

SPEECH BY

**HON. SENATOR TAN SRI MOHD ALI MOHD RUSTAM,
CHAIRMAN OF WORLD YOUTH FOUNDATION**

**AT THE
OPENING CEREMONY
OF
INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON CHILD MARRIAGE:
“STRENGTH IN UNITY, GIRLS ARE NOT BRIDES – A
GLOBAL YOUTH PARTNERSHIP TO END CHILD
MARRIAGE”,
TEMASEK HOTEL, MELAKA, MALAYSIA**

A VERY GOOD MORNING TO

**MR. ROBB STEWART
SECOND SECRETARY
HIGH COMMISSION OF CANADA IN MALAYSIA**

DATO' LIM SUE BENG

**MR. MOLOBE IKENNA DANIEL
NIGERIA**

**MS. PALLAVI PAREEK
EDUCATIONIST AND FEMINIST, CLOUDTRAIN**

**MR. SULAIMAN RAMEEZ
PROGRAMME OFFICER – INTERNATIONAL YOUTH
COUNCIL SRI LANKA CHAPTER, SRI LANKA**

**MR. MANAS K DOWLANI
GLOBAL HEADQUARTERS, INDIA**

**MS. OMMERA AHMED
CHILD AND YOUTH PARTICIPATION OFFICER
ECPAT INTERNATIONAL, BANGKOK**

**MS. ROSLINA CHAI SAN SAN
SINGAPOREE**

**MS. VARSHA K. AJMERA
CHIEF OPERATIONS OFFICER
WORLD YOUTH FOUNDATION**

**DR. VASANTHA KUMARI
INCAD FOUNDATIONS, INDIA**

**DR. GEETHA PREMKUMAR
H-KRAFT INTERNATIONAL, INDIA**

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN,

**SELAMAT DATANG AND WELCOME TO MELAKA, A
UNESCO WORLD HERITAGE CITY.**

**YOU HAVE COME FROM ALL OVER THE WORLD TO BE
HERE TODAY, AND I AM VERY GRATEFUL TO YOU FOR
MAKING THE JOURNEY.**

**YOU REPRESENT YOUTH FROM 22 COUNTRIES AND YOU
BRING ALONG WITH YOU ENORMOUS WEALTH OF
KNOWLEDGE AND EXPERTISE. LET'S MAKE THE
FULLEST POSSIBLE USE OF IT! I HAVE HIGH
EXPECTATIONS FOR THE CONFERENCE'S OUTCOME.**

CHILD MARRIAGE NOT ONLY HOLDS GIRLS BACK, DEPRIVING THEM OF THEIR HEALTH, EDUCATION AND A CHANCE TO PROSPER, BUT IT ALSO HOLDS BACK THEIR FAMILIES, COMMUNITIES AND THE NATION.

ALMOST HALF OF ALL CHILD BRIDES WORLDWIDE LIVE IN SOUTH ASIA; AND 1 IN 3 ARE IN INDIA, ACCORDING TO THE LATEST UNICEF REPORT NEARLY HALF OF THE GIRLS IN SOUTH ASIA ARE MARRIED BEFORE 18 AND EACH YEAR, 15 MILLION GIRLS ARE MARRIED BEFORE THE AGE OF 18. THAT IS 28 GIRLS EVERY MINUTE ACCORDING TO THE REPORT BY GIRLS NOT BRIDE, A GLOBAL NGO.

THIS YEAR'S THEME, “STRENGTH IN UNITY, GIRLS ARE NOT BRIDE – A GLOBAL YOUTH PARTNERSHIP TO END CHILD MARRIGE” IS PARTICULARLY RELEVANT TO OUR EFFORTS.

NOT ONLY DOES IT BRING ATTENTION ON THE ISSUE THAT BRING US ALL TOGETHER, BUT IT DOES SO BY HIGHLIGHTING THE IMPORTANCE OF PARTNERSHIP WITH YOUTH.

THIS CONFERENCE IS ONE IN A SERIES OF ACTIVITIES THAT WORLD YOUTH FOUNDATION HAS UNDERTAKEN IN AN EFFORT TO RAISE THE AWARENESS ON GENDER EQUALITY.

ACHIEVING GENDER EQUALITY AND EMPOWERING YOUNG GIRLS AND CHILDREN IS AN INTEGRAL PART OF THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS (SDGS) WHICH WAS RECENTLY ADOPTED BY THE UNITED NATIONS.

WITH A GLOBAL POPULATION OF OVER 1.8 BILLION YOUNG PEOPLE BETWEEN THE AGES OF 10 AND 24 YEARS OLD, THE ROLE WHICH YOUNG PEOPLE CAN PLAY IN THE ACTUALIZATION OF THE SDG'S REMAINS CRUCIAL AND VERY IMPORTANT.

GOAL 4 ADDRESSES ENSURING INCLUSIVE AND EQUITABLE EDUCATION AND PROMOTING LIFELONG LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES FOR ALL, AND GOAL 5 FOCUSES ON ACHIEVING GENDER EQUALITY AND EMPOWERING ALL WOMEN AND GIRLS.

THESE 2 GOALS REMAIN VERY ESSENTIAL TO THE REASON WE ARE ALL HERE AT THIS CONFERENCE, AND TO ADDRESS CHALLENGES FACING YOUNG GIRLS WHO

RATHER THAN BEING SENT TO SCHOOL TO BE EDUCATED, ARE BEING MARRIED OFF AND ARE EXPECTED TO PLAY ROLES OF FULLY GROWN WOMEN.

MALAYSIA VIEWS CHILD, EARLY AND FORCED MARRIAGE (CEFM) AS A HARMFUL PRACTICE THAT THREATENS THE LIVES AND FUTURE OF GIRLS AROUND THE WORLD, VIOLATING THEIR HUMAN RIGHTS, DISRUPTING THEIR EDUCATION, JEOPARDISING THEIR HEALTH, MAKING THEM MORE VULNERABLE TO VIOLENCE AND LIMITING THEIR PARTICIPATION IN SOCIETY AND THE ECONOMY.

IN 1995, MALAYSIA RATIFIED THE UN CONVENTION ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD (CRC), WHICH UPHOLDS THE CIVIL, POLITICAL, ECONOMIC, SOCIAL, HEALTH AND CULTURAL RIGHTS OF ALL CHILDREN BELOW 18 YEARS. THE TREATY WAS ADOPTED BY THE UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY ON 20 NOVEMBER 1989.

THE CRC IS BASED ON FOUR CORE PRINCIPLES, NAMELY THE PRINCIPLE OF NON DISCRIMINATION, THE BEST INTERESTS OF THE CHILD, THE RIGHT TO LIFE, SURVIVAL AND DEVELOPMENT.

THE GOVERNMENT OF MALAYSIA HAS ALSO RATIFIED THE CRC OPTIONAL PROTOCOL ON THE SALE OF CHILDREN, CHILD PROSTITUTION AND CHILD PORNOGRAPHY AND THE OPTIONAL PROTOCOL ON THE INVOLVEMENT OF CHILDREN IN ARMED CONFLICT IN 2012.

MALAYSIA HAS A LEGISLATIVE, ADMINISTRATIVE AND POLICY FRAMEWORK TO CATER FOR THE PROTECTION AND NEEDS OF CHILDREN AND THE PROMOTION OF THEIR PHYSICAL, MENTAL, INTELLECTUAL AND EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT.

THE FEDERAL CONSTITUTION SETS OUT THE BASIC HUMAN RIGHTS STANDARDS, WHICH ALSO EXTEND TO CHILDREN. THESE INCLUDE LIBERTY OF THE PERSON (ARTICLE 5); PROHIBITION OF SLAVERY AND FORCED LABOUR (ARTICLE 6); AND RIGHTS IN RESPECT OF EDUCATION (ARTICLE 12).

IN 2001 MALAYSIA ENACTED THE CHILD ACT 2001 TO FULFILL ITS OBLIGATION UNDER THE CONVENTION ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD (CRC).

IN THE SAME YEAR, MALAYSIA ESTABLISHED THE

NATIONAL COUNCIL FOR THE PROTECTION OF CHILDREN, WHICH ADVISES THE GOVERNMENT ON CHILD PROTECTION ISSUES WHILE THE NATIONAL ADVISORY AND CONSULTATIVE COUNCIL FOR CHILDREN ACTS AS A NATIONAL FOCAL POINT FOR CHILDREN'S WELLBEING AND DEVELOPMENT

THOUGH MUCH PROGRESS HAS BEEN MADE IN MANY COUNTRIES ON CHILD MARRIAGE, MUCH MORE NEEDS TO BE DONE. IF WE DON'T ACCELERATE OUR EFFORTS, THE NUMBER OF CHILD BRIDES GLOBALLY WILL DOUBLE BY 2050, AND AFRICA WILL BECOME THE REGION WITH THE HIGHEST RATES OF CHILD MARRIAGE WORLDWIDE.

WE SHOULD ACCELARATE OUR EFFORT TO STOP CHILD MARRIAGE BECAUSE IT HAS A SEVERAL GRAVE IMPACTS ON A COUNTRY'S ECONOMY, GIRLS AND FAMILIES.

I URGE EVERYONE OF YOU TO STAND UP AGAINST CHILD MARRIAGE. THIS IS NOT SOMETHING TO PUT OFF ANY LONGER, THE TIME TO DO SO IS NOW!

AS YOUTH ORGANIZATIONS, WE HAVE A UNIQUE OPPORTUNITY TO ACT ON THIS MOMENTUM AND ACCELERATE OUR EFFORTS TO HELP CHANGE THE LIVES OF GIRLS AND YOUNG WOMEN ALL OVER THE WORLD.

ENDING CHILD MARRIAGE REQUIRES WORK ACROSS ALL SECTORS AND AT ALL LEVELS. IT REQUIRES US TO UNDERSTAND THE COMPLEX DRIVERS BEHIND THE PRACTICE IN DIFFERENT CONTEXTS AND ADAPT OUR INTERVENTIONS ACCORDINGLY.

AT A LOCAL LEVEL, YOUNG PEOPLE SHOULD EMPOWER THEMSELVES AS AGENTS OF CHANGE WHICH CAN BE AN EFFECTIVE AND EMPOWERING PROCESS.

YOUTH ORGANIZATION SHOULD ALSO EMPOWER YOUNG GIRLS AND WORK DIRECTLY WITH THEM TO GIVE THEM THE OPPORTUNITY TO BUILD SKILLS AND KNOWLEDGE AS AN EFFORT TO END CHILD MARRIAGE.

YOUTH GROUPS AND NGOS CAN RAISE AWARENESS BY ENCOURAGING DIALOGUE BETWEEN YOUTH AND COMMUNITY LEADERS AND BUILDING THE CAPACITY OF YOUNG PEOPLE BY ENGAGING NGOS, SCHOOLS,

LOCAL COMMUNITIES AND THE MEDIA.

SUCH INITIATIVES ENSURE ACCESS TO KNOWLEDGE AND EDUCATIONAL SERVICES THAT EQUIP YOUTH WITH BETTER DECISION MAKING SKILLS, WHICH CAN HELP TO PREVENT EARLY FORCED MARRIAGE.

CONFERENCES LIKE THIS OFFER THE ADVANTAGE OF NETWORKING AND I ENCOURAGE YOU TO INTERACT AND LEARN FROM EACH OTHER.

THE WAY FORWARD CAN BE NO OTHER THAN BY PARTNERSHIP – COLLABORATION, SHARING OF KNOWLEDGE AND INFORMATION TO WORK TOWARDS A COMMON GOAL – STOP CHILD MARRIAGE.

YOU HAVE THE POTENTIAL TO CHANGE THE WORLD, AND YOU MUST MAKE SURE THAT WE TOGETHER CREATE AN ALLIANCE THAT CAN MAKE A FUNDAMENTAL SHIFT IN THE WAY WE WORK.

I WANT TO TAKE THIS OPPORTUNITY TO THANK EVERYONE WHO HAVE WORKED HARD FOR THIS CONFERENCE.

A SPECIAL RECOGNITION TO THE CO-ORGANIZERS OF THIS ACTIVITY: THE MINISTRY OF YOUTH AND SPORTS MALAYSIA, MINISTRY OF WOMEN, FAMILY AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT, THE INTERNATIONAL YOUTH COUNCIL, COMMONWEALTH YOUTH COUNCIL, ECPAT INTERNATIONAL, ASIAN NGO AND MAHKOTA MEDICAL CENTRE.

I WISH YOU EVERY SUCCESS IN OVER THE NEXT FOUR DAYS.

THANK YOU.

20th May 2016, Temasek Hotel, Melaka, Malaysia