

representation in Malaysia by saying:

It gives a great pleasure for me to announce that, consistent with our policy on the Palestinian question and our desire to further strengthen relations with the PLO, the government has decided to extend full diplomatic status to the office and the representative of the PLO in Kuala Lumpur, as accorded to other resident diplomatic missions here.⁵⁴

The increasing role of the Malaysian government concerning the Palestinian issue could be clearly noted throughout the 1980's. Apart from its annual contribution of US\$5,000 (in 1981) to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) operating in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, the Malaysian government contributed M\$100,000 in 1982 to the camps' dwellers, following the Israeli invasion of Lebanon.⁵⁵ Humanitarian aid came in other forms like medical assistance, scholarships for Palestinian students in Malaysian universities and occupational training centers.⁵⁶

Another most recent disturbing challenge to the Ummah was the costly and long war between Iran and Iraq (1980-1988) that may be regarded as one of the most tragic events in Islamic history. The Malaysian government strongly believed in a political solution to

⁵⁴ Ibid., p.272

⁵⁵ Shanti Nair (1997), op.cit., p. 207

⁵⁶ See, *Foreign Affairs Malaysia*, vol. 17, no. 3 (September 1984), pp. 24-25. During Yassir Arafat's visit to Malaysia in 1984, a joint-communiqué was issued which mentioned Malaysia's offer of training and scholarships.

the Iran-Iraq conflict,⁵⁷ and the issue to her was purely political. Deputy Premier, Datuk Musa, assured that Malaysia, being a non-Arab country who is not located in the area of conflict, and as a member of the OIC, would offer to undertake serious and long term efforts to find peace in the area of conflict. He commented on the stand of his government on the conflict as follows:

Considering that Malaysia maintains close relations with both Iran and Iraq, we would like to offer ourselves to find a solution to the conflict without appearing to take sides with either side.⁵⁸

It is also interesting to note that the awareness of the Palestinian issue had widely spread throughout the 1980's among the Malaysian public. It was largely spearheaded by the government itself, the Malaysian dailies, and the non-governmental movements such as ABIM and PERKIM. In November 1986, the support for the PLO cause was again demonstrated. Following an official visit to Singapore by President Chaim Herzog of Israel, Malaysia, Indonesia and Brunei submitted an official protest to the Singapore government that chastised this visit for its lack of sensitivity towards the feeling of its Muslim neighbors. Anti-Singapore rallies were held in Johor, and effigies of Premier Lee Kuan Yew were burned by protestors.⁵⁹ The rally organizers submitted a memorandum to the government calling for

⁵⁷ *Islamic Herald*, vol.6, no.9&10, 1982,p.42

⁵⁸ *Islamic Herald*, vol.6, no.9&10, 1982,p.42

⁵⁹ *Utusan Malaysia*, 22/11/1986.