

**SPEECH BY WAY SECRETARY GENERAL, DONALD
CHARUMBIRA, AT THE OPENING CEREMONY OF THE
FOURTH MELAKA INTERNATIONAL YOUTH DIALOGUE**

JUNE 28, 2003

PUTERI RESORT, AYER KEROH, MELAKA

Ladies and Gentlemen:

It is my sincere pleasure to welcome you all to the Fourth Melaka International Youth Dialogue!

On behalf of the World Assembly of Youth and the Organising Committee of this Dialogue, Welcome to Malaysia, Welcome to Melaka and Welcome to the Melaka International Youth Dialogue!

We have a total of 220 registered participants from 43 countries attending this Dialogue, from a broad spectrum of youth organisations. One of the unique aspects of this Dialogue is the sheer diversity of participants, which creates an environment for sharing experiences and learning about different cultures and traditions.

The Melaka International Youth Dialogue is the brainchild of the Rt. Hon. Datuk Seri Hj. Mohd Ali bin Mohd Rustam, Chief Minister of Melaka and President of the World Assembly of Youth. Datuk Seri

declared Melaka a Youth State, and invited young people from all over the world to converge on Melaka for international youth events. We then formulated the concept of an International Youth Dialogue, based on an open and inclusive global outreach, as one of the flagship annual programmes of the World Assembly of Youth.

The key word in this event is Dialogue. We are here to exchange views, to learn, to network and to define areas of mutual agreement. The Melaka International Youth Dialogue is a platform for young people to gather and consider issues of important to them.

The theme for this year is *Youth Participation in Decision-Making Processes*. The choice of this theme arose out of our evaluation of the efficacy of resolutions that we pass as youth organisations, and how far they are implemented. We discovered an over-arching concern about the way resolutions passed at youth events and youth conferences may never be implemented. This is when we concluded that for the desires of young people to become a reality, it is necessary for them to participate in decision-making processes.

The United Nations World Programme of Action for Youth to the Year 2000 and Beyond, included a section on *Youth Participation in Decision-Making Processes and In the Life of the Society*, this is one of the aspects that this Dialogue will evaluate.

Many of us will find that the reality is that young people are often tokenized or left out of decision-making processes that affect their present and future well-being. As the major shareholders of the future, it is imperative that young people be involved at all levels of decision-making within their communities, countries and the world at large.

Our involvement must be mainstreamed to ensure that youth are at the forefront of the fight against HIV/AIDS. That youth are at the forefront of the fight against poverty. That youth are at the forefront of preserving the environment. At the forefront of promotion of democracy. At the forefront of enterprise and employment creation!

Any society that fails to realise the importance of engaging young people in decision-processes will reap its reward in the form of future generations of mediocre leadership that has no appreciation of societal development needs.

The case for youth participation is further fortified by the unipolar world order, which is creating an environment where young people have no progressive ideology and platform to participate in world affairs. Under the bipolar regime, both fronts were actively engaging youth in their campaigns to promote their ideologies. Whether or not any of the Cold War fronts was right or wrong, the fact is that, youth were actively engaged in various levels of decision-making.

It is important for young people to once again be central pivots in meeting present-day global challenges. One of our main motivations should be the implementation of the UN Millennium Development Goals, for it is the youth of today who will become the leaders of that world envisioned by these Goals.

Young people must therefore become the central activists for the world to achieve the UN Millennium Development Goals! Some of these goals include eradicating extreme poverty and hunger, achieving universal primary education, promoting gender equality and empower women, combating HIV/AIDS, ensuring environmental sustainability and developing a global partnership for development. Achievement of these goals needs full and active youth participation!

It is hoped that the Melaka International Youth Dialogue will be platform for us to renew our commitment and strengthen our determination for full and active youth participation!

I would like to express my appreciation to the Melaka State Government, sponsors and co-organisers of this Dialogue, the Ministry of Youth & Sports, UNICEF, the Malaysian Youth Council and Asian Youth Council. To all volunteers, working committees, secretariat staff, speakers, facilitators and programme partners, thank

you for your invaluable support and contribution towards the 4th Melaka International Youth Dialogue.

Finally I would like to extend especial thanks to our Rt. Hon. Chief Minister and WAY President, Datuk Seri Hj. Mohd Ali bin Mohd Rustam. Thank you Datuk Seri for your commitment to the young people of the world, and for opening up this state for young people from various nations to have this opportunity for dialogue and networking. I may not be able to express my thanks in words, but let me use a traditional Malay poem or *pantoon*, which says:

*Pulau Pandan Jauh ke Tengah
Gunung Daik bercabang tiga
Hancur badan di kandung
Tanah budi baik di kenang juga*

This is to say words alone cannot express our gratitude, but your deeds will always be remembered.

To all participants, thank you for coming to the Dialogue, enjoy yourself and please participate fully and actively!

I thank you.