

The religious significance of the Palestinian issue to ordinary Malay-Muslim is reflected in the frequency in which it becomes the topic of sermon in Friday prayers in Malaysian mosques. The Malays allergy and sensitivity to the Jewish people was best manifested during the Israeli aggression in the refugee camp of Shabra and Shatila in West Beirut in September 1982<sup>34</sup> and in the launching of protest demonstration that condemned the visit of Chaim Herzog to Singapore in November 1986. The demonstrators were comprised of various civil society groups in Malaysia including UMNO, PAS, ABIM (Angkatan Belia Islam Malaysia), and PERKIM (Pertubuhan Kebajikan Islam Malaysia). Anti Singapore rallies were held in Johore, and effigies of Premier Lee Kuan Yew were burned by protestors. The rally organizers also submitted a memorandum to the government calling for stronger actions ranging from a break in diplomatic ties to a review of the water supply agreement with Singapore. Another bold and commendable step taken by the Malaysian government was its decision of January 12, 1989, to elevate the office of the PLO in Malaysia to a full fledged Embassy of the State of Palestine. This elevation was, in fact, yet another reflection of Malaysia's strong and unequivocal support to the just demands of the Palestinians for self-determination and independence.

### **Conclusion**

Significantly, in the contemporary world, the Palestinian issue still remain explosive and unresolved. Its resolution is an urgent necessity as well as a major international concern. This is particularly so to all Muslims who view it not merely as a regional or an Arab problem, but more importantly a paramount religious issue. This sentiment indeed shared by Malaysia.

In spite of the religious significance, the humanitarian perspective of the Palestinian issue had further deepened the Malay sympathy and support to the Palestinians. Obviously, the Palestinians have become

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34. Foreign Affairs Malaysia, June 7, 1982, pg. 154. Malaysia strongly condemned the massacre and held Israel and the Phalangists responsible for the wanton act of savagery. The government also regarded the massacre as "A Crime Equal only to the Horrendous Nazi Atrocity", see The Star, 21 September, 1982.