance of appropriate interim measures to ensure that no protection gap exists during this transitional period. Here we agree on the need to take decisions concerning the extension, as appropriate, of mandates and mandate holders, the mandate of the Sub-Commission and its mechanisms. We see the necessity for the creation of inter-sessional working groups to improve and rationalize all mandates, mechanisms, functions and responsibilities of the Commission, as well as to develop the modalities for the universal periodic review. We also agree that time be allocated for considering the reports of the five inter-governmental working groups of the Commission.

14. We wish to highlight the report of the Working Group on the Right to Development. The conclusions and recommendations it adopted at its seventh session in January this year represent a historical turning point for practical implementation of the norms and principles contained in the Declaration on the Right to Development of 1986. As the

coordinator of the Non-Aligned Movement, we extend our appreciation to all our partners for their contributions. We count on them for their continued strong support in this endeavour.

Mr. President,

15. As we focus our attention on the work to be carried on by our newly-established Council, we must not overlook the responsibilities that we carry from our past. In this regard, Malaysia would like to remind the Council of the special mandate assigned to the United Nations by the international community vis-à-vis the people of Palestine. Given the very grave human rights and humanitarian crisis in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, we join all those who call for urgent consideration and immediate and effective measures on this critical issue by the Council. We hope that the promise of a fresh beginning will be brought to bear with the Council addressing this urgent crisis effectively. Indeed, this represents the litmus test for the Council's credibility and legitimacy.

16. Finally, Mr. President, our meeting here today represents a significant milestone in the implementation of the commitments made by our Leaders at the 2005 World Summit. We share the aspirations of the many who see in the Human Rights Council a unique opportunity to advance the cause of

human rights. Indispensable however to any meaningful role by the Council is the political will and commitment to engage constructively. We must thus collectively exert efforts to ensure that we work in a manner that will contribute to strengthening the Council's credibility and legitimacy as a United Nations machinery, which would contribute to the overall reform of the United Nations system.

I thank you, Mr. President.