

**SPEECH BY RT. HON. DATUK SERI MOHD ALI BIN MOHD RUSTAM
PRESIDENT OF THE WORLD ASSEMBLY OF YOUTH AND CHIEF MINISTER OF MELAKA**

**AT THE OPENING CEREMONY OF THE
9TH MELAKA INTERNATIONAL YOUTH DIALOGUE
“YOUTH AND GENDER EQUALITY”
FRIDAY 25TH JUNE 2009 AT 0900 HRS
PUTERI RESORT AYER KEROH, MELAKA**

WAY Executive Committee Members,

Representatives of WAY member organisations,

Invited Guests,

Melaka International Youth Dialogue participants,

Ladies and Gentlemen:

I heartedly welcome you to the 9th Melaka International Youth Dialogue. The Dialogue is an annual event that has given us the platform to educate and empower the youth on many pertinent issues. We have also had the opportunity to strengthen Youth Leaders and Organizations by bringing forth topics such as Globalisation, Employment, Information and Communication Technologies, Youth Participation in Decision-Making Processes, and Strengthening National Youth Councils for Global Development, Developing Human Capital and Youth and Tourism and last year's Towards a Drug-Free

generation. This annual event now in its 9th year has also drawn attention to the plight of the youth and how these challenges can be addressed globally.

This year's theme is 'Youth and Gender Equality'. In order to understand the theme better in its application to the youth we need to understand its foundation, 'Gender Equality'. Gender Equality also known as gender equity is where both male and female have equal opportunities in all sectors of life, that is to say, in job opportunities and economical and social grounds.

It also embraces the subject of empowering the female which suggests that they are entitled to live in dignity and in freedom from want and from fear. There is a general misconception that gender equality is exclusively for the female gender and their rights. However it is not limited to male involvement that also plays indeterminably sustainable roles in both within the family and developmentally for the economy. "Man and woman are likened to the wings of a bird, they have to work together to keep level flight".

According to some historical writings, the equality of malee and wfemale is fundamental. In addition, until the female are granted equal status with their male counterpart, advancement in humanity cannot progress. Abdul Baha of the Bahai faith further adds in his published discourses that gender equality was not simply righting historical social injustices against women, but would serve as a key factor in wide-ranging societal changes that would help develop a new civilization in which more 'feminine' qualities such as tender-heartedness and receptivity would balance previously dominant 'masculine' forces.

Gender Equality according to UNFPA is first and foremost a human right. Human rights refer to the "basic rights and freedoms to which all humans are

entitled." Examples of rights and freedoms which have come to be commonly thought of as human rights include civil and political rights, such as the right to life and liberty, freedom of expression, and equality before the law; and economic, social and cultural rights, including the right to participate in culture, the right to food, the right to work, and the right to education.

The human rights do not discriminate against culture, class, social status, race and certainly not against gender. According to an article from one of the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights, "All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood".

Gender equality is a cornerstone of many sectors for development, for example Education which leads to the creation of many choices amongst the youth and their leaders today. In general literacy is higher among the youth than in adults due to the recent expansion of basic education to both males and females. The latest available estimates indicate that there are 137 million illiterate youth in the world and 85 million of them are female which is an indication that there is still more expansion to be done.

In developing regions, youth illiteracy rates range from 2 per cent in East Asia and the Pacific to 28 per cent in Southern and Western Asia. Gender disparities in literacy are generally less pronounced for youth, but follow similar patterns regionally, with gender gaps still notable among youth in Southern and Western Asia, the Arab States and sub-Saharan Africa. The largest gap is in Southern Asia, where young women's literacy rates are 19 percentage points lower than men's.

There are 17 percentage points lower in Bangladesh and 24 points lower in Pakistan. In countries including Benin, Chad and Liberia, the difference is well over 30 points. Though the general trend is that young men outnumber the young women in educational institutions some countries like Uganda exhibit a reversed trend in that the number of females gaining entrance to institutions is higher than that of the males.

In regards to the sub topic of gender equality in the labour market, it is limited by occupational segregation, gender-based wage gaps, and the female disproportionate representation in informal employment, unpaid work and higher unemployment rates. Unfortunately, the female represent the majority of the working poor globally. Out of the 550 million working poor in the world, an estimated 330 million, or 60 per cent, are females.

Several factors contribute to this situation, including the undervaluation of the female working abilities work and their intermittent career paths, due mainly to their role as caregivers in the family and their greater need to balance work and family life. In some countries, there are also legal restrictions or prohibitions against women engaging in certain types of work. Despite some progress in the '90s, female workers typically earn less than their male counterpart, even for similar kinds of work.

Ladies and gentlemen, I would like to quote a wise man who once said "If youth is the season of hope, it is often so only in the sense that our elders are hopeful about us". As an overseer of the activities of the youth in this country, reiterated by my position as President of World Assembly of Youth, my hope is

for us to say NO to discrimination, NO to gender based violence, NO to occupational segregation and NO cultural hindrance. The world is only a stepping stone to greater causes and gender equality is one of them. As leaders, participants, volunteers and organisers in this, 9th Melaka International Youth Dialogue, let us learn from one another, share knowledge and experience with each other and let us proceed towards a better tomorrow of Gender Equality.

I would like to thank all partners and supporters of this programme. The organizers, the World Assembly of Youth, and collaborating organizations including the Asian Youth Council, Malaysian Youth Council, Melaka State Government, Ministry of Youth and Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development. I hope that all of you shall find this to be a fruitful Dialogue, and that you take time to enjoy the sights, sounds and tastes of Melaka, Malaysia's historical city. Do take home along with you the Malaysian hospitality and culture together with the memories you will be making.

I thank you.

