

ASEAN Youth Forum on Innovation & Creativity (AYFIC)

“Youth and Innovation as Agent of Change”

18-20 April 2011

Labuan, Malaysia.

Topic: “Leadership and Innovation: The New Vision of a Youth Leader”

Presented by: Ediola Pashollari, Secretary General of the World Assembly of Youth

Distinguished guests,

Datuk Datuk, Datin Datin,

Participants of AYFIC,

Ladies and gentlemen,

Good morning everyone. It is indeed a privilege to be here among all of you and to talk about one of my passion, being an advocate for the youth globally. I sincerely would like to take this moment to thank the committee for the ASEAN Youth Forum on Innovation and Creativity and the Malaysian Innovation Foundation for their invitation to this wonderful and meaningful event.

Some of you may have been aware of the organization in which I am serving as the Secretary General of WAY, and for some this may be the first time you heard of the name WAY! Since its inception in 1949, World Assembly of Youth or WAY as it is known, is the international coordinating body of national youth organization and national youth councils, which aims to change and connect countries to knowledge, experience and resources to help youth build a better life.

WAY works for the promotion of youth and youth organizations in program areas such as: democracy, environment, human rights, population, health, drugs, community development, entrepreneurship, education and leadership training.

The programs are mainly organized from our Secretariat office in Melaka in collaboration with WAY members, Youth NGOs, Youth Ministries and UN agencies. Our aspiration through the various programs, that are held locally, regionally and internationally, WAY is in preparing and educating, youth and youth leaders to achieve their goals and help them to take a step forward towards achieving the Millennium Development Goals.

We have all gathered here in this beautiful island of Labuan for a purpose, for we have in our hearts the desire to see that the youth of our future are well prepared to face the many obstacles and be empowered and equipped as much as possible for the future. And yet at the same time, we do realize the many challenges that are faced by the youth of this world. We need to realize that their participation in our program is vital for the future of the world.

We have established many programs that are continuously building, encouraging and strengthening the youth and the young people. Through WAY Volunteer Program, we have enlisted over 500 young people from the ages of 20-35 to assist in WAY programs and activities around the world. They were chosen based on their skills, abilities, talents, availability and most of all a willingness to serve the communities of youth at a given event and as needed.

Their training preparation consists of working at events, developing organization skills, leadership skills and also how to respond to disaster and communicating cross culturally. Indeed this program has proved its effectiveness as when the Tsunami and other earthquake disasters hit the nation of Indonesia, our volunteers were there to help. They were also there to render help to the victims of China earthquake, the flooding of Myanmar, the struggles of Palestine and currently helping in raising funds to assist with regards to Tsunami in Japan. They were our hand of extension of hope, compassion and support to the victims of these nations.

Most of our volunteers have continued to be involved in their country's youth organization holding places of leadership in various areas. They had seen the work and the role that WAY has taken in meeting some of the major needs of youth around the world. I am happy to say, that we were able to pass the torch to these young people and the flame continues to be visible.

To be successful and well educated is one of the goals that all of us have and it is the same for the youth. They want success, riches, education and all the great things the world has to offer. With that as the background, the World

Youth Institute (WYI) was formed as the realization for education, training and development programs, is an essential aspect in helping our youth.

Thus far we have offered seven (7) Executive Certificate Programs in collaboration with local and international universities. The programs have brought in young people from more than twenty different countries to come and be trained. The topics presented were in the areas of Tourism Management, International Relations and Diplomacy, Leadership and Communications Skills, Entrepreneurship Development, Leadership and Society Program. This year we are organizing a few more educational and training programs to equip our young and future leaders.

There are so many significant events happening in the world that are facing the youth and hindered their development. Being aware of that we have created in different local, regional and international events this far, will help the young people to guide, combat issues, educate and to bring awareness to them and WAY members globally. The young people have had to face famine, droughts, wars, earthquakes, tsunamis, various types of discriminations including genders and poverty.

We at WAY, through many deliberations, forums and dialogues have developed different types of policies, resolutions and declarations against some of these battles or challenges that the youth faces. These documents were created to provide the tools needed to promote and to address the matters to all those that are willing to hear the voices behind these papers.

One of our main annual events that brings together youth from various backgrounds to engage in a dialogue on pertinent global youth issues is the Melaka International Youth Dialogue. Last year was the 10th Anniversary of the

dialogues. Pertinent issues that are fundamental to the youth were chosen as themes, such as Developing Human Capital; Youth and Tourism; Towards a Drug Free Generation; Youth and Gender Equality; Youth Leadership Power and its Influence to the Society, etc. The theme of this year's 11th Melaka International Youth Dialogue is "Shaping the Next Generation of Entrepreneurs" that is taking place on June.

Our goal has always been to prepare, bring awareness, train, educate and address issues that are at the heart and cause for/of youth around the world. These dialogues have given us that realm of opportunity to bring the awareness, discussions and action to the surface.

For every program that we offered through seminars, workshops and forums are given from the national level to the international level. ALL youths have the right to education and have the opportunity to access it in every possible way and we will be right there alongside them to make it happen.

If the youth leaders and their young people are not able to come due to lack of funds, and distance, we try our best to work with the youth organizations within that country and grant them the chance to attend and be involved.

We sincerely believed that supporting youth in their potential growth for any type of leadership can be a highly effective way to reduce youth unemployment and stimulate growth in their communities. That is why we are going all out in addressing the issues that are before them and develop the different avenues, on how we can help them combat it.

There are so many ways that we as organizations, youth leaders and communities leader can do to encourage the youth, raise up young leaders,

mentoring them, coaching them, giving them opportunities to work alongside us and be giving them exposure to working life. We just need to put any hidden agenda aside and give the youth our full support. They and you all here today deserve it! You are our future, carrying our goals and dream along with yours.

We lived in an exciting era, as there are so many opportunities to do, almost anything is available at our fingertips. To excel in anything that we do in life there has to be the existence of leadership process evident, whether in action or in thinking. Therefore, in today's environment we must assist or provide the avenue for our youth create and execute new innovation.

There are so many things around us that can distract our youth and as leaders, we need to be creative and innovative in reaching them. We need to bring the youth to part with what is happening and even come up with new plans, strategy and ways in implementing them.

We have all gathered here and had chances of integrating with one another and exchange of ideas. There is more to come as we continue to listen to other plenary speakers, discuss, and ask questions and giving feedback. What we are doing here is important to all of us. We all want to be challenged and excel in the things we do, but there are things we must face that requires changes in our thinking and outlook in order to proceed on the road to success.

To be a leader is a great aspiration and all of you here are leaders in different capacities and have great vision, creative ideas and plans. There are times when those beautiful creative ideas do not go beyond the board or the discussion room. There will be obstacles at times to bring forth those ideas to reality, because not everyone sees the same way, some things are sacred and many are not willing to sacrifice it.

I sincerely do appreciate and applaud the leadership of ASEAN Youth Forum on Innovation and Creativity. Creativity and innovation are necessary ingredients of being a leader and to stay ahead in what we are involved in our organization.

We have often used the words creativity and innovation interchangeably but it is not appropriate to do so. The reason being is that creativity is about coming up with ideas while innovation is about bringing ideas to life. In other words, we may come up and display creativity of an idea but it is through the process of innovation that those ideas become a reality.

When we line up leadership and innovation together we will get results because innovation is linked to performance and growth through the improvements in efficiency, productivity, positioning and market share. We have to push the envelope here because this concept will add value by changing old organizational forms and practices. This can be a dicey process as we will come against those who are comfortable with the way things are.

Though it may cause challenges, it is necessary for change to occur and when there are new creative ideas being shared and organizations do not innovate effectively on them, there will be great problems. There is a great need to create an innovation culture, so that we can continue to grow and stay ahead of the competition.

The beautiful thing about innovation is that, it's not the result of a lone genius but rather a collaborative process, where everyone from the different parts of the organizations or group, contributes to the creation and the implementation of new ideas.

The focus is on needs and opportunities, looking at achieving profitable operations by reinventing themselves to meet the current needs and demands. In order to accomplish this there must be a strategy for creating and innovative culture and process for the deployment of these innovations.

In order to develop the culture of innovation in the organizations, I strongly believe that we have to do the followings, as the course of action may help us as we work through the progression of change within all parties involved.

1. There must be an understanding of what innovation is all about?
2. A willingness to learn the characteristics of and innovative culture.
3. Discover the definition of the innovation needed for your environment or organization.
4. Benchmark against other organizations to learn what they have done to create a culture of innovation for themselves.
5. Study the current thinking trend and approaches for capturing ideas versus traditional methods.
6. Develop an innovation steering committee to oversee the process.
7. Create the vision for innovation within the context of your organization.
8. Identify the driving and restraining forces for innovation and from there you can know the path to take.
9. Develop a customized strategic innovation plan to navigate the journey of creative ideas and implementation of innovation.
10. Constantly review the action and processes required to put into operation the strategic innovation plan.

11. There must be an agreement on a procedure to identify, select and execute innovations.
12. Survey the barriers to re-shaping the organizational culture to be more innovative.
13. Generate or allow the process of innovation to grow in the organization, in other words; develop mechanisms to capture ideas and visions from everyone throughout the organization.
14. Initiate a process to create innovation teams to ensure that ideas and visions that are captured do get explored.
15. Implementation can be done by linking innovative ideas to the overall organization improvement strategies and measure the impact of innovation once it is in place.

The next step to consider is how to make the vision become reality; there has to be collaboration, and understanding of the general culture differences that can influence the process and the importance that organizational structure has on creating an environment that supports and believes in innovation.

In order to arrive at the necessary changes in the implementation of the vision there ought to be:

- The Art of Ingenuity (Creative thinking skills in action)
 - The creator of ideas must be both an artist and a scientist. Willingly asking the question: “ Is there a better way?” Applying their creative thinking skills and knowledge to pursue every possible way to innovate and perfect;
 - Challenge opposition tactfully;
 - Do not accept the status quo;

- Ability to use organizational efficiencies to drive new ideas and methods.
- The Pursuit of Perfection (Relentlessly)
 - Continuously and rigorously searches for an optimal solution – one that yields a high impact breakthrough;
 - Systematically pursuing perfection at every level, every department and in looking back at the objectives of the organization;
 - It takes many small steps to make enduring impact.
- The Rhythm of Fit (Consider the Culture and Demands)
 - Innovation has to fit the innovator, the times and the larger picture;
 - It must be a change that fits in the current time and environment;
 - The process of innovation that works in one place will not necessarily work in another. We must consider the creator and the culture.

In conclusion, a strong committed youth leader will work at creating an environment that supports innovation and drives it forward. To have a successful and impactful innovation, there has to be risk taking. Short term goals is not a good way to instigate innovation, it is the long term thinking process that will bring the ideas to fruition.

In helping youth leaders to achieve innovation in their respective organizations and to create the culture to support innovative thinking and to adopt a process for innovation is a major undertaking. It can seem daunting as to know where to begin. However, the most important step is just that – to take the first step.

Start by examining the current culture and determine from there “what are the necessary steps of change needed to foster and support the innovative thinking process in the organization?”. Get excited with the ideas and spread it all around and get feedbacks. Even a small initiative can help to demonstrate the possibilities of a more robust effort.

All of us and not just the youth alone must have a will to make a difference. Take the courage, risk and the boldness to lead your peers, your organization and others through this journey. Soon, others will want to emulate the path that you have charted and begin their own journey.

I sincerely hope that we will be able to come up with some constructive plans of working together in bringing forth a new generation of leaders that will be well trained, equipped and was given every opportunity to succeed. We are not encouraging interdependency but independency, the youth or young people making their own decision, planning and charting their own growth and that they will pass forward those opportunities to the next group of young leaders.

It has been said many times over, that “without a vision the people perish!” I know that youth leaders and organizations have many visions and they may need to revisit those visions again, creatively, passionately and persistently sees it in their mind’s eye the reality of it. We must work together, hand in hand to achieve a better and innovative future for all.

Thank you once again for the opportunity to share, elaborate and challenge all of you here to see that Leadership and Innovation requires critical thinking skills, persistency, vision, creativity and a willingness to take risk to stand for what is the betterment of our youth.

We at WAY are here to assist, advice and collaborate with any group or organization that are wanting to take this exciting path or journey.

Thank you so much for listening and I am sure there will be some questions from this. I hope that you are interactively listening and that it has caused your creativity juice to flow.

I sincerely challenged you to be a new generation of youth leaders that not only dream of change with many ideas, but that you will take those dreams and vision and transform them individually and collectively to be a great success at its optimum level for yourself and your organization.

YOU CAN DO IT!

YOU ARE THE NEW LEADER THAT INCORPORATES CREATIVITY AND INNOVATION!

Please do join us! www.way.org.my

Thank you!