

OPENING ADDRESS BY:

HON DATUK SERI MOHD ALI BIN MOHD RUSTAM

President, World Assembly of Youth

INTERNATIONAL YOUTH FORUM

“THE ROLE OF YOUTH ON POVERTY AND MIGRATION ERADICATION”

13-15 APRIL 2009

TOURISM VILLAGE TRIPOLI, LIBYA

Invited guests,

International Youth Forum participants,

Ladies and gentlemen,

It is indeed an honor for me to welcome you to the International Youth Forum here in the beautiful city of Tripoli.

It is significant that we are here to highlight an issue that affects almost half a billion youth globally through the forum's theme 'The Role on Youth of Poverty and Migration Eradication'.

My appreciation and thanks goes to the two key organizers, World Assembly of Youth (WAY) and National Organization of Libyan Youth

(NOLY), for making this meaningful international gathering of young people a reality.

Ladies and gentlemen

As in the words of the great Muhamad Ali, the world famous boxer.. 'Wars against nations are fought to change maps but wars against poverty are fought to map change'.

And this is why we are here today, not merely to remember the poor but to assess the situation of poverty on the youth and the role they play in the eradication of poverty.

Global and World Youth Population

The world's population, as of April 2009, stands at 6.77 billion people, of which some 18 percent or 1.2 billion are youth between 15 to 24 years old based on UN's World Youth Report.

World Youth Population and Poverty

Of this figures, almost half of them or estimated 515 million youth live on less than USD2.50 per day with another 209 million living on less than USD1 per day.

Six Regions Where Poverty Strikes Hardest

The regions where estimated 209 million youth that are living on less than 1USD per day and the hardest hit by poverty are those who live in:

- a) South Asia - 84.1 million
- b) Sub-Saharan Africa - 60.7million
- c) East Asia and the Pacific - 46.5million
- d) Latin America and the Caribbean – 11.1million
- e) Middle East and North Africa – 2million
- f) Europe and Central Asia – 4.1million

The regions where estimated 515 million youth that are living on less than 2.50 USD per day and the hardest hit by poverty are those who live in:

- a) South Asia - 206.1 million
- b) Sub-Saharan Africa – 102.1million
- c) East Asia and the Pacific – 150.5million
- d) Latin America and the Caribbean – 27.2million
- e) Middle East and North Africa –12.1million
- f) Europe and Central Asia – 18.2million

It is clear from the statistics that the situation for youth faced with poverty is a serious one, that needs to be addressed both at the micro and macro levels.

Consequence of Youth Poverty – Migration

Owing to poverty, youth migration is another concern that needs to be address.

Youth migration is driven by bad socio-economic conditions such as low wages, high rates of unemployment, under-employment in rural areas and poverty.

Based upon Youth consultation and migration report, experts agree that young people between 15 and 30 years of age represent a large share of migrants.

Number of Youth Migration

It is estimated that in 2005 there were over 191 million international migrants worldwide.

Despite encouraging economic figures, international economic migration is not strictly regulated and the maltreatment of many migrant workers is common. Migrant workers are vulnerable to harassment, exploitation and human trafficking.

Reasons For Poverty

There are many reasons why poverty strikes. It can be due to unfortunate and unavoidable circumstances or even man-made.

Among the most common are:

- a) Lack of education - Based on the UN's World Report, an estimated 1 billion people around the world are illiterate.
Based on UNICEF – 101 million children lack primary school education with sub-Saharan Africa having the highest number 46 million and South Asia with 35 million.
- b) Lack of Skills – The most important asset of a nation is not its natural resource but its human resource or human capital.
- c) Drug Abuse – Drug abuse is also results in poverty as it robs the millions of youth of their ability to be productive members of society.
- d) Lack of Employment – Due to lack of employment opportunities in developing countries and increased demands for low-wage workers in developed countries, youth are pursuing employment in other countries in order to support themselves and their families back home.

How To Overcome

Governments around the world must realize that the future lies in the hands of the youth. Greater cooperation and unity must exist between nations if they are to address the issues of youth poverty and migration.

End Global Arms Race

It is very unfortunate that many governments, in particular in the richer nations, are more concerned with the arms race.

Some governments spend more on military expenditure than on social development, communications infrastructure and health combined.

While every nation has the right and the need to ensure its security, in these changing times, arms requirements and procurements may need to change too.

Each year, around \$45-60 billion worth of arms sales are agreed. Some two-thirds of sales are made to developing countries.

The 5 permanent members of the UN Security Council (US, Russia, France, United Kingdom and China), together with Germany and Italy account for over 80% of the arms sold between 2000 and 2007.

It is unfortunate that the US has not listened to the profound words of its own former President Dwight Eisenhower in 1953 when he said:

'Every gun that is made, every warship launched, every rocket fired signifies, in the final sense, a theft from those who hunger and are not fed, those who are cold and are not clothed.

The world in arms is not spending money alone. It is spending the sweat of its laborers, the genius of its scientists, the hopes of its children'

Just imagine what we can do to help to eradicate poverty with USD60billion each year which is spent on arms.

With that in mind, the UN and in particular the richer nations must do more towards eradicating poverty amongst the youth.

There must be greater commitment by nations to work in achieving UN's Millennium Development Goals to eradicate poverty by 2015.

In Malaysia, and in particular Melaka, we have initiated measures to eradicate poverty while also ensuring proper education for all through state sponsored scholarships and grants.

Youth Participation in Policy and Decision Making Process

Also important to help eradicate poverty amongst youth is that they be made part of the policy and decision making process in their respective countries.

If they are allowed to participate, then they would be able to raise and tackle these issues together with their respective governments.

Stable Governments and Society

However, to achieve this, the youth must be able to contribute towards building a stable government within their society.

Only through stability will there be a political avenue for them to use as a platform and get involved in policy and decision making process.

Youth Skills Development

Besides formal education as a ladder to climb out of poverty, developing programs to equip youth with the right skills is also equally important.

In Malaysia, we have Majlis Latihan Vokasional Kebangsaan or National Council for Vocational Training for the young.

Also targeted for the young in our country is industrial training programs carried out at various government institutes throughout the country.

The skills provide the youths with the ability to seek employment in various fields.

Special Loan Schemes For Youth Entrepreneurs

Also important is providing budding youth entrepreneurs with the kick start to help them set up their own business.

This may be by way of loans by specific financial institutions where young entrepreneurs are able to obtain loans at low interest.

I am proud to say that WAY successfully initiated a scheme in Zimbabwe in 2003 where money was loaned to set up a cyber café in Harare including setting up a net work of 96 computers for youth involved in the agricultural sectors.

Ladies and gentlemen

Today we gather in this hall and in this beautiful country Libya, to discuss the roles that youth can play.

We gather not to wave white flags to poverty and migration but stand our ground as youth, as brave youth to learn, educate each other and increase awareness and to find effective means to reduce the rate of poverty and migration among the youth.

My prayer is that at the end of this forum that light shall indeed shine as the youth unite to take part in the battle against poverty and migration.

Wishing you all a wonderful Forum!