

SPEECH BY CHAIRMAN OF MELAKA STATE YOUTH AND SPORTS DEPARTMENT

On behalf of the Melaka State Youth and Sports Department I wish you *Selamat Datang*, or *Welcome* to all delegates attending the 8th Melaka International Youth Dialogue. We are pleased to work together with the World Assembly of Youth on various programmes and in particular this Dialogue that has become the foremost annual event for youth.

One of our objectives is to promote understanding and cooperation among the youth. Such an event is of great importance to us as it convenes together youth not only from one country or region but from around the world and gives them a platform to exchange ideas and come up with meaningful solutions to problems affecting the youth and that can be implemented in various countries.

This year's theme *Towards a Drug-Free Generation* is important as it recognises that drugs are a real danger to society. Drugs can be so alluring to the youth because they promise an escape from frustrations and come under the guise of having fun. In reality drugs have devastating effects and cause an increase in crime, endanger health and often may result in death.

Indeed, this theme is in line with the Malaysian government's goal of achieving a drug-free society by 2015. However, for any goal worth achieving there are several obstacles and this particular goal received a number of setbacks. A 2007 report in the *International Journal of Drug Policy* shows how the initial response to illicit drugs in Malaysia was largely punitive.

However, this punitive drug policy did not cause a decline in drug abuse. In fact in 2004/2005 period there was a substantial rise in the number of drug users in the country. Even worse was that

two-thirds of the HIV/AIDS cases were found to be among the injecting drug users.

This alarming trend resulted in a review of the drug policies and eventually led to a gradual shift from purely punitive measures that often resulted in incarceration to a balance of drug enforcement and treatment that has produced positive results.

The successful piloting of substitution therapies is cause for genuine hope in the rapid development of such interventions.

The National Anti Drug Agency (AADK) reported that the total number of individuals and repeat offenders arrested and found to be addicted to drugs dropped by 36.5 per cent in the first half of 2007 when compared to a similar period last year. Statistics from the National Drug Substitution Treatment (NDST) Registry revealed that more individuals are seeking addiction treatment with the number of cases registered in the first half of 2008

increasing by 60 per cent to 17,930 patients in June from 10,726 patients in the corresponding period last year.

During the course of this Dialogue I am certain that much more will be discussed about drug abuse and how to control and even abolish use of illicit drugs. My hope is that my brief insight into the Malaysian situation may serve as a blueprint and give some idea as to some of the methods that can be used in dealing with drug abuse and striving towards a drug free generation.

Finally, I hope that not only will you have a productive Dialogue but will also enjoy yourselves especially during the arranged tour of this beautiful and historic city Melaka.

Thank you.