

Speech

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Launch of MH370 Photo Exhibition

Organised by the Foreign Correspondents Club of Malaysia (FCC)

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Introduction

Assalamualaikum wbt and salam sejahtera,

I want to begin by thanking the Foreign Correspondents Club of Malaysia (FCC) for inviting me to launch this MH370 Photo Exhibition. Before anything else, I want to acknowledge the presence of the families of the passengers and crew of MH370 who are with us here today. I also want to thank the photographers who have participated in this exhibition for their stirring and moving work. Furthermore, I would like to express my appreciation and gratitude to the organizers, especially Ranjeetha Pakiam, Vice President of FCCM and Vincent Thian, the coordinator of this exhibition, for your kind invitation, and for the opportunity to address everyone at this event today. Indeed, a big thank you to everyone who helped in putting the exhibition together.

FCC MH370 Photo Exhibition

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It has now been 121 days since MH370 went missing. Some people may say that it is too soon to hold an exhibition like this, or that it is even disrespectful given that the plane has not been found. I understand these sentiments. However, I like to think that this exhibition is a gesture—however small—that we have not forgotten about MH370, that we have not given up searching for it, and we will not stop until the plane is found.

This exhibition will consist of 40 photographs from 10 photographers from agencies like Xinhua, Reuters, AP and our Malaysian press. They include photos of Malaysians reacting to the tragedy, the search and rescue efforts as well as other very emotional aftermaths of the disappearance.

The exhibition reminds us of the human element of the MH370 story. It reminds us that 239 people took to the skies in the early hours of 8 March 2014, but never reached their destination. These photos remind us that these 239- fathers, mothers, sons, daughters and friends have not come home. The photos remind us that even as technology shrinks the globe and brings people even closer together that we are still very much at the mercy of fate.

Nevertheless, these are also pictures of hope, courage and resilience. They depict Malaysians from all faiths and ethnicities coming together to pray for the return of MH370. They depict serving men and women from more than 26 countries putting aside geopolitical rivalries to search for the missing plane. They also remind us that in times of tragedy, we forget our differences; we strengthen our bonds and learn who our real friends are.

The ongoing search efforts

Ladies and Gentlemen,

But the fact remains that MH370 has not been found and all the good that has come from the search pales beside this inescapable fact. Words mean little but the families and friends of those on board MH370 remain in our thoughts and prayers. We cannot even begin to understand the pain and anguish that they are going through. But we will do all we can to ease their burdens and help them to move on. At the same time, we are working with organisations throughout the world and within our own administration to boost airlines security to ensure that something like this will never, ever happen again.

Let me reiterate that the government of Malaysia and our international partners will not rest until MH370 is found. For my part, I will do all I can to support the new Minister of Transportation, Dato' Seri Liow Tiong Lai in the ongoing search. I will continue to play an active role in the ongoing search for the missing MH370. My responsibility to the families and my duty to the nation remain.

It must be stressed however that all that could have been done up to this point to find the plane has been done. Again, this means very little given that we still have not found the plane. But, let me assure you that MH370 will not be forgotten, that the work thus far will not have been in vain and we, by the Grace of God, will one day get to the bottom of this tragedy.

The role of the media

Ladies and Gentlemen,

As this is a Foreign Correspondents Club (FCC) event, I would like to say a few words about the role of the media in the incident. As I alluded to earlier, holding an exhibition like this is a bold move. So I thank the FCC for their courage and empathy in holding it.

The disappearance of MH370 was an unprecedented incident in global aviation history. It is only natural therefore, that the media scrutiny and attention towards it was likewise intense and continues to be. We appreciate the widespread coverage that both the Malaysian and foreign press have given to the search efforts. The media was with us from the very beginning and their tireless coverage was truly inspirational.

However, I must admit that all the media scrutiny was at times challenging and even overwhelming. Despite being in politics for more than 20 years, it was grueling to have to deal with almost 24/7 press coverage in addition to having to coordinate the search effort. But, this, as I have learnt is the lot of politicians and rightfully so. However, I felt driven by the thought that so many people were waiting for their loved ones to return and this compels me still to continue in this work.

All the same, one of the things that I have taken away from this event is the power of the media and the need for public leaders to constantly engage it. This is the reality that leaders everywhere cannot escape from. Nevertheless, we note with great regret that sensationalistic and at times even inaccurate reporting continues to emerge from this great tragedy. No one is questioning the right or need for the press to report on MH370 or to analyze and criticize the search efforts. However, and as these pictures should remind us, there are real lives at stake in this.

Reporters should therefore also bear in mind that they have responsibilities above and beyond the need for a good headline or breaking story. This is by no means a call for stories to be buried or toned down. But again and again, I would ask everyone to remember the lives behind the stories.

Conclusion

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I have said that the disappearance of MH370 has left a void in the hearts of all Malaysians. Almost four months later, this void has still not been filled. Our hearts are still broken and healing is a long way off. But we must continue to work. We must continue to pray, especially in this holy and Blessed month of Ramadhan.

We must continue to hope, for sometimes hope is all we have. We will find MH370. We will fill the void in our hearts and find that much needed closure.

It is my solemn duty and pleasure to declare this exhibition open.

Thank you.