

Speech by YAB Datuk Wira Hj. Mohd Ali bin Mohd Rustam on the occasion of the Launching of World Health Day and the World Assembly of Youth's World Health Day poster on "*Healthy Minds for a Healthy Generation.*"

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An estimated 400 million people today suffer from mental or neurological disorders or from psychosocial problems such as those related to alcohol or drug abuse. One out of four people who turn to the health service for medical care suffer from such disorders.

Youth is a time of experimentation, of tapping on new potential, and on trying out the untried. It is at this time that many fall into the vicious cycle of alcohol and drug dependence. Eventually, the dependence leads to Mental Health complications in later life. Mental disorders are becoming more common, often beginning in the teenage years and affecting many sufferers for the rest of their lives.

Worldwide, 5% of all deaths of young people between the ages of 15 and 29 are attributable to alcohol use. In Europe, one in four deaths of men in the age group 15 to 29 is related to alcohol. In parts of Eastern Europe, the figure is as high as one in three. All in all, 55 000 young people in this region died from causes related to alcohol use in 1999. That is a shocking and tragic waste.

Globally, 140 million people are suffering from alcohol dependence. Around the world, alcohol takes a heavy toll – damaging public and private life with countless traffic fatalities and injuries, home fires, drownings, suicides and violent crimes. But also debt problems, ruined careers, divorces, birth defects, and children with permanent emotional damage. The sanity of an entire generation can be compromised by its exposure to drugs and excessive alcohol.

Data from across the world suggests that a culture of drinking among young people may now be increasing also in developing countries. While overall rates of adult per capita consumption are falling in many countries, young people are too often drinking excessive quantities of alcohol to intoxication in single drinking episodes.

The economic burden of excessive alcohol use is also significant. The cost of under-age drinking in the United States alone has been estimated by the US Department of Justice at nearly \$53 billion in 1996. Another study showed that the annual costs for alcohol-related hospitalization in the state of New Mexico were USD 51 million while the annual alcohol taxes were only USD 35 million.

According to the latest UN Human Development Report, alcohol-related vehicle crashes alone are estimated to cost the Namibian economy at least one percent of gross domestic product yearly. Alcohol use among young people is a serious problem, but we know that we can considerably reduce the harm through

effective action, such as the awareness campaign that the World Assembly of Youth is launching here today.

Community action programmes and information and counselling may contribute to creating awareness about the danger of alcohol. A WHO study in ten countries showed that simple counselling of people who were known to drink heavily, but who were not alcohol dependent, had a significant positive effect on both average alcohol consumption and intensity of drinking.

For youth we need positive alternatives: better access to sports and recreation in and out of school. Information activities have little or no effect, however, unless they supplement policies that influence access and use of alcohol such as taxes and age limits.

Today we are witnessing the growth of a generation where children are exposed to falsely positive images of alcohol, but our youth are a key target of the marketing practices of the alcohol industry. Youth have become an important target for marketing of alcoholic products. When large marketing resources are directed towards influencing youth behaviour, creating a balanced and healthy attitude to alcohol becomes increasingly difficult.

In the face of such manipulation, young people are in need of positive role models, and productive recreation to encourage them to refrain from such

alcohol consumption. This is the only way in which Healthy Minds for a Healthy Generation can be achieved.

The other major cause of Mental Illness is that of drugs and substance abuse. The illicit drug trade touches millions of lives in both developed and developing countries. Its most negative impact is concentrated amongst the vulnerable and marginalized of our societies. The UN estimates that some 180 million people worldwide - 4.2 per cent of people aged 15 years and above - were consuming drugs in the late 1990s; this figure includes 144 million consuming cannabis, 29 million people consuming stimulants, 14 million people taking cocaine and 13 million people abusing opiates, 9 million of whom were addicted to heroin.

However, for the first time in recent history, global production of drugs such as heroin and cocaine is no longer growing, but shows signs of stabilization and even decline. Global coca leaf and cocaine manufacture continued to fall in 1999 by 7 per cent and was 20 per cent lower than in 1992/93. Illicit opium production, the raw material for the manufacture of morphine and heroin, declined in 2000 by at least 17 per cent and was some 15 per cent lower than in 1994. Production of opium poppy and coca leaf is concentrated in an ever smaller number of countries.

This makes concerted efforts, assisted by alternative development, an increasingly viable option to achieve the targets set out in the 1998 Special

Session of the General Assembly which aim at a substantial reduction if not elimination of such production by the year 2008. Progress is also being reported from the demand side, where there are signs of stabilization or even decline in some of the main markets.

Mental, behavioural and social health problems, involving hundreds of millions of individuals, have become much bigger contributors to the global health burden. More than 288 million cases of alcohol-related mental disorders have been recorded to date. Accompanying this have been up 20 million attempted suicides, and one million completed suicides.

The burden of mental and neurological problems is likely to become even heavier in the coming decades and will raise serious social and economic obstacles to global development unless substantive action is taken.

Mental health and well-being have nearly always had a lower priority than communicable diseases and other 'physical' maladies, despite their significant impact on mortality. But we are now in a position to make use of the wealth of knowledge and technology that allows us to effectively manage, treat and prevent a wide range of mental health, neurological and substance use problems.

It is time to review priorities and commitments and to recognize that substantial benefits will accrue through investing in mental health. Many communicable diseases are now under control, but only as a result of public awareness and a commitment to address the problem.

I am pleased to announce that the World Assembly of Youth is today launching its global Mental Health campaign, with the publication of a poster depicting the theme Healthy Minds for a Healthy Generation. Tomorrow, the World Assembly of Youth will be holding workshops in Anguilla, Macedonia and Peru, to create awareness of the need for Mental Health, and the prevention of drug and alcohol abuse. Also tomorrow, the World Assembly of Youth is holding a Global Internet Chat on Mental Health. Youths from around the world are welcome to join the chat at our website.

I thank you all for coming to this special occasion, and hope that you will take up the challenge to inculcate in yourselves and your communities the aspirations for Healthy Minds for a Healthy Generation.

I thank you.