

the PLO, whom it regarded as the sole representative of the Palestinian people, as mandatory.

Significantly, Islam assumed growing prominence under Mahathir's administration. The cause of Islam can rightly be said to constitute the second most important dimension in his foreign policy throughout the 1980's.<sup>27</sup> Tun Dr. Mahathir's high commitment to the Islamic cause and the Islamization policy is partly motivated by his desire of image enhancement at home and abroad, particularly to maintain the legitimacy of the United Malay National Organisation (UMNO) in the eyes of the Malay-Muslim populace. Tun Dr. Mahathir's commitment to the Islamic cause, particularly the Palestinian issue, has become even more pronounced and assertive with his co-option of Anwar Ibrahim, the former President of ABIM, into the government in 1982. Therefore, under the leadership of Tun Dr. Mahathir, Malaysia's pro-Palestinian attitude became even more vocal and positive than that adopted by his predecessors. In spite of the challenge of Islamic revivalism, Tun Dr. Mahathir's era witnessed increasing awareness among various civil society groups, thus motivated his government to be more assertive towards them. Hence, in analyzing the role of Malaysian government towards the Palestinian issue in the 1980's, one would not fail to note the increasing competition and collaboration between it and the civil society groups in Malaysia.<sup>28</sup>

Shortly after assuming office, in October 1981, Dr. Mahathir decided to upgrade the PLO representation in the country to full diplomatic status. Malaysia was thus the only country in Southeast Asia region, and the second country in the world, to do so. The Foreign Minister of Malaysia, Tan Sri Ghazali Shafie, in his statement on the occasion of Al-Aqsa Day, in August 21, 1981, pledged Malaysian support for the cause of the Palestinian by saying that:

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27. Mohd. Yusof Ahmad, *Continuity and Changes in Malaysian Foreign Policy, 1981-1986*, unpublished PhD Thesis, submitted to the Tufts University, 1990, pg. 270

28. See Nor Azizan Idris, *A Historical Analysis on the Competitive Role of State and Civil Society Groups towards the Palestinian Issue*, paper presented at the 16th Conference of the IAHA, Kota Kinabalu, Sabah, Malaysia, 27 - 31 July 2000.