

SPEECH BY YAB DATUK SERI HJ. MOHD ALI BIN MOHD RUSTAM

CHIEF MINISTER OF MELAKA

AND

PRESIDENT OF THE WORLD ASSEMBLY OF YOUTH

AT THE OPENING CEREMONY OF THE

8TH MELAKA INTERNATIONAL YOUTH DIALOGUE

FRIDAY 27TH JUNE 2008 AT 0900 HRS

LEGACY HOTEL, MELAKA

WAY Executive Committee Members,

Representatives of WAY member organisations,

Invited Guests,

Melaka International Youth Dialogue participants,

Ladies and Gentlemen:

It is with great pleasure that I welcome all of you to the 8th Melaka International Youth Dialogue.

This Dialogue has become one of the most popular annual youth events, and it continues to attract participants from all corners of the world. This has

fulfilled the World Assembly of Youth's vision of developing an annual platform for young people to meet and exchange ideas.

Over the years we have had various Dialogues on issues such as Globalisation, Employment, Information and Communication Technologies, Youth Participation in Decision-Making Processes, and Strengthening National Youth Councils for Global Development, Developing Human Capital and Youth and Tourism.

The theme for this year's dialogue is **Towards a Drug-Free Generation**. This theme was selected to address the issue of drug abuse which continues to cause devastating effects in our societies and the lives of many individuals. Kofi Annan, the former Secretary General of the United Nations put it this way: "Illicit drugs destroy innumerable individual lives and undermine our societies. Confronting the illicit trade in drugs and its effects remains a major challenge for the international community."

Before we take a brief look at the efforts that have been undertaken to curb drug abuse it is important to define what drugs are. Technically speaking drugs are chemical substances that affect the normal functioning of the body and/or brain. Illegal drugs are those that are so harmful that countries across the world have decided to control them and have passed several international laws in the form of United Nations conventions that specify which drugs are controlled. The three multilateral drug treaties that form the backbone of the international drug control system are the:

- Single Commission on Narcotic Drugs 1961,
- Convention on Psychotropic Substances 1971, and the
- Convention against the Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances 1988.

How effective are these treaties? To answer this question we may look at a report by the executive director of the United Nations Office of Drugs and Crime, Antonio Maria Costa, where he said that the drug control system has succeeded in containing drug use to less than 5 per cent of the adult population of the world. However, he also noted that not all of the fundamental objectives of the drug control conventions have been met and some of the targets still remain elusive.

Indeed, many critics have cited several weaknesses in the United Nations drug control system specifically related to the functioning of the key organs and to the outdated character of several treaty provisions.

The Transnational Institute pointed out in a Drug Policy Briefing that shifting patterns between licit and illicit drug markets have been an ongoing phenomenon in which the distinction between recreational use, self-medication, addiction, prescription or diversion is often more confused than acknowledged.

Recent trends indicate an increase in abuse of prescription medication such as in North America where pharmaceutical opiates are starting to conquer part of the heroin market.

So, what is the way forward?

- Hope lies in a stronger emphasis on drug prevention and treatment. Drug abuse prevention programmes are effective if they respond to the needs of a society and involve all relevant sectors of a community. These programmes should also include evidence-based interventions, as well as strong monitoring and evaluation components.

- Secondly, there is a need to identify trends that will help in the design of effective drug control policies. The Commission on Narcotic Drugs (CND) stresses that the lack of sustainable drug information systems hinders monitoring of emerging epidemics and the implementation of responses to problems based on reliable evidence.
- Third: alternative development. The United Nations General Assembly Special Session (UNGASS) Action Plan on International Cooperation on the Eradication of Illicit Drug Crops and on Alternative Development defines this as "a process to prevent and eliminate the illicit cultivation of plants containing narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances through specifically designed rural development measures in the context of sustained national economic growth and sustainable development efforts in countries taking action against drugs, recognising the particular socio-cultural characteristics of the target communities and groups, within the framework of a comprehensive and permanent solution to the problem of illicit drugs."
- Fourth is demand reduction. This should be done in realisation that cutting down on supply continues to be a major difficulty for drug law enforcement authorities. Focusing on those who are afflicted by drug addiction is the key to unlocking the problem.

In an address to the Drug Policy Alliance which advocates legalisation of drugs, Antonio Maria Costa, executive director of UNODC made the following statement: "Is a drugs free world attainable? Probably not. Is it desirable? Most certainly, yes." He went on to argue, and I agree, that we should scepticism and opposition an various fronts we should seek to eradicate drug abuse in the same way that we all aspire to eliminate poverty, hunger, illiteracy, diseases, and wars.

Ladies and Gentlemen:

Over the years I have reiterated the importance of the youth to the sustainable development of a nation's economy. Drugs seek to undermine this development. Drug abuse affects the freedom and progress of young people, the world's most valuable asset. It is my hope that during this Dialogue you will discuss a wide range of topics related to drugs and particularly the role the youth can play in striving towards a drug free world. There are several speakers through whom we will gain beneficial information and your participation during the workshop sessions and the sharing of your ideas, views and experiences will be invaluable in defining how successful this Dialogue will be.

Ladies and Gentlemen:

I would like to thank all participants for travelling to Melaka to attend this Dialogue. Your support is appreciated, and I hope that you benefit from the experience, and that you return to your countries with new ideas that you can apply there.

I would also like to thank the entire team that has organised the dialogue; members of the steering committee, preparatory committee and organising committee. We are also grateful to all sponsors without whom this event would not have been possible.

I trust that you shall all have an enjoyable stay here in Melaka, and that you will always have fond memories of your experience here.

Besides the main programme of the Dialogue, I urge you to take time to enjoy the food, the sights and the sounds in Melaka and in Malaysia.

With these words, I declare the 8th Melaka International Youth Dialogue officially opened.

Thank you.