

SPEECH BY
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PRESIDENT OF THE WORLD ASSEMBLY OF YOUTH

AT THE FIRST GENERAL ASSEMBLY SESSION OF THE
XIV WAY GENERAL ASSEMBLY
SAFARI HOTEL
WINDHOEK, NAMIBIA
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WAY Vice Presidents

WAY Secretary General

WAY Executive Committee Members

WAY Members and Delegates to the General Assembly

Invited Guests including Honourable Ministers and Government Officials

Ladies and Gentlemen:

This is a special moment when we are all gathered as the General Assembly of the World Assembly of Youth, an occasion taking place for the fourteen time since the formation of WAY in 1949. This organisation is steeped in history, and we are again making history today as we gather to chart a way forward for WAY.

It is pleasing to see the national youth councils present here. We are grateful for your commitment to the organisation and its objectives. I do hope that all of you will

participate actively in this General Assembly, to ensure that we emerge a stronger, more objective, revitalized organisation.

Let me begin by sharing our history with those of you that may not be very familiar with the World Assembly of Youth.

WAY was formally established in Brussels in August 1949. The first Council of WAY, as a culmination of a series of preliminary meetings, met there to ratify the Charter, signed by representatives of national coordinating committees of 29 countries who thus became the founding members of the organisation.

The end of the Second World War created a surge in global desires to create new international contacts. Young people were also eager to create a new international society, which would put aside all the tensions and divisions of the Second World War. It was in this climate that WAY was created.

The first WAY General Assembly was held at Cornell University, Ithaca, USA, in 1951. This meeting will be remembered for the full support that it gave the liberation struggles in colonized nations, and to the anti-apartheid struggles. It was there that WAY outlined its programmes for liberation movements and developing countries.

WAY grew rapidly both in terms of membership, strength of national committees and range of activities. Membership doubled between 1950 and 1965. WAY was active in the promotion of international youth work. It formulated statements and programmes that were a clear expression of the growing international solidarity among young people. The more dominant part of WAY's programmes soon became national and regional seminars or workshops, including specialised professional conferences where participants could exchange experiences concerning skills, techniques and training methods to be used in youth movements. WAY became a forum where youth leaders could meet and listen to prominent political leaders in their own regions, as well as to the best experts available in the various subject fields discussed.

The WAY Secretariat was first established in Brussels, then it moved to Paris, then back to Brussels, then to Copenhagen, and in 1999 it moved to Kuala Lumpur and then finally to Melaka in Malaysia. We are now completing construction of a U\$2 million building which will be the permanent headquarters of WAY.

WAY is a living testimony that illustrates that it is possible for international organizations to be based in a developing country. The stereotype of international organizations being based only in developed countries is no more applicable to us. We believe it is actually better for them to be based in the developing world where they can be free of influence from the unilateral forces of the world. This is why we have even called for the United Nations to relocate to a developing country after the United States displayed its indifference to the UN system when it invaded Iraq.

The past four years, under the WAY Millennium Plan of Action, have seen WAY growing into a stronger force and enhancing its status after the decline that had taken place in the late 1990s.

The WAY Executive Committee adopted our Millennium Plan of Action in July 2000. This was to guide WAY and its programmes and activities until this General Assembly. I am pleased to say that many of our targets were met, and success has been achieved in most of the WAY programmes organised to date.

Among the key goals of the Millennium Plan of Action were for WAY to lobby for the elimination of unjust and unsustainable economic practices that are leading to, and perpetuating third world poverty. We resolved to conduct training that will empower young people to start and run their own globally-competitive enterprises.

Other objectives were:

- To create awareness of the need for racial and religious tolerance

- To provide humanitarian and emergency relief to communities suffering due to hunger, poverty, natural disasters, economical and political crises
- To promote responsible behaviour among the youth, to combat the spreading of HIV/AIDS, to reduce the use of drugs including tobacco, to discourage juvenile delinquency and to create a physically and mentally healthy Community
- To encourage educational development of youth, improved educational delivery systems that reduce or eliminate illiteracy
- Foster gender sensitivity in youth organizations, as well as lobbying for equitable access to leadership positions by both men and women
- To undertake environmental conservation programmes that will ensure that the future generations will have a habitable and natural world as beautiful as it is today
- To instill the values of democracy, popular government, transparency and accountability in the youth, and ensure that this is observed at all levels of leadership.

By and large, I believe that we have achieved success in most aspects of the Millennium Plan of Action.

Today our main task as WAY is to ensure that all national youth councils are operational and viable entities, which are properly administering their youth development activities. There has been a noticeable decline in activities of national youth councils, with many ceasing to exist. This is largely due to the absence of donor funding that was once available at the time these national youth councils were formed.

One important factor is that a significant amount of money was provided to youth organizations during the Cold War. This money, however, was really meant to bring the youths to the warring sides of the war. Once the Berlin wall crumbled, there were no more funds made available to youth organizations, and today many have folded.

The United Nations has also scaled-down its budgetary allocations to NGOs, and this has affected youth NGOs. The multiplicity of non-governmental organizations has also compromised the actual funds flowing to youth organizations.

It is our role and function as the World Assembly of Youth to revitalize these youth organizations! Through capacity-building and establishment of permanent sources of income, national youth councils can become active and critical partners in the development process.

We should not have to limit our programmes and activities due to budgetary constraints, but we should rather focus on delivering high-value programmes for young people. The challenge is therefore to establish fixed sources of income that will ensure organizational viability for the long-term.

Engagement of governments is of critical importance. In coming years we would like to organise forums where national youth councils can meet with ministers of youth and senior governmental officials, to discuss their mutual roles in youth development. We need to have direct contacts with governments, which will also facilitate our interventions at intergovernmental platforms such as at the United Nations.

It is my hope that this General Assembly will help us to gather our thoughts and ideas on the future of WAY, and to develop a concrete action plan outlining the way forward until 2010. I urge all members to participate actively, not just at the General Assembly, but also throughout the years. It is not enough for members to only communicate with us once in three or four years when there is a General Assembly or important meeting. We need to cultivate a culture of communication and constant interaction that will enhance our cooperation.

WAY has a big global mandate, and it is important for us all to work together towards the fulfillment of that mandate. It is too big a task for just the president along, or the secretary general, or the executive committee. Our role in global affairs

needs the input and cooperation of all members, to ensure that we achieve the maximum potential that we have.

Let me also take this opportunity to thank the Executive Committee that has served with me since the 13th WAY General Assembly. Our Vice-Presidents Bossoondyal Nurdkenswarsing from Mauritius, Hooghart Desire from Suriname, Zage Filipovski from Macedonia, Felix Gonzalez-Polar from Peru, Dr. Firdous Ashiq Awan from Pakistan, Nana Yuliana from Indonesia, Imad Muttar from Iraq, Francis Ganyaglo from Ghana, Mohammad Fazlul Haque from Bangladesh and Bhuban Pathan from Nepal. I would also like to thank WAY Secretary General, Donald Charumbira, who comes from Zimbabwe, for his hard work and results-oriented administration which has seen WAY re-establishing itself in the world arena.

I would also like to thank all WAY staff, volunteers and supporters who have assisted the organisation throughout the years. It is your efforts that enable us to have successful programmes and activities!

I do hope that we will have fruitful and constructive deliberations at this General Assembly, which will feed into the Millennium Plan of Action Part 2, our guide to 2010 and beyond.

I thank you.