

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

**At the Opening Ceremony of the Third Melaka International Youth Dialogue
Sunday, June 22, 2003
Century Mahkota Hotel, Melaka**

YAB Dato' Seri Mohd Khir bin Toyo, President of the Malaysian Youth Council
and Chief Minister of Selangor

YBhg Dato' Fuad bin Hj Hassan, President of the Asian Youth Council

Mr. Donald Charumbira, Secretary General of the World Assembly of Youth

Government Officials

Invited Guests

Ladies and Gentlemen:

I am pleased to welcome you to Malaysia, and to the state of Melaka, for the Third Melaka International Youth Dialogue. This annual event carries the theme of ICT for Youth Development this year.

Technology is another major element that is essential for any nation to achieve self-sufficiency and significance in the global marketplace. New ways of producing more and better goods need to be identified in order to become more efficient. Technology has the effect of catalyzing development, and even leapfrogging the development process. The developing world, or emerging nations as they now prefer to be called, needs technology in order to catch up with the rest of the world, and even to surpass it.

The consequences of being left behind in the digital revolution are serious and far-reaching... isolation from the global economy and lack of educational, scientific and technological advancements. Things are being done faster, easier, better and more efficiently through the use of technology.

The world is rapidly progressing towards an era of knowledge workers and knowledge economies. This is an era in which people work smart, more than it working hard. It is a generation that realizes that efficiency and effectiveness can best be achieved through technology.

Young people are perhaps the greatest torchbearers of the impending world of information and communication technologies. It is the youth that have the dynamism, energy, creativity and zeal that is needed to harness ICTs. Many, in particular the older generations often view technologies as a threat, and therefore find it difficult to embrace them as a way of life. This is why we believe that information and communication technologies are especially appealing to young people.

The various forms of ICTs can be utilized to tackle many of the developmental challenges facing youth. Challenges such as HIV/AIDS, unemployment, education, health and population, hunger, poverty, debt, environmental issues, peace, leisure and recreation, gender issues and youth participation in democracy and decision-making.

The global dissemination of information on HIV/AIDS, for example, has largely been made possible by the availability of the Internet as a medium for communication. And more recently, the SARS virus was very effectively tackled by a combination of quick ground action and international collaboration through mediums such as the Internet. Many organizations managed to obtain the latest information.

The same applies to the other areas of youth development. ICT is an enabler and catalyser, through which services may be delivered faster and more efficiently. This is why it has become imperative for governments to take concerted action to bridge the digital divide.

I hope that you may be able to pick up some ideas from Melaka in the area of ICT. In the realization of the potential of ICT for development, the Melaka State Government declared this year as our Year of ICT. As a result, we are promoting ventures and initiatives in the field of ICT to enhance the development of the state. We have therefore inaugurated the K-economy incubator in Melaka, as well as launched wireless internet access in many parts of the state. Through these initiatives, it is our hope that the state can develop its potential in all spheres of economic and social development, utilizing the power of ICT.

Likewise in the World Assembly of Youth, we have initiated several programmes and initiatives aimed at promoting information and communication technologies amongst our member organizations, and amongst youth in general. We are encouraging our member national youth councils to fully utilize the Internet for their communications, work planning and project implementation, and we are also assisting these countries to acquire resources for achieving connectivity.

Bridging the digital divide is an imperative for the developing world. Being left out could spell a serious and disastrous disadvantage for those countries that do

not quickly adapt to this age of information technology. In years to come, most commerce, communications, education and even social activity will be primarily web-based. To be left out of these developments is to risk being distanced and lost to the rest of the world.

There are certainly risks associated with ICTs. There are issues such as pornography, hacking and the possibilities of malice through the internet. There are threats to national sovereignty, moral integrity, economic stability and so forth. However, running away is not the answer to these challenges. It is important for countries to develop comprehensive National ICT Policies, which articulate clearly the vision of the respective nation in the field of ICT. All the potential challenges may be identified and counter-measures put in place. This will ensure that the respective country is not left behind in the ICT revolution, but that technological development is achieved without compromising the country or its peoples.

Youth are the ambassadors of IT, and the drivers of the knowledge economy. It is the young people who take a natural liking towards ICT, and who can lead major developments in this field. Many of the most significant developments in this field, and particularly in the field of software development, are attributable to young people. Some are so idealistic as to offer services for free, just for the good of ICT development. Examples such as Redhat Linux, Freeware and others show us that youth can utilize their energies in such positive ways.

The Melaka International Youth Dialogue this year therefore seeks to identify how youth and ICT can form a partnership for development. I hope that you will all participate actively and contribute towards the formulation of clear and practical recommendation for youth and ICT for development. The essence of the Melaka International Youth Dialogue is for young people to exchange ideas, interact, and develop policies and programmes. It is up to you, as individuals, to make the most of the opportunities provided at this Dialogue.

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, the National Information Technology Council, the World Youth Foundation and the Global Knowledge Partnership. 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 historic city.

I thank you.