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Title : PERASMIAN KONGRES KEBANGSAAN KEDUA  
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Yang Berusaha En. Yacob Abd. Rahman, Pengerusi Jawatankuasa Pengelola Kongres;

Yang Berhormat Yang Berhormat;

Dif-Dif Kehormat;

Tuan-tuan dan Puan-puan sekalian.

Saya bersyukur dan berasa sukacita kerana dapat hadir di Majlis ini dan untuk berucap sedikit dan seterusnya merasmikan Kongres ini. Saya ingin mengucapkan terima kasih kepada Jawatankuasa Pengelola Kongres ini di atas penghormatan yang diberi kepada saya dan juga peluang untuk mengalu-alukan kehadiran pakar-pakar dari luar dan dalam negeri yang akan menyumbangkan buah fikiran mereka dalam Kongres ini.

2. Saya berharap Persidangan ini akan dapat memberi kesan yang baik kepada para peserta, sekurang-kurangnya akan memberi kesedaran kepada kita bahawa masalah ketagihan minuman keras ini, lambat laun akan menjadi masalah besar sekiranya tidak dikawal seperti juga masalah penyalah-gunaan dadah di negara kita ini. Selain daripada itu perlu juga kita sedar bahawa mereka yang ketagihan minuman keras memerlukan pertolongan dan pemulihan supaya kembali kepada kehidupan yang sihat.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

3. I am very pleased to be here to officiate the opening of the 2nd National Congress on Alcoholism. I wish to welcome all of you who have come to contribute your expertise in various fields on this important topic.

Looking at the list of speakers from both Malaysia and foreign countries, this Congress will touch on important aspects of alcoholism which I hope will initiate awareness to those who have not yet been stimulated into thinking that alcoholism is not yet a problem in this country and also to stimulate efforts to help and rehabilitate those who have drinking problems so that they will be healthy and useful citizens. I congratulate the Organisers and their co-sponsors for initiating this 2nd Congress, which I believe is the direct result and encouragement from a very good and successful Congress in March 1985.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

4. It has been reported by the WHO in its report on their Regional Workshop on Alcohol Related Problems in 1983, that the global trend is towards an alarming increase in the consumption of alcohol and the magnitude of alcohol related problems in many countries. Unfortunately, these problems are no longer the exclusive concern of the developed and affluent countries but are becoming an increasingly important public health problem in many developing countries, which are also experiencing very rapid and wide ranging social and economic changes.

5. Even though male adults constitute the vast majority of those with alcohol related problems, drinking among women and girls do occur and is silently on the increase because of various reasons ranging from social status, domestic stress and strain and unemployment. There is special concern in some countries over the increase in drinking by young people -- just as it is with drugs. In fact alcoholism and drug abuse has been considered as a single phenomenon because of its addictive effects.

6. In Malaysia, alcoholism and its related problems are not yet considered a public health issue, when compared with drug abuse. Nevertheless, we should be aware of its presence and similar effects on the

uncontrolled drinker.

Parents in western countries find great relief when they found their children indulging in alcoholic drinks and not in drugs. Let it be reminded so oftenly that alcohol, tobacco and marijuana are the first drugs to be experienced by young people and are therefore gateways to other hard drugs. Let it not be naively accepted that a can of beer is harmless to a young person in social drinking. That first drink may, to even a first timer, likely to be just as intoxicating as one mixed drink, just as lethal as drugs and just as addictive.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

7. The question of attitudes towards social drinking in a multiracial country such as ours is complex. Should there be drinking in moderation or controlled drinking? Should it be totally banned? In this Congress, I notice there are speakers on the religious aspects of alcohol consumption and its social cultural effects. Both aspects are very important in influencing the attitudes of people towards drinking. In this country, Islam is the official religion and, as such, the assimilation of Islamic values have forbidden advertisements for alcoholic beverages on radio and television. 'Toasting' with strong drinks at official functions has been abandoned and drinking and social parties are not encouraged in any Government gathering in the country and in our Embassies overseas.

8. There are many reasons for drinking; to socialise, to celebrate, to improve appetite, to enhance the taste of meals, as part of certain religious ceremonies or to relax.

When teenagers in western countries were questioned why they took to drinking, they quoted parental and social influences, they drink for its 'effects' -- i.e. to get drunk, peer pressure and lastly because of emotional disturbances.

9. Whatever may be the cause for drinking the difficulty arises when social drinking ends and problem drinking starts: where the style of drinking lacks control and alcohol no longer becomes a beverage to be sipped in moderation with food, friends and good conversation but a harsh and powerful potion that will never be drunk in a moderate way.

10. Uncontrolled drinking that results is not to be condoned as it can lead to intoxication and alcoholism. The resulting physiological and mental effects of alcoholism and its complications are many. It not only will affect the drinker but also his family and the society in general. We read from press reports of fatal traffic accidents every day and of wife-battering and child abuse. It would be interesting to know how much these incidents are related to intoxication.

11. Malaysia has experienced tragedies in the illicit production of toddy and samsu between 1965 and 1977. Fifty lives were reported lost in the state of Negri Sembilan alone, while in the first 6 months of 1981, illicit samsu claimed a further 20 lives.

12. The Government has set regulations and legislation as control measures but Government efforts alone cannot be sufficient without the assistance of the private sector.

Alcohol education is essential for parents in order to create social concern. Youths should be given talks on how to adapt and cope with stress and strain and the challenges that confront their daily lives. Confidence in solving their own problems may help to prevent the young executive from going to the 'bottle' for the easy way out. Deciding not to drink and sticking to it is often the most difficult thing to do for a young person as well as for an adult.

It is believed that it can take as much courage to say 'no' as it does to say 'yes' for the first time. This applies to smoking, drinking and drug taking. With parental help and counselling from teachers and organisations, the young person can be guided to make a correct decision and to prevent himself from being a problem drinker.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

13. There are many books of research done on alcoholism and its related problems and it is most encouraging to note that alcoholism is a manageable disease. The point to stress is how to manage it. We need to appreciate that there are among the alcoholics who desire voluntary help and those who are brought in by relatives and families. This clamour for help has been taken up by voluntary agencies such as Yayasan Anti Alkoholik Malaysia, Alcoholic Anonymous, AI Anon, AI Ateen whose work should be highly praised. It is certainly not easy to rehabilitate a drinker single handed as his family and often too his employers, would need alcohol education so that the basic reasons for the young drinker to drink can be understood and helped.

14. I hope you will deal in great detail this aspect of rehabilitation of the drinker in your discussions and work- shops. The objectives of management of a drinker should be to help the drinker understand his situation and to assist him to have the mental and physical ability to reduce, control or stop drinking.

15. We know that there are many problems among youths and young adults in this country. We can ill-afford to lose them to alcohol and drugs if the country is to depend upon them for further socio-economic development. I therefore appeal to all of you and to those families, relatives employers and agencies to make concerted efforts to help and cooperate with existing anti Alcoholic organisations in their efforts and activities to rehabilitate the alcoholic.

16. I wish you every success in you deliberations and look forward to your reports. I would like to thank again the Pusat Anti Alkoholik Malaysia, Yayasan Pusat Pertolongan and their sponsors for giving me this honour to be with you.

May we be blessed by the Almighty for our sincere attempts to help those in need of a healthier and better life in the future.

17. Dengan ini, saya dengan sukacitanya merasmikan pembukaan Kongres Kedua Mengenai "Alcoholism - A Manageable Disease".

Terima kasih.