

SPEECH BY THE DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER
AT THE FIRST NATIONAL CONFERENCE ON SOCIAL WELFARE
AT UNIVERSITY OF MALAYA (ARTS FACULTY),
KUALA LUMPUR ON APRIL 27 - 30, 1967

I am glad to be here today at this first Conference of your recently formed National Council of Social Welfare, Malaysia - an infant in years but showing a maturity of out-look worthy of many an intelligently functioning adult in that its very first activity is to achieve clear understanding of its role in society, so that it can make a worthy contribution to the welfare of the people in this rapidly developing nation.

As I looked through the programme that the Council has planned for the next few days, certain thoughts came to my mind which I should like to share with you. :

Firstly, I am pleased to see that you are beginning right from the start, that is, getting right down to clear understanding of what is social welfare - is it the kind of work that starts only when things have gone wrong, is it only concerned with disadvantaged, under-privileged, maladjusted persons or is it very much more embracing, seeking the prevention as well as the amelioration of social ills? What then are the objectives of social welfare and now how can we achieve these objectives?

To my mind, we in Malaysia have learned to clearly define goals and objectives, our terms of reference, our scope, our areas of responsibility and against this we weigh our resources, existing and potential. We can no longer be satisfied with ad hoc piecemeal schemes that serve only as temporary expedients. Today's approach - the national planned approach - can be seen in our First and Second Five-Year Development Plans and the First Malaysia Plan. I am happy, therefore, that you are adopting it in your Conference and as a vital beginning to your deliberations, that you will attempt to define social welfare, its implications, areas of responsibility between Government and voluntary social work bodies, you will discuss better coordination and cooperation in existing services and finally, the contribution of social work to society as a whole. However, in this respect, I think it is relevant to repeat what I have often said to my officers in Government, that is, that the technique of national development planning, especially of national economic planning, is now well advanced throughout the world and it is fairly easy for any developing country to have a planned approach but the technique of

implementation and putting some push and punch into translation of the plan from paper into factual results is a technique for which there is little inter-national knowledge available at the present from which developing countries can learn and apply. We, therefore, have to evolve our own technique and we have done so, especially in our economic planning. We had to evolve a technique because, as you know, we do not have unlimited time. We, therefore, must feel a necessary sense of urgency to achieve maximum results within the time at our disposal to convince our people and the free world that democracy can work in this country. I hope that your Council, now that it is grappling with reality, trying to find a concerted overall national approach to social work in this country, will feel the same sense of urgency and will, therefore, courageously and honestly discuss problems of implementation, using ingenuity, imagination, creativeness to plan and implement services that will meet the real needs of the people.

I have often said in referring to our Development Operations Room that its purpose is not to keep one's finger on the pulse of the programme where the pulse is beating but rather to be able to put one's finger in the pulse where the pulse of development has stopped beating, so that an accurate diagnosis of difficulties and delays can be carried out and defects rectified with speed. I hope, therefore, that your Conference will be one where discussion does not centre on achievements but one which will probe, however painfully, into inadequacies, lacks and failures, so that constructive results are obtained.

My second thought when I read the Programme was that we all have a common aim and a shared commitment. We are not just seeking an advanced and prosperous nation, we are seeking and advanced and prosperous nation with happy, well-adjusted citizens. We are all launched therefore, on the quest for a strategy to balance material and human development because we are committed to the belief that individual initiative towards self and community improvement should be encouraged within the overall National aims. And so, you and I seek in different ways to improve and increase human potential. Our Government's rural and national development policies, the Gerakan Maju programme, are designed to give full recognition to the universal principle that no nation anywhere in the world can hope to progress to any real extent without the full-hearted cooperation and energetic efforts of each and everyone of its citizens. Therefore, we seek the intelligent and whole-hearted participation of the people in all programmes for their betterment. You, in your work, help the underprivileged, the socially disadvantaged, the handicapped, and others in similar circumstances, to develop to their maximum potential. Public

assistance measures, rehabilitation programmes, help to keep people within the main stream of development. Government's economic programmes build up a solid basic economic infra-structure. Social Welfare and Social Services help to make a healthy viable social infra-structure and both together make up a prosperous nation of happy, well-adjusted individuals. Therefore it is unrealistic, if not impossible, to divorce on part of development from the other, to say that economic development must necessarily precede social development or vice-versa. Economic development achieves maximum results only with the participation of the people and social work with its insights into the complexities of human behaviour can help to secure that participation of the people that is vital to economic progress.

And this leads me to another thought. So far, if I may say so, social work has been conceived as primarily a remedial services coming in to solve problems of the individual in need. Your very examination of the definition of social welfare, its scope and responsibility will, I hope, lead you to a broader outlook and concept, so that you will attempt to think and operate on a much wider canvas.

During the last two decades, growth and maturity of social services have produced new insights into the functioning of societies and groups, and into the complexity of human behaviour and the nature of processes of change in them. If your practitioners of the social work profession have kept abreast with these new insights, I would venture to say that you have a vital role to play in our developing country in using these insights to obtain the effective participation of the people in all programmes for their betterment. Community development work, community organisation services are but two spheres in which you can help to bring about what we all want - a sense of belongingness to the Kaum, to be the community, to the nation. I know that the Department of Social Welfare has felt that it can make a contribution in this area and is at present organising crash training programmes for its staff, so that they can find their particular contribution in community development work within Gerakan Maju.

Finally, I note that you are giving thought to the processes of institution building; for example, you are interested in the role of a National Council of Social Welfare and, therefore, you will be looking into the nature of councils most conducive to the development of social work in this country. I should, therefore, like to share with you a United Nations opinion on the subject:-

“Substantial spade work must be done and good technical support provided over a sufficient length of time. Hastily set up councils or other institutions are not only self-defeating but disastrous to the

whole programme. More often than not, they end up as magnified examples of vested interests, power politics, dishonesty, arbitrariness, inefficiency and other negative qualities which the Council set out to overcome in the first instance. Equal caution must be exercised to avoid over organisation. To sustain dynamism and development orientation in the new institutions, they should be continually exposed to new educational influences. Training programmes for the members should not be random and sporadic but systematic and spread over long periods of time."

With these final words, I will leave you to begin your deliberations, "saya dengan sukacita dan bangganya mengisytiharkan Konferensi ini dimulakan."