

By : DATUK SERI SYED HAMID ALBAR
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Title : SPEECH AT THE LAUNCHING OF THE 2004 YOUTH SMOKING PREVENTION MEDIA CAMPAIGN

Distinguished guests,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Assalamualaikum Warahmatullahi Wabarakatuh,

And a very good afternoon,

It is indeed a great pleasure to be here this afternoon on the occasion of the launching of the "2004 Youth Smoking Prevention Media Campaign." As the President of the Malaysian Association of Youth Clubs (MAYC) and as having a deep interest in the wellbeing and progress of youth, I must say that this event is particularly special to me. I am therefore very pleased and honoured to officiate and be associated with this important media campaign. It is pertinent that our youth is exposed to the harmful effect of the habit, not only to their health but also the health of others. I would also like to take this opportunity to convey my sincere thanks and appreciation to the British American Tobacco (Malaysia) Berhad and JT International Berhad for their collaboration with MAYC in organizing as well as inviting me to launch the 2004 Youth Smoking Prevention Campaign.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Our Prime Minister, YAB Dato' Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi during the launching of the National Youth Day 2004 Celebrations in Kuala Lumpur recently, has called on our youth to always strive to be competitive and excel in any field that they choose to pursue. In this regard, the Government has therefore invested heavily on youth programmes to meet the demands, expectations and challenges in achieving the Vision 2020.

MAYC with 500 affiliated clubs at the state and district levels throughout Peninsular Malaysia with a total membership of 360,000 is well placed to complement the efforts of the Government in moulding our younger to be responsible citizens with good exemplary values. In this context, I am very pleased to inform that apart from organizing youth activities ranging from social, sports and cultural events, MAYC has now embarked on organizing successful events associated with economics, welfare, anti-drugs, agriculture as well as religion. Today, we are engaging in a media campaign to prevent youth from smoking. I have no doubt that the campaign will complement the national anti-smoking campaign launched by the Government recently with a slogan "Tak Nak Merokok" or "No to Smoking".

Ladies and Gentlemen,

According to the Ministry of Health, in 2003, it was estimated that there are 5 million smokers in Malaysia (22 % of the population). Smoking is also believed to be a factor that caused 25 % of the non-accident deaths in Malaysia. It is also attributed as a contributing factor in eroding one's health such as cardiovascular diseases, stroke, cancers and other lung-related diseases. The apparent adult per capita consumption of cigarettes in Malaysia has increased by 57% from 1970 to 1985 and by another 69 % between 1985 and 2000. The trend is expected to continue.

The Government has allocated RM 20 million a year on anti-smoking campaigns. Heavy duties and tax regime on tobacco and cigarettes were also imposed. Malaysia is also set to ratify the World Health Organisation's "Framework Convention on Tobacco Control" which we signed last September. The Convention will allow the Government to impose further restrictions on the use and sale of tobacco products as well as even allow civil suits against tobacco companies. All these efforts signify the commitment of the Government to effectively undertake anti-smoking campaign.

This media campaign is a continuation of previous campaigns including the one launched by the Ministry of Youth and Sports in 2000 with the slogan "Youth Should Not Smoke". It is also designed to captivate youths and address the misconceptions among the younger generations that smoking is hip, cool and trendy. I am confident that the campaign would contribute to the nurturing of good and positive values among youths.

I wish to commend the British American Tobacco (Malaysia) Berhad and JT International Berhad for their willingness to launch this initiative with MAYC. The fact that they are in tobacco industry illustrates that they are good and responsible corporate citizens - willing to help the Government to curb and fight against smoking, particularly among youths. I hope other tobacco companies as well as corporations from other sectors would emulate these two companies in supporting the Government to create dynamic and progressive youths who are free from smoking.

On that note, I take great pleasure in launching the 2004 Youth Smoking Prevention Media Campaign" and wish the organizers every success in their endeavours.

Thank you.