

4. The United Nations has estimated that there are about 300 million people in the World today that are classified as indigenous people in more than 70 countries. That number constitutes about 7% of the World's population, a sizeable figure that we cannot ignore and form a valid reason for the need for us to channel our efforts to protect and assist them within the overall context of people centered development process and basic human rights. The indigenous people are still disadvantaged and subject to exploitation. In many countries, non-indigenous people hold power over economics and politics of these countries. Indigenous people remain second class citizens in their own countries. But consistent with the positive changes taking place around the globe, it has been determined that we must address the plight of indigenous people. Efforts must be undertaken to improve their standard of living and to bring them into the main-stream of the society with whom they live while respecting their culture and traditional way of life. For this reason, Malaysia fully supports the theme "Indigenous People - A New Partnership" for the International Year.

5. Malaysia is a land of indigenous people though there are important immigrant races living in harmony with indigenous groups. There are over 30 groups of indigenous people in Malaysia. Most of them left the forests a few hundred years ago to settle in the valleys and plains to grow rice and set up villages which in turn became towns. My indigenous group, the MELAYU too, left the forests and though our roots go back to those beginnings, we have made our choice towards modernization. Now Malaysia is a modestly successful country that is proud of the multi-faceted nature of our origins. We draw strength from our diverse antecedents, as much as we have tapped the constructive energies of the immigrant races that came to Malaysia over 100 years ago, as partners on the road