

**SPEECH BY**

**THE RT. HON. DATUK SERI HJ. MOHD ALI BIN MOHD RUSTAM**

**AT THE OPENING CEREMONY OF THE  
MELAKA INTERNATIONAL YOUTH DIALOGUE - 2002**

**JULY 29 – AUGUST 1, 2002  
Hotel Equatorial Melaka**

**SALUTATION**

Mr. Joop Theunissen – Chief of the United Nations Youth Unit

Datuk R. Raghavan – Chairman of the Youth & Sports Committee of the State Government of Melaka

Mr. Norizan Shariff – Secretary General of the Malaysian Youth Council

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

Dr. K.J. John – Executive Director of the National Information Technology Council

State Executive Council members

State Government Officers

Delegates to the Melaka International Youth Dialogue

Ladies and Gentlemen:

I am pleased to welcome you all to the state of Melaka, to this second Melaka International Youth Dialogue. Melaka state is pleased to play host to this important annual meeting, and it is my belief that the meeting has great impact on youth movements worldwide.

This Dialogue is the international culmination of a series of regional and international meetings convened by the World Assembly of Youth on the subject of Youth Employment. We held the Latin American Youth Dialogue in Santa Cruz, Bolivia, which came up with the Santa

Cruz Declaration on Youth Employment. We then held the European Youth Dialogue in Brijuni, Croatia, which produced the European Youth Communique on Youth Employment. The African Youth Dialogue was held in Johannesburg, South Africa. The Asia-Pacific Youth Dialogue was held in Mongolia.

Simultaneous to this meeting, we are also holding the Latin American and Caribbean Rural Youth Seminar in Iretama, Brazil. This meeting seeks to identify how youth in rural areas can become catalysts for development. There will be some live networking and exchange of information between the two meetings.

After the first Melaka International Youth Dialogue last year, the state government agreed that this event is an important annual programme that deserves the full support of the state. Melaka is also modelled as a "youth-friendly" city that provides access and opportunities to young people.

The World Assembly of Youth is presently operating under a Millennium Plan of Action, under the theme of "Towards a Global Community." This is why at last year's dialogue, we deliberated over the issue of Globalisation and Youth. This year we have been focusing on the issue of Youth Employment, which is a serious and pressing global concern.

The reality is that Youth Employment is at the heart of any debate about Globalisation. The main arguments about globalisation are that freedom of movement of capital must be complemented by freedom of movement of labour. In other words, if investors want liberalisation then they must be prepared to have liberal migration policies. So this comes back to the issue of employment – and this is predominantly a challenge besetting the young people.

It is therefore no exaggeration to state that youth employment is central to a wider network of social, political and economic concerns.

There are more than one billion young women and men in the world today, the majority of whom live in developing countries. Across the globe, they are making important contributions as innovators, entrepreneurs, productive workers, consumers, citizens and members of civil society. They are at the forefront of the information and communications technologies revolution. They are societies' artists and athletes. Their culture enriches our societies and can be a force for positive change in cultural values. In short, young

people are an asset, invaluable partners for economic and social development, bringing creativity, enthusiasm and leadership to the table.

Rapid globalisation and fast-paced technological developments have already offered many young women and men unprecedented opportunities for education, innovation and productive, rewarding work. Those young people entering the work force form a new generation with great capacity, the best educated and trained generation of young women and men ever.

But for millions of others, globalization and technological change have created uncertainty and insecurity by exacerbating their already vulnerable situations, widening the gap between young entrants into the labour force and experienced workers, between those young women and men with well paid and productive work and those with low wage and poor quality jobs. Many young people are failing to gain a firm foothold in the labour market. They are ending up with no job at all, working fewer hours than they would wish or else working in low-paid, dead-end jobs, mainly in the informal sector, with little protection, security or effective voice, and no real prospects for the future. Their individual experiences are further influenced by factors such as gender, ethnicity, geographical location and the state of development of the countries in which they live. However, statistics, sobering as they are, reveal little of the heavy toll that unemployment and underemployment take on young women and men, their families and communities through economic hardship, human suffering, social exclusion, lost production and wasted human potential. Not surprisingly, there is a sense of frustration and hopelessness among those who feel left behind by the knowledge economy and the network society.

Young people are now asking that their voices be heard, that their issues be addressed and that their roles be recognized. Rather than being viewed as a target group for which employment must be found, they want to be accepted as partners for development, helping to chart a common course and shaping the future for everyone. Over the next ten years, their number will reach almost 1.2 billion, with relative declines in the youth population of industrialised and transitional countries being more than offset by the increases in developing regions, where the majority of young people will continue to live. The expected inflow of young people into the labour market, rather than being viewed as a problem, should be recognized as presenting an enormous opportunity and potential for economic and social development.

The state of Melaka obtained its name out of courage. When a Sumatran prince, Parameswara was fleeing Indonesia in the fourteenth

century, he rested under a tree at a place not far from here. As he lay there, he caught sight of a mousedeer being chased by a hunting dog. But instead of the mousedeer running away, it stood firm and fought away the dog. Parameswara was so impressed by this show of courage that he named this state after the tree that he was resting under at that point – the Melaka tree.

It is with the same courage and determination that we should tackle the youth employment challenge. It is seemingly insurmountable, complex and difficult. But we should not give up. We should continue to work towards the creation of more and better jobs for the youth.

Sixty-six million young people are estimated to be unemployed throughout the world, representing more than 40 per cent of global unemployment. However, this is only part of the picture. Hundreds of millions more work fewer hours than they wish, and still others, largely in developing and countries where 85 per cent of the world's young people live, work long hours with little gain and no social protection in the informal economy.

These statistics, sobering as they are, reveal little of the heavy toll that unemployment and underemployment takes on young people, their families and communities through economic hardship, human suffering, social exclusion and lost production.

Rapid globalization and fast-paced technological developments have offered many young people unprecedented new opportunities for education, innovation and productive and rewarding work. But, they have also added to uncertainty and insecurity by exacerbating already vulnerable situations, and widening the gap between those young people with well paid and productive work, and those with low wage and poor quality jobs. Many young people are failing to gain a firm foothold in the labour market or end up confined to low-paid dead-end jobs that offer no real prospects for the future and little protection, security or effective voice. Some are excluded from both the labour force and education and training systems. Not surprisingly, there is a sense of frustration and hopelessness among many who feel left behind by the new knowledge economy.

Nevertheless, experience shows that when given the opportunity, young people can be intrepid innovators, productive workers, enterprising entrepreneurs, active union members and valued consumers. They are at the forefront of the information and communication technologies revolution. They are societies' artists and athletes. In short, young people are invaluable partners for social development bringing creativity, enthusiasm and

leadership to the table. Permanent and profound damage is caused when their contributions are excluded.

The challenge for all societies is to generate sufficient opportunities for all young people to obtain decent and productive work that makes use of their talents, experience and aspirations – and does so under conditions of freedom, security, equality and human dignity. This challenge is indeed enormous. There are two choices. Take appropriate action now and reap the rewards in terms of productive, stable, secure and inclusive societies; or do little and continue to pay massive human, social and economic costs.

Generating employment opportunities for young people, and thereby eliminating youth unemployment and underemployment, is a widely shared goal. However, there has been little movement beyond rhetoric to concrete and effective action. Efforts need to be infused with a sense of urgency, vision and resolve, and guided by practical experience.

There are undoubtedly many paths to success. However, across the variety of countries, there are a few common elements that are seen as essential: political will, long-term commitment, employment-intensive macro-economic policies and, equitable social and labour policies. These elements must be supported by effective institutions.

There is therefore a great need to launch a dialogue amongst young people, and to mobilize partners for action. There is a role and responsibility for everyone—governments, the private sector, youth organizations, employers, workers, community groups and civil society coalitions—in providing decent work for young people.

Perceptions about young people need to change. Youth are not merely a target group for which employment must be found; they are partners helping to chart their own course for the future. They are champions of social change and democracy and they bring these values to the workplace.

This is the rationale of the Melaka International Youth Dialogue. We believe that young people are a force for change. We do not want to have a top-down approach when it comes to youth. We want a bottom-up approach that is of the youth, by the youth and for the youth.

We must realise that youth are an essential part of development, and that by investing in youth, we will create a richer and more stable society. In the eyes of young people, the foundation of development is the guaranteed availability of food, clothing and shelter. It is a situation in which the health and safety of a population is a sustainable

provision, and where systems are in place to transfer knowledge to future generations.

But development, at the same time, is not a static situation. If the basic human needs are met, development implies a progression, a continuous movement towards a better existence. Development is a process. Development is not a goal but the act of improving the human condition, and upgrading it continuously through the learning experiences of man. In the same sense, human resource development is not an end, but a continuous process in which mankind advances his capacities and skills to survive and make use of his environment.

The world youth population, defined by the United Nations as age 15 to 24 - is estimated to be 1.2 billion, almost 20% of the total world population. The majority of the world youth population, about 85% of youth, lives in developing countries. The development of youth is a critical element if sustainable development is to occur. There is presently a global deficit as far as developmental opportunities for young people are concerned.

Young people in all countries are both a major human resource for development and key agents for social change, economic development and technological innovation. Their imagination, ideals, considerable energies and vision are essential for the continuous development of societies in which they live.

As youth are full of potential and energy, they are motivated and imaginative, and have a natural drive for action. Youth are the movers and shapers of the world to come. Let us pause and think about what the world will be like fifty years from now. If you see a world of hope and brightness, where everyone has food, clothing, shelter, education and health - then it is because it is we the youth that are going to make this dream come true. The best way of ensuring that the world of the future can be brighter is to realise the potential of developing young people, and enabling them to contribute to overall human development.

Youth are the first to recognise and encounter new needs and gaps in present situations. Always in the forefront, youths give fresh ideas and innovation to present existing systems, making adaptability and acceptance easier for the population at large. While the veterans may know the skills of the establishment, the young possess the new knowledge, and together with their own imagination and innovation,

formulate and create new ways of doing things, thereby improving existing work systems.

It is therefore the youth themselves that can bring about a change to the global employment challenge. Youth have the innovation and skill to create jobs, to create income, and to create sustainable livelihoods.

I therefore challenge you to make the most of this meeting. Make new friends, make new partnerships... but above all please make new jobs for the youth!

I thank you.

End.