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**CHIEF MINISTER OF MELAKA AND
PRESIDENT OF THE WORLD ASSEMBLY OF YOUTH**

**AT THE OPENING CEREMONY OF THE
4TH MELAKA INTERNATIONAL YOUTH DIALOGUE**

MONDAY JUNE 28TH 2004 AT 9AM

Ladies and Gentlemen:

Let me begin my speech by bidding a warm welcome to all international and local participants who have traveled far and wide to attend this Melaka International Youth Dialogue.

As we say in our traditional Malay welcome: *Selamat Datang!* Welcome to Melaka!

It is said that if you visit this historic state of Melaka, it means that you have visited Malaysia. If you come to Malaysia and never visit Melaka, then it means that you have not actually been to Malaysia. So I am pleased to confirm that all of you gathered here for this Dialogue have actually visited Malaysia!

The Melaka International Youth Dialogue is one of the key calendar events of the World Assembly of Youth. It is a platform for us to engage in active dialogue and to exchange views and experiences on youth issues. The MIYD has evolved over the years to become the major annual youth event in the world.

This is the fourth International Youth Dialogue that has been organised by the World Assembly of Youth. The first was in 2001, under the theme of Youth and Globalisation. In 2002 the Dialogue was on Youth Employment. In 2003 we focused on Youth and ICT. Each of these Dialogue sessions were unique and memorable experiences, that have resulted in the international popularity of this event.

I am therefore confident to say that the Melaka International Youth Dialogue shall continue to be the major annual meeting of youth, and it will continue to grow in importance.

In year 2004, the theme of the Melaka International Youth Dialogue is *Youth Participation in Decision-Making Processes*. The reason why we selected this theme is because we realised that the most important thing for youth leaders and youth organizations is to ensure that their decisions, their concerns and their desires, are addressed in all levels of decision-making processes.

Every year, hundreds of resolutions and declarations are produced at various youth meetings worldwide. The question is whether these resolutions and declarations are ever implemented. In many cases, they remain resolutions on paper, and are never addressed after the meeting creating them.

At the individual level, young people are often marginalized from the decision-making processes of their societies and communities, although they are vital contributors to development. Young people are not only the future, but they are also the present. They should therefore be engaged if there is to be continuity in any society.

It is against that background that we are gathered here to address the issue of *Youth Participation in Decision-Making Processes*. We would like to see how youth participation can be enhanced so that young people are included or at least considered in decision-making processes.

I quote the words of Kofi Annan, Secretary General of the United Nations, who said, quote:

“No one is born a good citizen; no nation is born a democracy; Rather, both are processes that continue to evolve over a lifetime. Young people must be included from birth. A society that cuts itself off from its youth severs its lifeline; it is condemned to bleed to death.” Unquote.

We must therefore strive to ensure that young people are included in all levels of decision-making within their societies. Youth are the life blood of any nation.

The case for youth participation in decision-making becomes more compelling when we consider the dynamics of the youth population in the world. Nearly half of all people in the world are under 25. Children and adolescents comprise 39% of the world's population.

In their large numbers, young people also face a lot of challenges in their societies.

Poverty is amongst the major challenges facing young people. The number of youth in the world living in poverty in 2000 was estimated to be 238 million representing almost a quarter of all youth in the world. Almost half of the world youth population lives on less than U\$2 per day.

There are further challenges in the area of education. In 2000, approximately 82 million young women and 51 million young men were illiterate. An estimated 130 million children, entering adolescence, are currently not in school. Of these, nearly 60 per cent are female.

The unintended consequences of unprotected sexual relations and early childbearing weigh heavily on the health and lives of adolescents and youth. Obstructed labour,

HIV infection, and sexually transmitted infections rank among the ten leading causes of early deaths among young people living in developing countries.

An estimated 11.8 million young people aged 15-24 are living with HIV/ AIDS. This is almost one third of all people with HIV/ AIDS. Of the over 6,000 HIV/ AIDS infections that occur daily, more than half are occurring among young people. Half of all those with HIV become infected before their 25th birthday. Many of them die from AIDS before they turn 35, leaving behind a generation of children to be raised by grandparents or young siblings.

Youth employment is another major challenge facing young people. Youth account for 40 per cent of the world's total unemployed. Youth unemployment rates are 2 to 3 times higher than the rates of adults.

As the future leaders of the world, youth are also affected by the deterioration of the environment and ecosystem. The effects of global warming, climate change and endangered flora and fauna are going to affect young people, who are inhabitants of the future world, more than anyone else.

There are therefore many challenges facing young people in the world today. Success in addressing these challenges can only be achieved if youth are engaged in decision-making processes, to ensure that they have a say in their communities, societies, nations and the world at large.

The UN World Youth Report 2003 articulates various ways in which young people can become active in decision-making processes in various ways.

Firstly, youth can be provided with training as researchers, and then undertake independent research on issues of direct concern to them. This has proved to be a successful model of youth participation in many countries. It has proven that youth have the capacity to find solutions to their own problems.

Secondly, youth can be involved in programme design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation. They may share their views and experiences to help design and implement programmes that target their specific needs; by playing a key role in monitoring and evaluation, youth are able to help the programme and its objectives and adjust to changing circumstances as necessary.

A third area is that of peer representation and advocacy, where youth are provided with opportunities to elect or be elected by their own peers to serve as advocates and lobbyists for youth concerns. This is also closely related to the area of campaigning and advocacy, which affords young people the chance to get together and articulate their experiences and concerns. Youth would therefore be able to develop campaigns that involve mobilizing young people from the grassroots to national or international levels.

Fourth, youth can develop and manage their own organizations. As it stands, there are a growing number of youth organizations in the world, which are defining their own structures, policies and priorities for action.

Finally, youth should also be more actively included in political structures. Young people may be provided with opportunities to run for parliament, to join policy-making bodies and to be involved in various aspects of public administration. Their dynamism will ensure that any vision will be able to last for the long term.

I am sure that throughout the Melaka International Youth Dialogue, you will be able to identify more areas for youth participation in decision-making processes.

The most important thing about the Dialogue is for you to exchange views and to interact with youths from various backgrounds. It is these interactions that will deliver new opportunities for you to return and improve yourselves and organizations in your countries.

The World Assembly of Youth is pleased to once again convene this Dialogue. It is committed to ensuring that this platform continues to be the rallying point of youth worldwide.

The Melaka State Government is also committed to supporting this Dialogue, in line with our vision to boost tourism and promote Melaka as an international destination for Meetings, Incentives, Conferences and Exhibitions. There are numerous facilities in the state, including the recently-built Melaka International Trade Centre, which aims to be a centre of world trade. The state is also positioning itself to be a hub for biotechnology, manufacturing technology as well as information and communication technology.

Tourism remains Melaka's greatest offering, being the historic state of Malaysia. Several state-of-the art tourism facilities and resorts exist throughout the state.

I hope that many of you will return to Melaka as tourists, traders or investors in the near future. Melaka aims to be a developed state by the year 2010, and we are actively working towards that vision.

Ladies and Gentlemen:

Global progress requires youth participation, for us to achieve development. This means that we need an intergenerational cooperation. Let us therefore use this fourth Melaka International Youth Dialogue to ensure that the case for youth participation is strengthened and implemented by our organizations and countries.

I would like to express my gratitude towards all who have supported this event, including the Ministry of Youth & Sports, the Malaysian Youth Council, the Asian Youth Council, UNICEF and all other partners and contributors. I would also like to

pay tribute to the WAY staff and volunteers who have put a special effort to ensure that this Dialogue is a success.

To all of you, who have traveled from far and wide, I wish you the best in the discussions and dialogue sessions! I am convinced that the fourth Melaka International Youth Dialogue will be a successful event!

I thank you!