

LAUNCH OF “POWER OF 10 SENS” CAMPAIGN

*In conjunction with the International Day for the Eradication of Poverty,
Organised by the Universal Peace Federation*

Friday, 12 September 2008 • University Kebangsaan Malaysia, Bangi

KEYNOTE ADDRESS BY

Mr. Youssouf Oomar

UNICEF Representative to Malaysia

Yang Berbahagia Tan Sri Datin Paduka Seri Hajah Zaleha Ismail

President, Universal Peace Federation Malaysia

Dr. Teh Su Thye

Secretary General, Universal Peace Federation Malaysia

Professor Dr. Aminah binti Abdullah

Dean, Faculty of Science and Technology, University Kebangsaan Malaysia

Professor Dr. Musa Ahmad

Deputy Dean, Faculty of Science and Technology, University Kebangsaan Malaysia

Mr. James Poon

Director of Education, Universal Peace Federation

Associate Professor Dr. Normah bin Dali

Ambassador for Peace, Universal Peace Federation

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Good Morning, Selamat Pagi,

I am certainly delighted and honored to be with you here this morning to speak on a topic that is very close to my heart and encourage young people like yourselves to join the growing global call to action against poverty.

Ladies and gentlemen,

A Global Perspective

Poverty is real, it's a big problem and it affects real people and real children. The fact that poverty amongst children is an even greater problem than poverty in general should come as no surprise to most of us because some of the poorest regions of the world are rich in children.

Over 1 billion children globally suffer from at least one form of poverty or another. More than half of these children are from developing and middle income countries.

What contributes to poverty you may ask? Most people relate poverty to the lack of income. But this is not the only element that contributes to this global issue. Poverty can be split into 2 categories, namely Income Poverty and more importantly Basic Needs Poverty.

Income Poverty

Income poverty is the condition where people do not have enough money to meet basic needs for food, clothing, and shelter. As children are dependent on their families, they enter or avoid poverty by virtue of their family's economic circumstances. Children cannot alter family conditions by themselves, at least until they reach adulthood. Global statistics show that more than 30 per cent (about 600 million) of children in developing countries live on less than 1 US dollar a day.

Basic Needs Poverty

Basic Needs Poverty on the other hand goes far beyond monetary deprivation and recognises poverty's wider consequences including the lack of proper food; safe drinking water; decent sanitation facilities; health; shelter; education and information. Severe deprivation among children is highest in Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia.

Each deprivation exacerbates the next. Through an inverted trickle down effect poverty may increase vulnerability of children to non-schooling, violence, abuse and neglect, family disintegration, abandonment, and even trafficking - making poverty the worst form of violence to reckon with.

Children In The Face of Poverty

Childhood should be a happy time spent playing with friends, enjoying a favorite toy — even planning for the first day of school. But children in the developing world spend most of their childhood struggling to survive, without much hope for a secure, productive life.

Too many children go to bed with empty stomachs. They also wake up to seemingly hopeless futures: school problems, unemployment, welfare, gangs, drugs and crime. Children of poverty are more likely to suffer young and violent deaths.

Mentally and physically malnourished for the first five years of their lives, they are unable to keep up in class. Children, particularly girls, who are severely deprived of essential goods and services have to stop their schooling to help the family, preventing them from fulfilling their potential and trapping them in the cycle of poverty.

Poverty stricken children are also exposed to exploitation and abuse. They are trafficked for child prostitution, forced into early marriage, forced into hazardous labour, or subjected to violence and abuse in the home, school and community - depriving them of their childhood and exacerbating their existing poverty.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The Situation in Malaysia

I urge you to take a few moments to digest the statistics I am about to give you. If they raise your eyebrows and give you a little more perspective on what it takes to make a difference in the world, then please join the challenge to prove that together, we can make a difference.

According to statistics from the Economic Planning Unit in 2004 :

- 1.2% of total households live in hardcore poverty (income less than RM415 per month, which is the national food Poverty Line Income)
- These rates are equivalent to 600,000 poor children (age 0-18), out of which 127,000 children are hardcore poor – with more than half of them in Sabah
- The rapid urbanisation process in Malaysian cities has resulted in a significant and increasing number of **urban poor** households

According to the Ministry of Education Report in 2008 :

- 4 in 100 children in this country are not enrolled in school

The Malaysian Ministry of Health said that :

- 40% of people living with HIV in this country are children from the ages 13-29

UNICEF's State of The World's Children Report informs that:

- 7000 children in Malaysia die before they turn 5 years of age due mainly to preventable causes such as pneumonia and food poisoning (septicaemia)
- Some 14% of Orang Asli children between the ages of 6 and 12 do not attend school. And more than half drop out before year 6.

UNICEF'S Global Fight Against Poverty

One of the United Nations major global agendas for human development is the Millennium Development Goals or the MDG's and we are all committed to ensure that these goals are met. Top on the list of the MDG's is the eradication of extreme poverty and hunger.

Recognising that poverty constitutes a denial of basic human rights, UNICEF incorporates the principles of the Convention on the Rights of the Child into its global operations. Worldwide, UNICEF works to break the cycle of poverty and hunger by fulfilling children's rights, through:

- Building national capacities for primary health care.
- Getting girls to school.
- Supporting good nutrition.
- Assisting in water and sanitation improvement.
- Creating a protective child environment.
- Advocating, raising awareness and helping effect policies for children's well-being.

Prospects for the Future

Poverty reduction is about providing people with the basic capabilities to live in dignity. As youth and the future leaders of this country, your voice and contributions matter most in making poverty history in this country.

Today, you witness the launch of the "Power of 10Sen" project organised in tandem with the Global Peace Festival (GFP) 2008. This project is a practical and affordable possibility for all of you to get involved in an initiative that will empower you to make a big difference through your contributions. You will see that even a small amount like 10 cents can go the distance in making a difference in the lives of children plagued by poverty.

However, what is more important than your money is your time. Your time can make a big difference for a child. With up to 15 million kids in need, every volunteer and advocate is an asset in our ongoing war on child poverty. With your time invested in the lives of children in poverty, society benefits, too. Crime rates decline, youngsters become better educated and then see their futures with more optimistic eyes.

One of the major benefits of working with children is seeing tangible results, from their smiling faces to their increased test scores. However small your contribution, just know that you are helping a nation deeply in need.

Poverty amongst Malaysia's most vulnerable children cannot be eradicated unless the basic capabilities of children are developed and safeguarded from the moment of birth.

By doing your bit, you can change a child's life now and for the future. Our Children Are Our Future. Thank you.