

**SPEECH BY
YAB DATUK SERI HJ. MOHD ALI BIN MOHD RUSTAM**

**CHIEF MINISTER OF MELAKA
AND
PRESIDENT OF THE WORLD ASSEMBLY OF YOUTH**

**AT THE OPENING CEREMONY OF THE
5TH MELAKA INTERNATIONAL YOUTH DIALOGUE
MONDAY 27 JUNE 2005**

**MELAKA INTERNATIONAL TRADE CENTRE, AYER KEROH,
MELAKA**

Honourable Datuk R. Raghavan, State Executive Councillor for Youth and Sports

Honourable Pohamba Shifeta, Deputy Minister of Youth, National Service, Sport and Culture, Republic of Namibia, also Executive Committee Member of the World Assembly of Youth

Honourable Idrus Marham, President of the Indonesian National Youth Council, Vice President of the World Assembly of Youth and the Asian Youth Council

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

Mr. Norizan Shariff, Secretary General of the Malaysian Youth Council and the Committee for Asean Youth Cooperation

Ladies and Gentlemen:

It is a great pleasure to wish you all a warm welcome to Malaysia, and specifically to the historic city of Melaka. We are gathered here for the 5th Melaka International Youth Dialogue, an annual event that brings together youth leaders from all around the world. I am happy to see many familiar faces, as well as new faces, amongst the participants of this meeting.

The Melaka International Youth Dialogue (MIYD) is an annual meeting convened by the World Assembly of Youth as a platform for young people to discuss pertinent social, economic and political issues. Since 2001, the MIYD has been convened annually in Melaka, through a long-standing collaboration between the World Assembly of Youth, the Melaka State Government and the Malaysian Youth Council.

The theme that we have selected for this dialogue is **Strengthening National Youth Councils for Global Development**. This theme was selected as it has become increasingly evident that national youth councils need urgent revitalization in order for them to be able to

function effectively. The donor support of the 1980s has declined, and thus many national youth councils are facing viability problems.

In this dialogue we would like to look more closely at the factors that influence the success or failure of national youth councils, and how we can develop solutions to overcome challenges and consolidate strengths.

According to the World Assembly of Youth definition, a national youth council is the national umbrella-body of youth organizations in that particular country. It should be an open, inclusive body, catering for the diversity of its population. It should be the apex body of youth structures, and therefore the main representative of youth in the respective country.

The full members of the World Assembly of Youth are national youth councils, therefore making WAY the international coordinating body of national youth councils. Our role is to ensure that national youth councils remain viable and active.

This Melaka International Youth Dialogue comes shortly after the fourteenth WAY General Assembly held in Windhoek, Namibia, in February this year. We would now like the MIYD to become the annual meeting of WAY members. I am pleased to note that many WAY members are here with us today, from more than 40 countries. I am sure that this dialogue will produce some fruitful deliberations and outcomes.

This meeting should result in the strengthening of the membership base of WAY by enhancing the capacity of national youth councils. We also hope that this meeting would produce an international framework for collaboration of national youth councils at subregional, regional and international levels.

The Role of National Youth Councils in Global Development is much greater than many may realise. Firstly, it is evident that youth are the majority of the population of any country. Without engaging young people, no country can achieve development.

The United Nations adopted the Millennium Development Goals as the key targets for global development. Young people need to be directly involved in this process and to participate actively in national plans to meet the UN MDGs.

One of the critical Millennium Development Goals is to eradicate extreme hunger and poverty. Many young people live in poverty in urban slums and in underdeveloped rural areas, becoming the biggest group living in extreme hunger and poverty. National youth councils have a role in ensuring that young people in all parts of the country are reached by advocacy and campaigns to eradicate hunger and poverty.

Another critical goal linked closely to young people is the need to combat HIV/AIDS, Malaria and other diseases. Most new HIV/AIDS infections occur in young people below the age of 25. Every five minutes a young person is infected with HIV. There is also a substantial number

of young people living with HIV/AIDS. Youth need counseling, education and peer support to overcome challenges posed by the HIV/AIDS pandemic.

Care for the environment has recently become a major global issue. The consequences of neglecting long-term environmental sustainability include global warming and environmental degradation. Youth are the leaders of the future, and are therefore the main stakeholders of the environment. Young people should be involved in environmental conservation activities to ensure that they appreciate the need for ensuring long-term environmental sustainability. Such an approach will reap manifold benefits in the future.

Maternal health and adolescent reproductive health are challenges that particularly face young women. High incidences of infant mortality, death of young women during delivery of children, and a lack of understanding of sexual and reproductive health needs are factors needing urgent address around the world. Better community education would result in lower infant mortality and greater preparedness of young mothers for their maternal roles.

On the same note of young women, gender equality is still an evasive goal at all levels of governance. Through national youth councils, equal opportunities should be given to both genders to participate in decision-making and leadership processes. The World Assembly of Youth is presently authoring a Gender Policy which we will encourage our members to adopt in their countries.

Youth Employment is another major challenge besetting the developing world. High numbers of unemployed youths give rise to a host of social and economic problems. National Youth Councils should lobby their governments and private sectors for implementation of action plans to stimulate youth employment. Youth should also be trained to be self-reliant and able to start and run their own businesses, rather than being dependent on becoming employees. Youth enterprise is one of the most effective way of reducing national unemployment.

For youth development goals to be achieved, it is important for partnerships to be established with governments, the private sector, non-governmental organizations, the donor community, and other players in the development sector. Youth need to be provided with avenues for participation in decision-making processes that would enable them to fully represent the needs of young people.

With the rapidly globalizing world, a major concern is the widening divide between the Haves and the Have Nots, and the divide between the Knows and the Knows Nots. Whilst on one extreme are opulent people with the latest gadgets and technologies from cyberspace, on another extreme are people without sufficient food, shelter and clothing. Youth should advocate for an equitable process of globalization that does not only serve to make the rich richer and the poor poorer.

Ladies and Gentlemen:

You therefore have many issues to discuss at this Melaka International Youth Dialogue, and I am sure that your deliberations will be stimulating and fruitful. The outcome document of this dialogue – The 5th MIYD Declaration – will be circulated to all WAY members as the blueprint for youth participation in global development processes.

I encourage you all to contribute to all the discussions, to share ideas and experiences so that we emerge with the best practices and models that other national youth councils can use.

Your experience in Melaka this year will also be enhanced by a full-day tour of Melaka tomorrow. We would like you to visit the key institutions in Melaka and appreciate the developments taking place here. Our goal is for Melaka to be a developed state by the year 2010, and we are moving fast towards that goal.

Among the places you will visit is the new head office of the World Assembly of Youth, at the World Youth Foundation Complex. The WAY secretariat will move into this building as soon as all the final touches are complete. This will then become the permanent secretariat of WAY.

I would like to convey my thanks and appreciation to the team that has organised this Melaka International Youth Dialogue, under the leadership of the WAY Secretary General. We thank all volunteers and contributors for your support!

I would also like to thank all of you for making the time and effort to attend the Dialogue, and for your contributions towards the discussions and deliberations.

May you have an enjoyable stay in Melaka and Malaysia, and please take time to enjoy the food, the sights and sounds of this country.

I thank you.

ENDS.