

**SPEECH BY Y.B. DATO' SERI SHAHRIZAT ABDUL JALIL,
MINISTER OF WOMEN AND FAMILY DEVELOPMENT
MALAYSIA, AT THE CLOSING CEREMONY OF 1ST ASIA
PACIFIC REACH TO RECOVERY INTERNATIONAL BREAST
CANCER SUPPORT CONFERENCE -"CELEBRATING
WELLNESS" AT LEVEL 10, SUNWAY PYRAMID
CONVENTION CENTRE, SUNDAY 11TH AUGUST 2002 AT
4.00 PM**

Dr Robert Burton, Dr Jeff Dunn, and Mr Tom Hudson from International Union Against Cancer (UICC)

The Honourable Datin Paduka Seri Hj. Zaleha bte Ismail
Chairman, National Population and Family Development Board, Malaysia
Director, Asean Confederation of Women's Organisations Advisor to the 1st Asia Pacific
Reach To Recovery Breast Cancer Support Conference

Ms. Dorothy Teoh
President, Breast Cancer Welfare Association, Malaysia

Ms Ranjit Kaur
Organising Chairperson of the Conference

Distinguished Delegates of 1st Asia Pacific Reach to Recovery International Breast
Cancer Support Conference

Members of the media

Assalamualaikum warahmatullah hi wabarakatuh dan salam sejahtera

Good afternoon!

1. It is most meaningful for me to spend this Sunday afternoon to be with you on this unique occasion "Celebrating Wellness." It is so heartening to see volunteers and professionals for the first time, including breast cancer survivors, from the Asia Pacific region gathered here today to conclude this special conference. It inspires me to see so many survivors gathered together to share your critical experiences which have undoubtedly touched the lives of many in this hall and beyond. A strong point about your Conference which impresses me is that by speaking openly about your struggles, all of you have helped to reduce the stigma associated with breast cancer. Furthermore the

first-hand testimony of survivors will certainly add strength to advocacy programmes on breast cancer. Allow me to thank the organiser, that is, the Breast Cancer Welfare Association (BCWA) for inviting me to close the 1st Asia Pacific Reach To Recovery International Breast Cancer Support Conference -Celebrating Wellness.

2. I have been informed that the proceedings of the conference have resulted in commitments and resolutions that every delegate will take home to their individual organisations and countries to be followed through. For Malaysia I understand that a key follow-up action to your four days of deliberations will be the setting up of a National Coalition of Organizations of Breast Cancer Survivors to help in the development of services for survivors. This National Coalition can standardise and streamline the services provided by local groups by making available training for volunteers in the country (including breast cancer survivors) and handling advocacy issues. It will be wonderful if the National Coalition can develop its own website, through which it can post information from time to time to the public, especially those getting to know about or already living with breast cancer. Updates on breast cancer prevention, diagnosis, treatment and the list of the support groups available in Malaysia and the related links would be most useful for women or men alike.

3. I certainly believe the National Coalition in Malaysia will be able to break new ground and make changes to the lives of many women and families affected by breast cancer. Let's tell the whole world that breast cancer survivors can still raise children to be responsible and productive adults as well as be wives to their husbands!

4. I am sure this Conference has taken note that breast cancer today is common, and everyone is at some degree of risk. The rate of women being diagnosed of breast cancer in Malaysia is rapidly rising. The breast cancer incidence amongst women is estimated to be around 34.86 per 100,000 population. According to the Ministry of Health in 2001 there were a total of 4,911 cases discharged and 276 deaths. The age group that is most

affected is the 40-49 years age group. Also breast cancer is an illness which recognizes no barriers such as race or socio-economic status. While we do not yet fully understand its causes, we do know that risk factors such as changes in reproductive patterns, diet and stressful lifestyles can be controlled by the individual. Women today need to realize that having children at a later age and not breastfeeding will put them at greater lifetime risk of breast cancer.

5. We at the Ministry of Women and Family Development Malaysia have been involved in advocacy issues regarding breast cancer through out clinical and community services. The National Population and Family Development Board (LPPKN) under my Ministry has a wide network of 50 clinics throughout Peninsular Malaysia providing reproductive health services. Early detection of cancer among women is one of the critical services given to clients. In this matter, prevention is better than cure. Hence self breast examination (SBE) is taught to every women who comes for other services such as family planning, minor gynaecological problems and reproductive health care and counselling.

6. Here I would like to share with you some positive news based on a small study conducted on 500 women by the LPPKN clinic in Ipoh, Perak in 1999. The results indicated that although 74.8% of them undertook SSE, only 23.3% were doing it correctly. Remedial measures were taken by creating awareness among clinic staff. Care was taken to teach the clients closely every six months using charts and breast models. In February 2002, a similar study was done for 500 women and it was found that the number of women carrying out BSE had increased from 74.8% in 1999 to 88.8% in 2002 and that now more than double or 59% of them are doing it correctly as compared to only 23.3% in 1999. Although this study is by no means on a big scale, it is sufficient to convince us that everyone has a role to play in advocacy and education in the prevention of breast cancer. Furthermore I urge all clinics to be equipped with breast models which will facilitate the education of their clients in this important procedure which should become routine practice for all women.

7. I am glad that my Ministry is funding the Breast Cancer Awareness Campaign 2002, which was launched recently in March and organised by the National Council of Women's Organisation (NCWO) and the College of Radiology. In this campaign, women are taught BSE and offered mammography services by the participating clinics in 6 states (Kelantan, Pahang, Penang, Selangor, Wilayah Persekutuan and Sabah). Up to now 3,000 have benefitted from BSE training. Through LPPKN and smart partnerships with a few NGOs, the Ministry is planning to embark on a new advocacy project. This is an extension of our 'Nur Sejahtera' Women's Reproductive Health program in which emphasis will be given to reproductive cancers including breast cancers. It is through grass-root projects such as these that our women become aware of vital preventive measures such as breastfeeding, nutrition and general health care.

8. I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate the organising committee for their faith and commitment put into this conference. Your noble work will benefit many women and families in showing them the way forward *-live with cancer, not die from it.* I would like to emphasize here that the constant support of husbands, fathers, brothers and all male members of the family is essential throughout this challenging Journey.

Let's Celebrate Survivors!

Before I officially close this 1st Asia Pacific Reach To Recovery International Breast Cancer Support Conference, I would like to bid farewell and a safe journey home to all our foreign delegates. Do try to see some of *fascinating Malaysia* before you depart.

Thank you. Assalamualaikum warahmatullah hi wabarakatuh.