

***Text of the address given by K. Haridas,
representative of the International Council of Initiatives of Change,
at the opening ceremony of the International Youth Forum,
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THE ROLE OF YOUTH

His Excellency the Vice-Governor of West Java Mr Dede Yusuf,
Your Excellencies,
Distinguished Guests,
International Delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen.

Salaam Sejahtera and a very good morning to all of you. Allow me at the very outset to thank the organisers of this Conference for their very kind invitation. Youths as they look ahead to life have, I believe, an important part to play both in ensuring that the Millennium Development Goals are met so as to ensure that the world of the future is both more peaceful and one that sustains peaceful efforts in dealing with issues and crisis's that may develop.

I would like to stress three points during my presentation: namely, the Role of Youth in the context of the Millennium Development Goals; the notion of 'Change' in the context of change that happens in spite of us, and change which depends on our initiatives to make a difference; and lastly the qualities of the Head and the Heart that are essential in inspiring Transformational Leadership.

In considering the first point, any committed young person looking ahead to the future will definitely see in the UN Millennium Development Goals priorities that will make a difference. However, we have to ensure that nation states focus on these, and are not derailed into undertaking grandiose programmes at the expense of reaching these targeted significant goals. Any success will only come about following sustained action and initiatives.

Youths have two significant contributions to make: namely to remain critical watchdogs as well as monitors. In addition, secondly they can also be supporting initiatives by the public sector, the private sector and the NGO sector by providing assistance to programmes aimed at achieving these goals. Such initiatives will ensure that the world of the future will move in the direction of working towards achieving these specific targeted goals. The millennium development goals are an example of national goals which are linked to international standards of human rights.

Ladies and gentlemen, my second point relates to the six letter word 'Change'. The Democratic Presidential Candidate in the United States Mr Barack Obama is talking about change and this seems to have caught the imagination of many young people in the US. 'Change' is his slogan. We must remember that change is all the time confronting us. With the recent increase in 'pump prices' there are calls around the world for lifestyle changes. The impact of such price increases will cause us all to change in one way or another.

The impact of climate change, ozone depletion, environmental degradation and carbon emissions are all taking its toll globally. Floods, fires, and natural catastrophes take place in China, the United States, Myanmar, Indonesia. The world as a whole is paying a price and climate change informs us that these are no more national issues alone. In addition we now face the 'Food

scarcity' challenge that is going to seriously impact on the poorest of the poor.

Barack Obama seems to have captured the imagination of young voters who have come out in numbers and this has helped him immensely. He has talked about Economic issues and the need to make a difference in the lives of America's poor – ideas like imposing a windfall tax on Petroleum companies. He has talked about Climate Change and the need to respect the Environment. He has talked about transcending Race and Colour while at the same time being caught up on issues of faith.

We need people who can become 'Transition Leaders':- men and women with the capacity of motivating and lifting people beyond today's boundaries of you and me, of colour, of race, religion and language - fundamental issues that are continuously exploited to divide people from people. We live in an increasingly interdependent and interconnected world and Climate Change is informing us that it has no respect for whether it is China, the US, Europe or Indonesia.

We have to think in terms of what is best for humanity and the time has come to develop globalised minds and hearts that care for humanity as a whole. It is no more a question of my village, my town, my city, my nation or my region. It is all this and much more. It is about the world as a whole and a deeper and a more inclusive sense of humanity.

Yes, we need change all round - be it political, social, economic, and environmental and even in International Relations. All this talk about change emphasises things that are happening out there about which you and I have very little control. This is what we mean when we say that 'change' is a constant. Yet, this is followed by a more important injunction namely that 'growth is an option'.

Ladies and Gentlemen this option stresses a qualitative type of change that needs to happen in and around us. This is something we can all do and could provide an immediate focus. This is important because this type of change depends on us, on you and me. When we talk about promoting mutual understanding, interfaith cooperation, undertaking peace initiatives and action plans with a view to working towards achieving the goals of the millennium development plan by 2015, we are addressing serious issues that call for a change in attitudes, overcoming prejudices, meeting challenges and promoting peace and understanding.

It is in this context that the work of Initiatives of Change provides a challenge. People of all backgrounds, nations and beliefs are engaged in a committed way in transforming society through inspiring a change in people like you and me. Everyone is important. Everyone can make a difference and all are needed. There is a need for a moral and spiritual approach that we can all identify with and accept. Through a shared search in silence and listening, through an acceptance of absolute moral standards of honesty, purity, unselfishness and love as guideposts and a commitment to start with oneself a qualitative change at the individual level becomes possible. A shared moral and spiritual approach has enabled many to appreciate diversity. Our differences are then no more a threat. Many have become as a result better Muslims, Christians, Hindus and Buddhists, better practitioners and in the final analysis better human beings.

People with such insights and experience can provide Transitional Leadership by sharing their experiences and lifting people beyond limited boundaries and narrow paradigms. We need to move beyond being victims and carry that torch of hope for the future. Such Leaders search for ways to address the issues that confront them. We need an ethical approach, transparency and accountability as otherwise many of our good intentions and goals are derailed because of

dishonesty, corruption and unbridled greed.

Unless we can inspire a level of unselfishness and a commitment to change what is wrong starting with ourselves we will never contribute adequately to making the difference. The human factor is significant in this regard and youths who capture this inspiration can speak with a moral clarity and become agents of change in their societies. They will then help create structures and systems that enable greater change in society as a whole.

Your Excellencies, Ladies and gentlemen, distinguished guests; 'Initiative of Change' also emphasizes change. It is about starting with yourself. It is about having the courage to look at yourself and clarify your values and lifestyle. It is about putting right what is wrong in your life and of reclaiming the ethical ground which then provides us with the basis for positive action.

People need to change and this factor cannot be wished away. No lasting fundamental change can ignore the need for a foundational basis of shared values and goals in today's interdependent world. An unexamined life will never realise its potential. As it has been stressed the problems of today cannot be changed at the same level of thinking and living that has created them. A shift in our thinking and living will provide a shaft of light filled with possibilities for the future.

Compassion, honesty, forgiveness and unselfishness are not purely intellectual ideas. These embrace qualities of the heart that refine the mind and broaden its capacity. These are only meaningful to the extent we claim these as part of our life's experience. When I apologized to someone whom I hated, I experienced liberation, freedom and forgiveness. When I returned money I had borrowed and not returned I understood more deeply the notion of honesty. When I personally faced up to the motivations of hate, greed, anger and lust and inspected regularly my motives I learnt to deal with these in my life.

By being transparent and through sharing with friends I realized that shared human experiences become powerful catalysts for inspiring change and extending possibilities. These experiences help us break boundaries and inspire transformation in ourselves and our shared experiences then help others find new realizations and experiences.

Finally, Your Excellencies, Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen and delegates I pray that over the next days you will not only struggle with the realities and challenges facing society but will also confront the need to change yourself and if this is equally addressed then many of you will leave this conference inspired and dedicated to making a difference. This will then provide a basis for your sense of hope for the future.

Your own change will be a testimony of your commitment and the word change will then have a deeper meaning in all your endeavours for the future. You will then be able to provide the Transformational Leadership that will link issues and people through combining the qualities of the intellect and the heart in inspiring and sustaining change. I wish you all the very best in all you undertake for the future.

K. Haridas, Bandung, Indonesia

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