

Representatives of organizations engaged in educating the young for active citizenship in South and Southeast Asia met in Penang, Malaysia from December 10-13, 2004 to promote and share experiences with interactive methods of instruction in civic education and to strengthen and expand the network of those involved in civic education within the region. The **Workshop on Educating the Young for Active Citizenship** included more than 30 representatives from 12 countries with diverse populations in terms of race, ethnicity, and religious belief and a wide variety of experiences in representative government.

Dr. Toh Kim Woon inaugurated the workshop on behalf of the Chief Minister of the Penang, Malaysia state government. His remarks set the tone for subsequent discussion and expressed eloquently the commitment of the participants to promoting active citizenship for the young.

**REMARKS OF YANG BERTHORMAT DATO' DR. TOH KIM WOON,
ON BEHALF OF THE CHIEF MINISTER OF PENANG,
AT THE OFFICIAL OPENING OF THE
INTERNATIONAL WORKSHOP ON EDUCATING THE YOUNG
FOR ACTIVE CITIZENSHIP,
DECEMBER 11 - 13, 2004, 9:00 A.M.
HOTEL EQUATORIAL, PENANG**

Yang Berbahagia
Profesor Dato' Dzulkifli Abdul Razak
Vice-Chancellor, Universiti Sains Malaysia

His Excellency Mr. Robert Pollard
Charge d' Affaires
US Embassy, Kuala Lumpur

Mr. Charles Quigley
Executive Director
Center for Civic Education, Calabasas, California

Yang Berbahagia
Dato' Profesor Syed Ahmad Hussein
Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic and International Affairs)
Universiti Sains Malaysia
and also Director of the Malaysia Citizenship Initiative

Ladies and Gentlemen

First of all I would like to convey the apologies of the Honorable Chief Minister of Penang, Yang Amat Berhormat Tan Sri Dr. Koh Tsu Koon, who is unable to attend this morning's meeting due to a prior committment. He sends his regards and wishes you a most fruitful workshop.

On behalf of the state government, I would like to thank the organizing committee for inviting me to grace the opening of this International Workshop on Educating the Young for Active Citizenship. I would also like to take this opportunity to officially welcome you to Penang.

Ladies and Gentlemen

Malaysia as a young democracy has undergone tremendous development and socio-economic and political changes. These changes bring both problems and challenges. The government, on its own, will not be able to provide solutions to all the problems and challenges; it needs the participation of its citizens, including ideas from the young.

The participation of the people in the government and in public affairs defines citizenship. Participation in the government also means participation in society and the community.

Active citizenship goes beyond just being good citizens in the traditional sense of the term. A person is usually deemed as a good citizen if he or she behaves well, obeys the laws and votes during election time. An active citizen will be very much involved in the on-going process of decision and policy making. Active citizens will participate by expressing their concerns, highlight problems and most importantly, contribute positively to the solutions of those problems.

Basically, the term "active citizenship" relates to a person in the community who:

- § wants to play a full and active role in the community and not depending solely on certain groups of people to solve the problems in the community;

§ wants to feel that he or she can help shape the direction and future of society and increase the degree of volunteerism in it;

§ is eager to learn by listening and communicating with others in the community; and

§ knows that his or her ideas are being heard by others, including, if not especially, by policy makers.

Lades and Gentlemen

Every government has its vision of the future of society, and the vision (and mission) can only be achieved if we are able to nurture and bring along the young towards it. Therefore, it is the responsibility of those who are conscious and who are concerned about the future of society to provide the opportunity for the young to share the vision of the future, and to get connected to the community and to the policy processes. By getting them involved, we are making them more aware of what's going on around them. We are also exposing them to the sources, impact and consequences of, and solutions to, the problems existing in the society.

Active participation for the young in whatever forum or platform can educate them on the needed values that we, the adults and the government, would like to instill in them in our effort to build a united, progressive, democratic, peaceful and tolerant society. Their participation would make them understand and appreciate the fundamentals of a democratic system of government. And the fora and platforms of participation for the young, I must add, must provide equal opportunities to all and must include the disadvantage groups such as the young in the rural areas, the urban poor and minority groups.

The young, especially those in the junior secondary level, between the ages of 11 to 15 years old, are indeed full of creative ideas and unbiased idealism. Providing them a platform to speak

their minds will provide them the environment that will allow them to express their ideas for the benefit of the community at large. Some of these ideas are indeed brilliant. This can be seen in some of the proposed alternatives suggested by students who participated in the Projek Warga, organized by the Malaysia Citizenship Initiative, Universiti Sains Malaysia.

As a representative of the Penang State Government, I personally believe that an active citizenship program like Projek Warga should be supported and encouraged, as it provides the platform for the young in Malaysia to showcase their findings on community problems and also to voice their views in solving or reducing the problems. Such programs also encourage discourses and exchanges between the young and community leaders and policy makers, and this help to further educate them and to prepare them to become a responsible and participative citizen of the future.

Ladies and Gentlemen

The Malaysian government is reintroducing civic education into the school curriculum. This is because the government is very aware of the crucial need of civic education in nation-building and in preparing the young to shoulder the responsibility of building the Good Society of the future. Nevertheless, we have to remember that civic education can be provided not only through the formal educational structure but also - and perhaps more so - through the informal and active means, such as getting the young actively involved in public and community affairs, through which elements of interaction; team-building, negotiation, and consensus-building skills; and methods of informed participation can be instilled.

Ladies and Gentlemen

As participants of a workshop on educating the young for active citizenship, you will contribute in providing ideas for the building of the future generation. I look forward to receive the report of

the workshop, which I believe will be able to guide the government in providing avenues for active and participative citizenship for young citizens of this young democracy.

I wish you all the best for the workshop and I do hope you take the opportunity to also to get to know Penang more.

Ladies and Gentlemen

With great pleasure I hereby declare the Workshop on Educating the Young for Active Citizenship open.

Thank you.

09.12.2004