

*Welcoming Speech
By Varsha Ajmera
Chief Operations Officer
Malacca Straits Hotel, Melaka*

**A Very Good Evening
Datuk Hj. Ab Karim bin Hj Sulaiman
Melaka State EXCO for Welfare, Unity Youth and Sports
(Pengerusi Jawatankuasa Negeri Kebajikan, Perpaduan, Belia &
sukan)**

**Dignitaries
Speakers,
Guests
Donors
Members of the Press
Participants**

A warm welcome to Historical Melaka – the cultural melting pot. It's great to have all of you here today.

On behalf of the Foundation's Chairman, Rt. Hon Datuk Seri Mohd Ali Rustam, I convey his warmest regards to all of you. He sends his heartfelt apologies for not being able to attend today's dinner due to conflicting schedules.

The World Youth Foundation (WYF) "*an NGO in Special Consultative Status with the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations*" is an international non-governmental organization, whose aims are to promote research, development and documentation of youth programmes beneficial to youths worldwide.

The Foundation, established in Malaysia, with an international focus is an independent NGO and it's work is in accordance with the Foundation's MAA – our guiding principle. Good governance and transparency have been the core values we value in the work that we do.

The Foundation is proud to be the owner of the World Youth Foundation Complex, the World Youth Foundation Hostel and all

upcoming construction on its land, which was a gift by the Melaka State government in 1994.

The Foundation seeks to support the work of the UN and the World Programme of Action for Youth to the Year 2000 and Beyond as well as the Millennium Development Goals. To this end the Foundation has organized various seminars/meetings, conferences/ dialogues for youth in areas such as population, HIV/AIDS, human rights, education, environment, sustainable development terrorism, racism, entrepreneurship, globalization, culture, substance abuse etc.

Through it's programmes the Foundation seeks to engage and empower young people on a range of issues, besides giving young people the opportunity to share best practices, networking and learning through people – to-people exchange.

For the past couple of centuries, and particularly the last 60 years – we, the people, have been squandering the planet's vast treasury of ancient sunlight.

Coal, oil, gas – fossil fuels made from life that flourished in the sun of prehistoric times – which took many millions of years to form have been burned up in one massive binge.

Global warming is already occurring far faster than expected and the world's scientist have repeatedly warned that unless we quickly start to kick the carbon habit , and reduce emission, dangerous climate change will be inevitable.

The party is over, and this task is now falling to our generation to undertake the task to make fundamental transformations in the way we use our resources. Environmental issues present some of the most profound and complex challenges requiring attention today and in the coming decades. Hence it is important that a strong foundation be build to enhance local, regional and national capacities to respond to those challenges by increasing environmental awareness. Here the role of youth is central, for it is in the rising generations, that, heightened awareness can most easily be achieved.

At the launch of the World Commission on Environment and Development monumental Report, Our Common Future, at the Queen Elizabeth Hall, London on 27 April 1987, Mrs Gro Harlem Brundtland, Chairperson of the Commission spoke this words

“ Securing our common future will require new energy and openness, fresh insights, and an ability to look beyond the narrow bounds of national frontiers and separate scientific discipline. The young are better at such vision than we, who are too often constrained by the traditions of a former, more fragmented world.

“ Our generation has too often been willing to use the resources of the future to meet our own short term goals. It is a debt we can never repay. If we fail to change our ways, these young men and women will suffer more than we, and their children will be denied their fundamental right to a healthy, life-enhancing environment.”

Since 2002 we at the Foundation have been playing an important role in bringing to the forefront issues concerning our environment by participating in the World Conference on Sustainable Development held in Johannesburg, South Africa, the ASEM Youth Dialogue on Sustainable Development, Vietnam, 2004, the Asia Europe Youth Explore which was held in China, 2006.

In August 2005 the Foundation hosted the “International Conference on Environment and Disaster Management " Our Shrinking World" and the “International Training Workshop for Youth Representatives on Environment and Disaster Management, in 2006. This workshop is the final follow-up of the above events.

Over the last 4 days participants of this workshop had the opportunity to learn from trainers Dr Iftekhar and Ms Claire both from the University of Melbourne Australia as well as Mr Ravindran Nair from Malaysia about the different fields of Disaster Risk Management and Environmental Management, which included wide ranging topics to develop a broad based understanding of these fields. It also includes exercises for participants to get practical knowledge. They had the opportunity to hear from Malaysia’s leading environmental journalist Karam Singh Walia on the topic “Media and the Environment”.

At the end of this training, participants will be expected to define an agenda that can be followed up in their own contexts after conclusion of the workshop. Another possible outcome to be achieved at the workshop is to develop an electronic or other network between interested participants that can inform and define future agenda for such youth-based learning events.

I wish to place on record my sincere thanks and appreciation to everyone involved in making this workshop a success. We appreciate immensely the generous donation by the Economic Planning Unit of the Prime Minister's Department, the Ministry of Youth and Sports Malaysia, all major donors, advisors and UNEP offices from Kenya, Bangkok and West Asia. Our thanks to our Chairman, Rt. Hon Datuk Seri Mohd Ali for being a gracious boss, my colleagues and volunteers for their cooperation and passion, the print and electronic media for the continued support, UN agencies for highlighting this event in their listserves and all participants for being here today.

But most of all I would like to thank my family for being my pillar of support. Thank You.

11st July 2008