

# MALAYA'S FIRST YEAR AT THE UNITED NATIONS

As Reflected in Dr Ismail's Reports  
Home to Tunku Abdul Rahman



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## TRANSCRIPT

of remarks

by Ambassador James R. Keith  
on the occasion of the  
Book Launch for "*Malaya's First Year  
at the United Nations*"  
The Lake Club, Kuala Lumpur  
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HRH Raja Nazrin Shah, Crown Prince of Perak, Tan Sri Ramon Navaratnam, Ambassador K. Kesavapany, Encik Mohamed Tawfik Tun Dr. Ismail, and Dr. Ooi Kee Beng, Ladies and Gentlemen, thank you, every one, for being here on this occasion to launch "*Malaya's First Year at the United Nations.*" I think this is an auspicious

day for us to note first years and first things. Because of course in the United States, we are about to embark on a series of "firsts." It is an important moment for us to take stock of those first impressions, as we were discussing earlier. First impressions count a lot, and today we celebrate a book that is full of first impressions. Not only of the United States, but also of the United Nations, and these are two key ideas for us to talk about and to think about this morning.

That is, Malaysia's investment in its relationship with the U.N. and its stake in multilateral fora. Malaysia's use of multilateral fora to advance its own interests and to contribute to the advancement of the interests of its neighboring countries and also its partners across the Pacific Ocean and beyond. It is important also to reflect on Tun Dr. Ismail's thinking about Malaysia's relationship with the United States. There is a fair amount in the book that you can glean from his perspective on how Malaysia should define its national interest and its stake in global affairs, and how it should pursue those interests. As we in the United States in the hours ahead, are about to embark on a new administration, an administration that has said already that it is interested in advancing multilateral fora and their agendas, I think it is important for us to reflect on the lessons learned.

Tan Sri and Ambassador, I share your perspective about the lessons learned from this book going all the way back to the late 1950s are still relevant today. And that reflects, I guess, a perspective – you know the Nobel prizes in the hard sciences and other international recognition go to scientists who make theoretical breakthroughs. But in the social sciences including the Nobel Peace Prize and the political science side of things,

the awards go to those not steeped in the theoretical side necessarily, but who achieve tactical objectives on the ground. To those who have a “track record” of doing things. And so though it is really true and I think it comes to you through Tun Dr. Ismail’s writings, that the achievements of diplomats and politicians are those of people who can manage practical human affairs and make things happen on the ground. In other words, with all due respect to my superiors in Washington and my fellow Ambassadors and High Commissioners here, it is not really rocket science when it comes to figuring out how to get things done. The art of governing and the art of politics and the art of diplomacy is the implementation as you can see in Tun Dr. Ismail’s writings, his appreciation for the fact that it takes a lot to get those ideas implemented. More credit to him for having the courage to put all of this in writing and create a record that is transparent and there for generations that follow to learn from.

Another point I would make is that this book really shows how important it is that we come together as societies of human beings. It is easy to forget that the American society or the Malaysian society (or in those days, the Malayan society as it was known), were groups of people making decisions on a daily basis that they knew affected their citizens daily lives. As I mentioned when I was speaking with members of Tun Dr. Ismail’s family a moment ago, the American Field Service is an example of this where connections are made; through high school and college students who come to know each other and come to realize what life is like in America, or what life is like in Malaysia. Through our Fulbright program we do the same; the academic and cultural exchanges that we create give us those human bonds that allow us to get beyond the newspaper pages, and get beyond the stereotypes on either side of the Pacific. That is another great contribution that this book has made, it allows us to not just imagine, but to experience the life in the United States of a Malaysian diplomat. I would be remiss if I didn’t thank all of you in the audience who have contributed to Malaysian-US relations and in particular I do want to say a word of thanks to Datuk Visu Sinnadurai, I hope you are here, another friend who has helped us pull together all kinds of events in US-Malaysian relations.

Really in the end, that is what the relationship is about. It is the result of combined efforts of dedicated public servants like Tun Dr. Ismail; dedicated public servants in many respects not necessarily just on the payroll of their governments; those who are toiling away in think-tanks and institutes; those who are journalists, who are writing with honesty and courage about the relationship; those who help create legal and other academic exchanges between our institutions, so my thanks go out to all of you.

I think this is indeed the beginning, I would hope, both from ASLI and ISEAS’ perspective, the beginning of much more fruitful research into a period that was seminal in our history and that continues to relate today... that continues to have influence on our thinking and our operation of our governments’ policies. More power to the scholars who might pursue this tremendous trove of primary source material that is available. It seems to me many PhDs are yet to be written on this period. So it remains only I suppose for me, having said my thanks to everyone, to declare the book officially launched, thank you very much.