

SPEECH BY

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AT THE OFFICIAL OPENING OF THE 8TH MELAKA INTERNATIONAL YOUTH

DIALOGUE ON

“TOWARDS A DRUG-FREE GENERATION”

27 JUNE 2008

Government Officials

Members of the Diplomatic Corps

Invited Guests

Ladies and Gentlemen:

On behalf of the World Assembly of Youth, I extend a warm welcome to all participants who have travelled far and wide to attend the 8th Melaka International Youth Dialogue this year.

I am pleased to see so many people from different parts of the world, some who have been here before and others for whom this is your first time to attend this Dialogue.

We are further honoured by the presence of various government leaders and senior government officials amongst us and your continued commitment to matters affecting the youth.

Ladies and Gentlemen:

Our theme this year is Towards a Drug-Free Generation. At this juncture I would like to give a brief overview of some of the issues that we are going to address. There will be plenary and workshop sessions during which more extensive discussions will be conducted.

An understanding on what drugs are is essential in understanding their devastating effects. It is vital to realise that drugs also cover substances that must be used under medical supervision to treat illnesses.

Initially, plants were grown and converted into drugs such as coca paste, opium and marijuana.

Over the years these crude products were further processed to yield drugs like cocaine and heroin.

In the 20th century people began to make drugs from chemicals, first with experimental intentions in mind then for recreational purposes. These are the so-called synthetic drugs such as ecstasy and LSD.

Today, designer drugs are being invented for the sole purpose of recreational human consumption. Even drugs that were considered 'soft' years ago such as marijuana have over the years become more potent due to biological or chemical modification to create higher concentrations of the active ingredients.

According to the 2007 World Drug Report released by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), about 200 million people are using the main illicit drugs, which are the opiates, cocaine, cannabis, and amphetamine-type stimulants.

Cannabis, also known as marijuana, its resinous form hashish and its main psychoactive ingredient THC leads with 162 million users which represents 3.8% of the global population aged between 15 and 64. UNODC was unable to come up with an accurate estimate of the location and total number of hectares under cannabis because it is grown in at least 172 countries, often in small plots by the users themselves. Reliable estimates were obtained from Morocco which in 2006 supplied 70% of the hashish consumed in Europe. UNODC and the Government of Morocco have been monitoring large scale hashish production since 2003. Based on these surveys, cannabis cultivation in Morocco has declined in recent years, from a peak of 134,000 hectares in 2003 to just 76,400 hectares in 2005 and 50,000 in 2006. Currently, Afghanistan appears to be overtaking Morocco as the world's top cannabis grower.

Amphetamine-Type Stimulants (ATS) which include amphetamine, methamphetamine and ecstasy follows with 35 million users. It continues to be characterised by:

- youthful consumers,
- a comparatively inexpensive final product, and
- low overhead production which is fairly close to the consumer.

The ATS market's heavy reliance on regulated precursor chemicals also defines its characteristics, as well as its control. In the past this has been a vibrant, highly adaptive market. However, it appears that supply control and demand reduction measures have been effective in suppressing expansion.

16 million people are estimated to use **opiates** which encompass opium, morphine, heroin and synthetic opiates. In 2006, Afghanistan was responsible for 92% of global opium production. According to the Afghanistan Opium Survey 2007 of UNODC, production reached 8200 tons which represented 93% of the world's supply and outstripped global demand which was estimated at 4500 tons. Last year the total export value of Afghan opium was around US\$ 3.1 billion. Much of the opium ends up on European streets as heroin, the hardest of drugs.

13 million people use **cocaine**. Most of the world's cocaine comes from coca leaf cultivated in Colombia, Peru and Bolivia. The global area under coca cultivation fell by 29 per cent to some 156,900 hectares between 2000 and 2006.

Unfortunately, the success in the reduction of coca cultivation from 2000 to 2005 did not lead to a decline in cocaine production. In recent years, the use of fertilizers and pesticides, and the refinement of knowledge and skill in processing

the leaf, has improved coca yields, leaving cocaine production largely stable. For instance, in 2006, the area under coca cultivation in Bolivia, Colombia and Peru amounted to 156,900 hectares, a 2 per cent contraction over 2005 but the overall cocaine production remained largely unchanged.

On a positive note 42 per cent of global cocaine production and 26 per cent of global heroin production never made it to consumers in 2006. On the 12th June 2008, the UN Information Service reported that 236.8 metric tons of hashish with an estimated wholesale value of US\$400 million was seized in Afghanistan, in what is considered to be the world's largest seizure of drugs.

Despite marked improvements in the quality and reliability of drug abuse data since 1998, up-to-date information regarding the most vulnerable population groups, in particular youth, women and injecting drug users, is not available. Because of this severe lack of information, it is difficult to give an accurate picture of the extent of drug abuse among the youth. Currently, organisations doing surveys tend to look at smaller samples of young people in developed countries as an indication of the direction youth culture is taking. This does not provide precise statistics but can give clues about the trends in drug abuse especially given the fact that youth culture is increasingly global. One such survey by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration in the U.S. reports that the highest percentage of drug abuse is from those aged 16-25 at 56.9%.

It is with such statistics in mind that the World Assembly of Youth seeks to make an intervention to address the problem of drug abuse especially among the youth. This task should not be taken lightly as drugs have dire effects.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The objectives of the 8th Melaka International Youth Dialogue are:

- To prevent drug abuse amongst youth;
- To reduce the drug abuse rate amongst youth;
- To achieve behaviour modification amongst youth;
- To increase youth awareness of their responsibilities regarding drug abuse;
- To improve the national and international policies that deal with drug abuse and its effects on society;
- To heighten international resolve to tackle the drugs abuse challenges;
- To improve cooperation between governments, civil society and private sector to address drug abuse;
- To have stronger, more effective national youth councils with leading roles in the fight against drug abuse.

The author Charlotte Perkins Gilman said: (Quote) “It is the duty of youth to bring its fresh powers to bear on social progress. Each generation of young people should be to the world like a vast reserve force to a tired army. They should lift the world forward. That is what they are for.” (Unquote) That is what **we** are here for.

Let me remind the participants in this Dialogue that the output of any dialogue is only as good as its input. The Dialogue is made more enriching by the sharing of knowledge and experiences that will be of mutual benefit. For this reason I encourage each of you to participate fully and actively.

I would like to thank our partners in this Dialogue, the Melaka State Government, the Ministry of Youth and Sports, the Malaysian Youth Council and the Asian Youth Council. We are also grateful to the many contributors who have made this event possible, and to all members of the various committees who were instrumental in putting this Dialogue together.

Finally, I hope you all enjoy your stay and experience all the history, culture, hospitality and culinary delights that this country has to offer.

Thank you.