

SPEECH BY MISS EDIOLA PASHOLLARI

ACTING SECRETARY GENERAL OF THE WORLD ASSEMBLY OF YOUTH

AND

CHAIRPERSON OF THE 9TH MELAKA INTERNATIONAL YOUTH DIALOGUE

AT THE CLOSING CEREMONY OF THE

9TH MELAKA INTERNATIONAL YOUTH DIALOGUE

“YOUTH AND GENDER EQUALITY”

SATURDAY 27TH JUNE 2009 AT 2000 HRS

PUTERI RESORT AYER KEROH, MELAKA

Rt. Hon Datuk Seri Mohd Ali bin Mohd Rustam, Chief Minister of Melaka
and the President of the World Assembly of Youth

Datuk Datuk and Datin Datin

WAY Executive Committee Members,

Representatives of WAY member organisations,

Invited Guests,

Melaka International Youth Dialogue participants,

Ladies and Gentlemen:

Wow! What an exciting few days we have had. It really is the start of a journey and a new phase in a journey. It is important to take a moment to reflect on all the ways in which people's minds have been turned to the righteous, to the insistent demands from so many sections of society in our own country and right throughout the world for gender equality.

Very clearly it is a journey we are on and we are very far from reaching our destination. The dialogue we have had has helped to propel us very rapidly through the equality agenda. It has helped us to focus on ways and techniques and attitudes that we could use, absorb or indeed get rid of in order to promote the gender equality agenda.

Our determined focus on equal opportunities for all has generated an important and widespread process of reflection, analysis, debate and action. It has drawn in very many of you here to that process.

Your awareness has been sharpened and your knowledge expanded. I think many of you leaders have been re-energised in your commitment in doing the kind of work that needs to be done. Hopefully as a result of this dialogue and the declaration made you have gathered and distilled ideas that can now put into practice for next year and beyond.

In order to do the kind of work that needs to be done; if we are going to make the ambition for gender equality live up to what it should be, rather than what it is for many people, just a noble and distant aspiration but not actually a reality.

I want to say a very special thank you to those who have been involved in this important dialogue. Particularly, I want to thank all the speakers which had presented to us many aspects of gender equality of various nations around the world. Especially to the President of WAY, Datuk Seri Mohd Ali Rustam huge leadership that you always give, a very courageous leadership, thank you so much.

This is a revealing agenda and dialogue we have had because we are dealing very often with voices that are silenced and some of them are very silent indeed. We really have to pull back a lot of layers before they will talk to us and be open to ensuring that we don't think that we have this whole thing rigidly boxed. Rigid boxes are the absolute anathema of all gender equality agendas.

Bias, bigotry, ignorance, insensitivity, intolerance or bullying ideologies are obstacles to gender equality and contribute to lives that are lived in pain, lived in frustration, and lived in under achievement. There is a lot of wasted life, a lot of wasted opportunity and it's a tragic waste because it's a waste for the person, a waste for their family, and for their community. It is a big waste for every single one of us as a society and frankly historically.

I think we are rightly in a hurry to put those times behind us and to get to the place and circumstances where we know that humankind will flourish, where the individual will flourish as never before. Equality of opportunity, which is the basic building block of that, will be a given and easily accessible and that wrap around equality system will be a given.

We're fortunate at the moment we have this remarkable confluence of peace and prosperity. The voices of our youths must be included in our discussions and planning. There is greater variety, greater diversity of needs being articulated. As the voices have broadened so our sensitivity and our knowledge have also broadened. So we have a lot to look forward to, as we try to build this kind of society where individuals do not have their lives circumscribed by false barriers, unjust impediments not of their making which prevent them from realizing their full potential.

The female genders that are still on low pay need these voices and need that new sensitivity as do our youths. The quicker we address issues like these the quicker they are able to make their fullest contribution which is the better for everybody.

We think of those who are still coping with major literacy problems which are the hangover from a very poor early education experience, who are still excluded even today. They are excluded from so many second chance education initiatives. There are many others who are overlooked and

neglected and who feel that their voice just can't penetrate that membrane of neglect.

We are not a society of clones. We are a society that functions as well as it does precisely because of the massive range of random skills, talents, perspectives, passions that over four million individuals, no two of them the same even if they are identical twins, pour into our civic society every day. We just wouldn't have the kind of extraordinary mix that we do with a dynamic at the heart of it if everybody looked the same, talked the same, felt the same, and believed the same. It just wouldn't be the place that it is.

We are a society though that does have a shared value system and a shared and common ambition for ourselves. We believe in the equal dignity of every human being. We say so in our constitution. We have a written constitution that says that we are about the business of establishing a true social order. I take that to mean a social order based on the full gender equality of every human being because I can't think of anything else that could be called a true social order.

So I think at the moment we do have a real and visible traction in our society, a momentum towards equality, a momentum towards the kind of society where everybody is included. We are still embarrassed, thankfully, about those who are excluded. It is a blot on this world we and our leaders have created. It is something that we commit ourselves to changing and to create that culture of opportunity for all.

This included the women who were told you can't do that because you're a woman and the men and women whose ethnicity or religion or sexual orientation placed them completely at the whim of others, out in the cold. It includes the disabled people who have been left to cope not just with disability which is a big enough thing to cope with in itself but with the attitudinal icebergs that have gathered around disability, condemning them forever to be spectators rather than right at the mainstream. But that was the past.

For some it is still the present. It simply is unacceptable that it could possibly be our future. So this dialogue of Youth and gender equality is the place where we reaffirm our commitment that the future is going to be a place where opportunity is opened up and where it becomes the wrap around gender equality system.

We will only get to that future when all of us are committed to pushing out of the way all the obstacles that remain in the way.

“Seamus Heaney put it brilliantly in a poem of his from the **Canton of Expectation and it's still very true**. Because there are still a lot of people out there who are hoping and expecting that their lives will get better and that someone will be their champion. He talks about those people, those champions, those advocates as having intelligence as brightened and unmannerly as crow bars.

Anyone of you who have ever used a crow bar will know that at the end of the crow bar the more hands there are, and the more push there is at the top of it, the quicker you will get the obstacle out of the way. That is what you're about- pulling together the energy and the commitment and the passion that will make sure we get these obstacles out of the way at the quickest speed we can and at the earliest possible opportunity.

So to you who have made this work your vocation and your mission I want to say a very big thank you and hope that the work that you have committed to will be crowned with success very quickly, the kind of success that will allow more people to believe that the world they live in isn't the world that just talks about equality but is the world that actually lives and means it.

Thank you!