

Penyampai : DATIN SERI DR. SITI HASMAH BINTI HAJI MOHD. ALI
Tajuk : THE OPENING OF THE WORKSHOP ON THE ASEAN NETWORK OF PARENTS
Lokasi : THE CRYSTALL BALLROOM, MING COURT HOTEL, KUALA LUMPUR
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The Honourable Datin Paduka Hajah Zaleha Ismail, President, Asean Council of Women's Organisation, Deputy Minister of Transport;

The Honourable Dr. Siti Zaharah bte Sulaiman, Chairperson, Organising Committee of the Asean Workshop, Deputy Minister in The Prime Minister's Department; Excellencies;

Distinguished delegates;

Ladies and Gentlemen.

I am honoured to be invited to address this distinguished group of delegates to the Workshop on the Asean Network of Parents' Movements Against Drug Abuse this morning. It gives me great pleasure to welcome all our Asean friends who have come to contribute their expertise at this important meeting.

2. Drug abuse has become a source of great concern and worry for parents in ASEAN because of our close proximity to the opium producing areas -- the 'Golden Triangle'. In Malaysia our geographical location, good infrastructure and communication system seems to make Malaysia an ideal transit country for the flow and trafficking of drugs into and out of the country. However some of the illicit drugs smuggled in on transit have been diverted to create and meet local demand. I am sure the same can be said of the other ASEAN countries.

3. Malaysia views the drug problem very seriously. It has become so serious that the Government has declared it a national security problem and all efforts should be taken to eliminate the problem. As a deterrent, harsh penalties have been imposed on drug traffickers who prey on our young. I am sure those of you who flew in by the Malaysian Airline System must have heard the announcement reminding passengers of the death penalty for possession of narcotics or you must have noticed the billboards around Kuala Lumpur portraying the hangman's noose for drug traffickers. All these warnings serve to remind the public and visitors alike of the penalty for this grave offence in this country.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

4. The pattern of drug abuse in Malaysia has changed from the days of opium smoking among elderly Overseas Chinese up to the 1950s to the use of heroin and morphine among the young during the 1960s and 1970s. The increasing involvement of the local population occurred at a time when youthful involvement in drug abuse has been growing world- wide. This could be due to the rapid social and economic changes occurring in the country during this period.

The majority of drug users today are young adults who began their drug habits between the age of ten and twenty.

5. The scourge of drug abuse has affected our people very deeply. What started as a teenage fad among the affluent urban youth has spread to the rural areas and has affected all strata of society. The easy availability of drugs on our streets has compounded the problem. Now we hear even of school children taking drugs.

6. As a wife and mother with grown up and small children I am very concerned about their future and that of the future of their children. I am sure parents everywhere share this concern, especially those who have children or relatives who are involved with drugs. When I met with the wives of world leaders during my travels abroad we often discussed the drug problem that has affected the youth of the world. We asked ourselves whether drug traffickers have families of their own? Have they ever seen drug addicts or heard their tragic tales? During my travels in Malaysia I met with parents of drug addicts and heard their

tragic stories. I heard of addicts stealing from their families, and mothers and wives being beaten up by their sons or husbands under the influence of drugs. I have also visited many rehabilitation centres and saw youths in the prime of their lives trying to shake off the drug habit.

7. As parents who wish to see a drug-free society we should support every effort by our governments to eradicate the drug problem in our respective countries. In any country women play a vital role in the preventive efforts against drug abuse. As mothers we are closer to our children and understand the needs of our families. Thus we are in a better position to do something to protect our family from the drug scourge.

Ladies and Gentlemen

8. The uncontrolled use of drugs would definitely sap the energy of our youths and our economy and endanger our national security. We can ill afford to sacrifice the future of our young generation. It has been found that the majority of drug users in ASEAN are in their adolescence and youth. For them to grow and prosper, for us to ensure the lead a good life, for us to preserve the bond and unity between parents and children, the evil menace of drug abuse has to be stopped and prevented.

9. Our priority should focus on preventive efforts. The aim is to isolate youths from the clutches of drug peddlars and to protect school children from the lure of drugs. In this respect we should emphasise that the war against drugs is everybody's responsibility and that the community should play a supportive role to the government.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

10. I am happy to say that parents in this country have responded positively to drug eradication programmes. In October 1985 a National Conference on Parents' Involvement in the Prevention of Drug Abuse was convened by the Organisation of Wives of Ministers, Deputy Ministers and Parliamentary Secretaries in Kuala Lumpur to create public awareness. This was followed in April 1986 by a Workshop on the Involvement of the Public Service Against Drug Abuse. In July 1986 a Workshop on Parents' Movements Against Drug Abuse was convened to discuss strategies which could be effectively carried out to combat the drug menace. This Workshop was attended by many voluntary bodies and other social organisations. It is our hope that participants to these two meetings would form the vanguard of the Parents Movement in Malaysia as they had been exposed to the drug problems and had discussed strategies for action.

11. It is imperative that parents should support government efforts to eradicate drug abuse. Voluntary organisations can play an important role in this respect. If we can mobilise women, welfare, religious, professional, youth and service organisations I am confident we can make the public aware of the dangers of drug abuse.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

12. We are fortunate in that women organisations in ASEAN have formed an ASEAN Network of Parents Movements to tackle the drug problem. It indicates that parents in the ASEAN region would like to see a drug-free ASEAN. Now that our governments have shown us the way it is now up to us to start the ball rolling. It is with this hope that we are all gathered here today and for the next five days will deliberate and exchange experiences, and to keep abreast of the latest information on drug matters. There will be many questions related to the drug problem and not all of them could be answered but the least we could do is to identify our risk groups and protect them from destroying their minds and bodies. We, as parents, who care for the safety and security of our children, should no longer be so naive about the present local and global drug problems. We shall learn from the experiences of our friends in the United States on how parents can be involved in drug prevention work. I am quite certain the US experience would give us an invaluable insight into the work of the Parents' Movements there.

13. I wish you a productive meeting and hope you will have an enjoyable stay in Kuala Lumpur. I now

have great pleasure to officially open the Workshop on the ASEAN Network of Parents' Movements in Drug Abuse Prevention.

Thank you.