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## Strategic Interest of Malaysia's in Matters Concerning Policy on Antarctica

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### Abstract

As members of the Antarctica Treaty 1959, Malaysia is aware of the stringent requirements in the Treaty Protocol on Environmental Protection 1991 (The Madrid protocol 1991). Malaysia is also aware of the weight on the economic factor as huge budgetary allocations needed to fund Malaysia's scientific research expeditions. Nevertheless, the membership resulted in the need to reconciliation local environmental policy to the Madrid Protocol 1991. This paper traces the development of Malaysian environmental policy pre and posts the signing of Antarctica Treaty, emphasizing the concept that affects the Malaysian policy in its attempt to compliment the Antarctica Environmental Protection Policy.

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### 1. Introduction

Malaysia acknowledges that the globalisation dictates the changes that are vital for future survival of communities. In accepting this, Malaysia identified that the knowledge-based economy is the way to secure Malaysia as a developed country in its Vision 2020. The main aim is to establish a progressive society who will be a

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contributor to the development of science and technology in the future. The focus on knowledge-based economy means that it is vital for the country to establish a greater interest in scientific research in order to compete in the borderless world. It is important for Malaysia to set up a network of international and local scientists for technology transfer in research activities in the biggest scientific laboratory – The Continent of Antarctica. The establishment of Malaysia Antarctica Research Program (MARP) is a big step towards the realisation of this goal. Apart from elevating Malaysian science research; the Programme is also invaluable in developing the human resource necessary to power a knowledge-based economy. Therefore, it is importance for Malaysia to establish a policy on transformation of Antarctica science discoveries into Malaysia Antarctica (Environmental Protection) Law. The propose research will emulate the Environmental Protection Policy established by German, a non-claimant of Antarctica, since the German Policy dictates similar expectation like Malaysia that Antarctica's pristine environment is a common heritage of mankind that need to be protected by the law of the State.

As such, the Programme aims to facilitate and coordinate Malaysian scientific effort in the areas of global sciences such as climate change and biodiversity. This is the niche areas being the relationship between the tropics and the poles. Encourage and foster efforts to develop the capability and capacity of Malaysian scientists to compete at international level via international networking. Promote and maintain Malaysia's presence as a significant player in Antarctic research to pave the way for Malaysia's entrance into the Antarctic Treaty System. Development of Malaysian research interest in the Antarctica was realised in 1997 when the Cabinet has approved the set up of a Malaysian Antarctic research programme. A bilateral scientific agreement with New Zealand helped to set up the logistics necessary for Malaysian scientists to launch research in Antarctica. The Malaysian-Antarctica Research Programme was set up under the auspice of the Academy of Sciences Malaysia (ASM) to coordinate researchers around the country to focus and establish world-class research in their institutions. To date, the Programme has accomplished to make Malaysia's scientific presence felt.

## **2. The interest begins with a humble inquiry**

Malaysia's interest in Antarctica began when Malaysia and Antigua raised the issue of Antarctica and its governance and the right of the global community over its resources, at the United Nations in 1983. Question of Antarctica, Malaysia and Antigua had drawn attention to the issue of Antarctica's exclusivity to the developing nations and the need for Antarctica to be established as a global heritage for mankind in the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) in 1983. It was a period of massive mineral exploitation of the deep seas by multinational companies from the developed nations. Dr Mahathir Mohamad, the Prime Minister then, contended that there are reasons to believe that a similar fate could befall Antarctica and measures should be undertaken to guarantee protection of Antarctica's environment from reckless pillaging of its natural resources. He also voiced that the Antarctic Treaty System (ATS) should be encouraged to open its door for developing countries to participate in the decision making regarding the Antarctica. Malaysia's position was that the less developed countries should have access to the wealth being exploited and that such territories be governed under a multilateral agreement administered by the United Nations. This results in the Question of Antarctica being tabled in the UN and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) was given an observer status in the proceeding annual Antarctic Treaty System Consultative Meeting. The Question of Antarctica was presented annually at the UNGA from 1983-1992. After a year's recess in 1993, the Question of Antarctica has become a triennial endeavour at the UNGA.

Malaysia's stand on Antarctica in the United Nations has roused the interest of the member countries of the Antarctic Treaty Consultative Parties (ATCP), leading to the invitation of two Malaysian representatives to a Workshop on the Antarctic Treaty System in South Beardmore Station, Antarctica in 1985. The late Tan Sri Zain Azraai, Malaysia's permanent representative to the United Nations at that time and Tan Sri Datuk Dr Omar Abdul Rahman, the Scientific Advisor to the Prime Minister then, were sent to participate in the workshop. Although Tan Sri Datuk Dr. Omar had written a proposal to promote Malaysian research in the Antarctic after the workshop, it was another decade before it could come to fruition. At the international front, Malaysia continued to be an instrument to voice the concerns of the developing nations regarding the issue of Antarctica. Initially, the focus of the question raised by Malaysia revolves around the exclusivity and the unaccountability of the ATCP and for the ATS to adhere more closely to the UN charter as outlined by the treaty. A particular source of query was the establishment of the Convention on the Regulation of Antarctic Mineral Resource Activities (CRAMRA) in 1988

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