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DEVELOPING COUNTRIES TO GAIN FROM MALAYSIA'S POVERTY REDUCTION EXPERIENCE

Kuala Lumpur, November 5— Malaysia's development success, especially in reducing poverty and increasing the prosperity of its people, will serve as a role model for developing countries during a workshop aimed at fostering bilateral and multilateral South-South cooperation starting today.

Launched by YB Dato' Mustapa bin Mohammed, Minister of Higher Education, the workshop titled, *"Sharing Malaysia's Best Practices in Eradicating Poverty –Pro-poor Rural and Urban Development Policies and Programmes"* is jointly hosted by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the Economic Planning Unit (EPU) and the Centre for Poverty and Development Studies (CPDS) at the University Malaya.

More than 20 developing nations from Asia and Africa are represented at the workshop, which will serve as platform to share Malaysia's experiences on how it has developed and implemented equitable policies to reduce poverty, particularly through its rural development strategies, while maintaining an open and competitive economy.

The 10-day workshop will include site visits to key national poverty eradication programmes including FELDA, the Penang Skills Development Centre, Amanah Ikhtiar Malaysia, FELCRA and MARDI.

"Malaysia's remarkable track record in poverty reduction and improving the well-being of its people has been widely recognized. It proves that the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) are not utopian," said Dr. Richard Leete, UNDP Resident Representative for Malaysia, Singapore and Brunei.

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"The country has amassed a fair amount of "tried and tested" institutional experience and technical expertise over the past 50 years. Through South-South exchanges, the country can do its part in sharing its development model with lesser developed countries."

According to government statistics, in 1957, 50% of the population lived below the poverty line. Today, the absolute poverty rate stands at less than 5%. In 1957, Malaysia's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) was just RM12.8 billion with a 1 per cent economic growth rate and per capita income of RM788. In 2006, Malaysia's GDP was at RM277.3 billion, economic growth was around 6 per cent and per capita income stood at RM19, 739.

Since independence, Malaysia has played an increasingly important role in advocating for and strengthening south-south cooperation, as well as fostering North-South or triangular partnerships. Malaysia's commitment to its "Prosper Thy Neighbour" policy is evident through its active participation in the Malaysian Technical Cooperation Programme (MTCP), South-South Information Gateway, and various capacity-building initiatives within the OIC and ASEAN. Further, Malaysian firms are increasingly finding investment opportunities abroad, particularly in Southern countries.

Dr. Leete said that the workshop will also assess factors that have hindered progress in fighting poverty in lesser developed Asian and African countries as follow up to this year's Langkawi International Dialogue 2007.

"There is an urgent need to refocus attention and resources on the regions, countries and communities that are being left behind. We need an environment of genuine multilateral cooperation backed up by adequate financing within the global partnership for development," he said.

According to the UN Millennium Development Report 2007, the proportion of the world's population living in extreme poverty fell from nearly a third to less than one fifth between 1990 and 2004.

Nonetheless, the wealth generated from unprecedented economic growth in the developing world has not been shared equally, with sub-Saharan Africa seriously off track in meeting all of the MDG. Asia has witnessed a dramatic rise in inequalities within and between countries.

Although almost eight years have passed since the MDGs were first introduced, today just short of one billion people live on less than one dollar a day, every year six million children die from malnutrition before their fifth birthday, and in deeply impoverished nations less than half of the children are in primary school and fewer than 20 percent go to secondary school.

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The MDGs adopted by all UN member states in 2000 call for quantified, time-bound progress in eradicating extreme poverty and hunger; achieving universal primary education; promoting gender equality and the empowerment of women; reducing child mortality; improving maternal health; combating HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases; ensuring environmental sustainability; and developing a global partnership for development.

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About UNDP

UNDP is the UN's global development network, advocating for change and connecting countries to knowledge, experience and resources to help people build a better life. We are on the ground in 166 countries, working with them on their own solutions to global and national development challenges. As they develop local capacity, they draw on the people of UNDP and our wide range of partners. UNDP's current priority is to help all countries achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) by 2015.

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