

SPEECH BY

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8TH MELAKA INTERNATIONAL YOUTH DIALOGUE ON

“TOWARDS A DRUG-FREE GENERATION”

29 JUNE 2008

Government Officials

Members of the Diplomatic Corps

Invited Guests

Ladies and Gentlemen:

I welcome you all to this farewell dinner, which makes the conclusion of the 8th Melaka International Youth Dialogue. I take this opportunity to express my gratitude and appreciation to all participants for your presence and involvement in this Dialogue.

The 8th Melaka International Youth Dialogue assembled 120 young people from 20 nations from various regions of the world. During the last four days we have listened to several reports from around the globe of the current situation of drug

abuse. With this foundation in place we broke up into smaller groups which gave us an opportunity to discuss each of the issues at a more profound level the workshop focused on various aspects of the drug abuse problem namely:

- Role of NGOs
- Role of Government
- Role of Private Sector
- Models for Reducing Supply
- Demand Reduction
- Awareness

The results of these deliberations were compiled by a drafting committee to develop a declaration. This declaration is a solid blueprint for youth councils and youth organisations on how they can tackle the problem of drug abuse. This would not have been completed without the visit to the rehabilitation center, actually seeing drug users served in putting a human face to this Dialogue and reminded us what we are fighting so hard to achieve. If anyone was in doubt or felt that the efforts were futile I hope that you will return with renewed resolve to champion the cause of a drug-free generation.

During the course of the Dialogue we were briefed on the relation of drugs to contraction of diseases worst of all HIV/AIDS. The report from the Red Crescent in Malaysia showed how last year there 80,939 cases were reported and 80 per cent of these cases were drug related.

In Mauritius, which has the highest rate of drug abuse, the HIV/AIDS infection rates rose to % percent among Intravenous Drug Users (IDUs) and an overall upward trend reaching 1.8 percent within the 15-49 age group. Concerns were raised over pregnant sex workers on intravenous drug use. Findings showed that there are as estimated 17,000-18,000 Injecting Drug Users of whom 4,800 are commercial sex workers and 2,871 are prisoners.

We were informed of the success of harm reduction as a method of combating the effects of drug abuse. Harm reduction measures in use are needle exchange programs and drug substitution therapy and they have a success rate of up to 60 percent though relapse of drug users may reduce the success rates to 46 percent.

Several solutions were suggested such as peer counselling: mobilisation of youth to reach out to other youth, positive role model, community-based development and even mandatory treatment. However, one solution does not apply to all countries and there is need to adopt strategies to suit our varying environments.

At the opening of this Dialogue I stressed that the input is only as good as its input and that the deliberations are made more enriching by the sharing of knowledge and experiences. Now I would like to stress the importance of implementing the declaration that we adopted this morning in your respective countries. Without implementation all our efforts will be wasted.

I want to thank all who have worked so hard to make this Dialogue a success including volunteers, speakers, facilitators, partner organisations and supporters.

Special recognition goes to Melaka State Government, the Asian Youth Council, the Malaysian Youth Council, the National Anti-Drug Agency, P1 and AGIBS. We also thank our President and the Chief Minister of Melaka, Rt. Hon. Datuk Seri Ali bin Mohd Rustam. For his continued commitment and support of youth and issues that affect young people.

Form the feedback I have received, you have enjoyed your stay here. For those who are leaving travel safety and those who are staying for some time, enjoy your stay here.

Thank you.