

**SPEECH BY
YAB DATO' SERI ABDULLAH BIN HAJI AHMAD BADAWI
AT THE LAUNCHING OF THE INTERNATIONAL YEAR OF VOLUNTEERS 2001
AT HOTEL SINGGAHSANA, PETALING JAYA
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Terlebih dahulu, saya mengucapkan terima kasih kepada Yayasan SALAM Malaysia yang sudi menjemput saya untuk hadir di Majlis Pelancaran Tahun Sukarelawan Antarabangsa 2001 pada pagi ini.

2. Sesungguhnya, saya gembira dapat bersama-sama dengan saudara-saudari yang telah menunjukkan komitmen yang luar biasa dengan kerja-kerja sukarelawan. Saya berharap sempena Tahun Sukarelawan Antarabangsa 2001 ini, saudara-saudari akan meningkatkan dan mengukuhkan azam untuk terus bergiat menjalankan tugas-tugas sebagai sukarelawan.

3. We have only just entered a new millenium, leaving behind a 20th century battered by two world wars and in its last years, raging ethnic and religious conflicts and internal strife, be it in Asia, Africa, the Middle- East, the Americas or the Balkans and bigger Europe.

4. It was a century scarred by so much unnecessary violence, mass killings, whether by modern day mass destruction weapons or barbaric genocides, and wars which were scattered from one end of the world to another.

5. Internal conflicts, race and religion-based violence and power games continue to plague the world and show little sign of abating. When the world refers to itself as modern civilisation, I ask myself whether this description is not a misnomer.

6. Amidst all these, we have seen massive exodus of refugees, of nations impoverished, of communities wiped out and of people set back by decades because of the ravages of war.

7. We would like to wish that disputes and problems can be settled through dialogue and negotiations; we wish to see the lot of the poor being improved through social and development projects; we wish to see regional and world peace; we wish to see a stable environment in countries of the third world so that they can focus on building up their people and their societies.

8. Yet, time and again we see dialogues fail and negotiations crumbling; we see the poor becoming poorer in many countries; we see intolerance becoming more prevalent.

9. And yet, through all these, we see hope emerging. A new spirit of humanity emerged in the last century - the spirit of helping one another, the spirit of volunteerism.

10. We have seen how selfless people volunteer to help the less fortunate, irrespective of colour or creed. Organisations like Medicines Sans Frontier and the Red Crescent Society and many others are seen on the battlefronts and refugee camps, sacrificing and risking their lives to help others.

11. This spirit is fast growing and it gives us hope that one day, the world will come to its sense and the needless bloodshed and violence will end. It may not come in our lifetimes, maybe not even that of our children; but if this selflessness keeps growing, then it is our prayer that one day there will be world peace.

12. But the work of volunteers will not end. There will always be the disparities within societies, between regions, between the developed world and the developing and third worlds. New afflictions like the aids virus and the old ills like poverty, lack of educational facilities and insufficient food and water will continue to plague us.

13. We have seen how inactivity or slow reaction on the part of the United Nations worsens situations in countries like Bosnia, Rwanda and Timur-Timur. And where the UN is slow, volunteers have filled the need by moving in to provide medical care, food, education and other social services which are lacking.

14. I am proud that Malaysia has taken its place amongst the caring people of the world to provide its own volunteers. Our people have provided health services to war-ravaged Cambodia; our information technology experts have gone to the aid of East Timur; our English teachers have been sent to Laos; our doctors have volunteered and helped in Bosnia.

15. These unsung heroes have risked life and limb and sacrificed their time to help the less fortunate. I thank them for their selflessness and for their human spirit.

16. The Malaysian government encourages Malaysians to involve themselves in volunteer programs that will help the needy and less fortunate. There are many ways volunteer organisations can work together to help the less fortunate and I would like to pledge full support from the government for their endeavour and programmes.

17. A country's success is normally measured by its economic success and political stability. we seldom use social factors as a benchmark to determine how successful a country is. While we cannot deny that the government and its corporate sector are the catalysts for growth, we also have to acknowledge that social groups and volunteer organisations, which help and build up the less privileged in society, are an integral part of total nation-building.

18. I am proud that today, we not only have organisations working extensively to help people within the country, but our people also cross borders to assist and help others.

19. In Malaysia, we have organisations like PEMADAM, the AIDS Foundation, and groups which help handicapped children and the aged, help in the rehabilitation of drug addicts, victims of domestic violence and abused children.

20. Volunteerism is here to stay and it should be encouraged and built up so that we can all contribute towards the greater benefit of mankind.

21. I would like to suggest that corporations encourage their employees to involve themselves in volunteer work and provide them with the necessary time off and unrecorded leave to carry out tasks which benefit society.

22. They must not forget that for a society to function effectively, we cannot afford to have a segment which is neglected and which feels abandoned. The government has embarked on various programs and projects to eradicate poverty, provide the best health care and education for the people.

23. Our resources are not unlimited and we are thankful that in many areas, volunteer organisations have filled in the gap. Yet, there are still areas in which more can be done and this is where the corporate sector can play its role by devising programs to encourage pensioners and others to help in volunteer work.

24. The government, on its part, will try to come up with strategies and initiatives to provide incentives to the private sector to encourage volunteer work. I also hope that the media will play a bigger role to create awareness amongst our people on the need to do more for society. It is only if we work together and in tandem will we be able to have a truly just society.

25. Once again, I would like to thank Yayasan SALAM Malaysia and voluntary organisations in the country which continue to provide support for the needy. Your each and every contribution is highly valued and appreciated and you play an important role in nation- building.