

**SPEECH BY DONALD CHARUMBIRA, WAY SECRETARY GENERAL  
AT THE OPENING CEREMONY OF THE  
2<sup>ND</sup> MELAKA INTERNATIONAL YOUTH DIALOGUE  
"YOUTH EMPLOYMENT"  
JULY 30, 2002**

Ladies and Gentlemen:

The issue that we are gathered to address today is both urgent and important. It is an issue that touches each one of us here very personally. And it is an issue that is key to the stability of our social and economic fabric.

Youth employment is perhaps one of the most challenging issues facing youth around the world. More than one billion jobs need to be created between now and 2010 to accommodate young workers entering the labor force and reduce unemployment.

The number of young people globally is about to become the largest in history relative to the adult population. At present, more than 50 percent of the population is under the age of 25, or just over three billion individuals are youth or children.

Despite our relative numbers, youth face numerous and growing challenges in the global community:

- More than 153 million young men and women are illiterate;
- A high percentage of youth never complete school; two out of 3 dropouts are young girls;
- In most developing countries less than 25 percent of girls attend secondary school;
- Up to 60 percent of all new sexually transmitted infections (STIs), including HIV/AIDS, are with youth;
- Youth have access to poor natural resources, with limited use and quality (including water and air); and
- The majority of youth in developing countries are involved in the informal sector and have limited chances of earning a decent living and breaking out of the poverty cycle.

Furthermore, the majority of youth, on average 80 percent, is economically active, but is underemployed. This implies that they do not earn a sufficient amount, or work for a sufficient period of time to

earn a living and to contribute to their community. To compound this further, the ILO estimates that there are approximately 70 million unemployed youth and in general terms, they assert that the youth unemployment rate is double that of the adult population

The problem of youth unemployment is rapidly assuming dangerous proportions in many countries as their economies and educational systems are unable to accommodate these numbers of youth. In many developing countries even low levels of economic growth are not predicted, and thus limit their labor absorptive capacity. Indeed shrinkage of their economies, and related livelihood opportunities are expected. Economists advise that the current system will not meet the supply of labor available.

Thus, youth unemployment is an urgent global issue that has repercussions in demographic, social, economic, health, and environmental spheres. These impacts will be felt at the individual, familial, national and global levels if not addressed, and this is a prescription for disaster.

Given that the majority of the world's unemployed live in countries with minimal welfare systems, no employment equates to no income and therefore no food, no shelter, no medicine and none of the other basic necessities of life. In countries where family represents the only safety net, the unemployment of those that should be key breadwinners extends the negative financial impact of unemployment to entire families.

But youth unemployment has other national and global impacts notably increased violence, crime and political instability. Desperation can drive many people into living outside the law both to survive and as a means of expressing dissatisfaction at the apparent neglect of their very existence. Many of the world's unstable countries are also those with very high youth unemployment rates.

If provided with an enabling environment and opportunities, youth in both developed and developing countries can be key agents for social change, economic development and technological innovation. Youth bring with them boundless energy, imagination, creativity, ideals, and a limitless vision for their future and the societies in which they live. If not utilized, they are a wasted resource. Thus, it is imperative that youth are harnessed as part of society. This can be achieved through providing sustainable and decent employment and livelihoods opportunities for them.

The World Assembly of Youth hopes that this Melaka International Youth Dialogue shall act as a catalyst for action. This is the starting point of a determined & concerted march towards more and better jobs for the young people. Through this meeting, we hope to generate dialogue amongst youth leaders, and to collate the views into a comprehensive action plan for youth employment.

Our work does not end at this meeting, it is only the beginning of our quest for addressing the global youth employment situation. We are all challenged to return to our countries and implement the resolutions obtained from this meeting.

I thank you all for coming from all four corners of the world, and hope that you participate actively and enjoy this second Melaka International Youth Dialogue.

I thank you.