

Address
by Dr J.A. Maraj
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at the Opening Session

Mr Chairman, Honourable Ministers, Distinguished Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen:

I should like in the first instance to thank the Government of Cyprus and the Organising Committee for the honour which they have done me in asking me to chair this seminar. I am acutely aware of the very difficult task which lies ahead as we attempt to grapple over the next three days with the complex problems to which the Minister referred. I take consolation, however, in the fact that I have the full support of my colleagues from overseas. We have been reinforced by a strong team of Cypriots, home grown, specially selected and well experienced. They will take us through the situational reports over the first few periods. I take consolation, too, in the fact that Honourable Ministers have taken time off from their very heavy schedules to be with us this morning, and if I am to gauge from the reception which I have had over the last two days when I visited various Ministries and Departments, then I am confident that there is a tremendous amount of interest in this area of activity. This makes me more optimistic about the task and I trust that it will not be as difficult as I anticipated earlier.

I have been asked to put the seminar into perspective. It seems to me that I ought to make it clear that the initiative for this grew out of a meeting of Prime Ministers in 1969, when the area of youth activities was identified as an area to which the Commonwealth Secretariat might give attention. We conducted several studies in different Commonwealth countries, and reported in 1971 at the much publicised Singapore Meeting of the Prime Ministers on what we had done in Africa and in the Caribbean. Heads of Government commended us on what we had achieved and instructed us to continue the work by having a similar seminar in Asia and the Pacific. This we completed in August 1971. It occurred to us, however, that two Commonwealth countries which had not been included in these studies and seminars were Malta and Cyprus. I should like to remind the audience that the Prime Ministers regarded youth matters of such great importance that they have instructed us to convene later this year a meeting of Commonwealth Ministers concerned with such matters. These

Ministers will meet in Zambia and their remit from their Prime Ministers is to make a comprehensive review of the whole complex of youth matters, with particular reference to unemployment.

In order that the Ministers might have before them the appropriate information on which to make decisions, we thought it best to complete the cycle of regional seminars by holding one in Malta and one in Cyprus.

I suppose you would like to know what sorts of things we propose to talk about. Basically there are five areas. We would like to examine closely the changing role of youth in society, and in this connection I think Cyprus has a tremendous amount to offer. For from my brief glance at it and from my discussions over the last two days it has become quite clear that some of the strains and the tensions which appear to exist in other countries are perhaps less marked here and it may be that in examining the changing role of societies and of youth's position in them, perhaps what we learn from Cyprus may be of benefit to many other countries in the Commonwealth. We shall be examining questions relating to education and training, whereby the faith which was held in the conventional patterns of education and training seems to have been shaken in many parts of the world.

We shall also look squarely at the problems of unemployment. How might employment opportunities be created or generated in order to alleviate the difficult problems which face most of our countries? Already in Cyprus I am given to understand that very well qualified people are beginning to experience some difficulty in obtaining employment immediately and I hope that from the discussions which will ensue Cyprus may perhaps get some ideas for coping with this problem.

We shall be looking, too, at the ways in which young people might contribute more effectively to the development process. I have heard it said that young people should not ask what their countries can do for them but rather what they can do for their countries. I am one of those who subscribe to the view that young people are looking for opportunities of contributing effectively to their societies and in considering the role of youth in community development, we shall explore specific ways in which this may be accomplished. Finally the seminar will give consideration to concrete programmes of action which might be possible at national level, regional level or international level.

Mr Chairman, this seminar would not have taken place had it not been for the vision and perhaps also for the support of a large number of people. I have not had the opportunity before of paying tribute to the Commonwealth Foundation in the presence of the Director, Mr John Chadwick, who is with us this morning. Every one of these five seminars has been financially supported by the Board of Trustees of the Foundation and I would like to record our appreciation to Mr Chadwick and to the Board for all the help we have had from them. I too would like to join with the Chairman in thanking Dr Vanezis, who provides one of the strongest links we have with Cyprus. Through him we are able to keep in closer contact than we might otherwise have been. I should make it known that Dr Vanezis is Chairman of the Working Party preparing for the Meeting of Youth Officials. Judging from his performance in London, it is clear that Cyprus exports not only sherry of the finest quality but first class people as well.

The presence on the Commonwealth team of Mr Rabukawaqa and Mr Kihumba is, I think, some evidence of the multi-national nature of the organisation and I am particularly pleased that they agreed to come and share their experiences with us.

Mr Chairman, I would have done less than justice if I did not express my appreciation for the excellent preparations which have been made by the inter-ministerial committee; and I would like to thank you, Sir, and your colleagues for all that you have done in setting the stage for this meeting.

I should like to thank the Honourable Minister for his encouraging address and for outlining a path which we might follow, if our deliberations are to be in the interest of Cyprus and of our other member countries. I should like also to pay tribute to the Principal and staff of the School for the Deaf, where we are meeting today. It is clear to me that this institution is a seedbed of progress and of achievement. It is seldom that one sees so many inspiring things done by people who have been less privileged, and if because we have the seminar here, we too were to be inspired by their achievement, I think we would have done well indeed.

I said yesterday that I thought it would be a great pity if in Cyprus we were to attempt to isolate youth, to put it into the dock and to treat it as though it were a special problem. I have indicated earlier that I am convinced that problems which we call youth problems are in fact problems of development in countries which have predominantly a youthful population. But while there

seems to be a trend for young people to believe that it is only what they say that can be right or can be considered, I would like to remind them, since there are a fair number present this morning, that youth does not have any prerogative on vision or imagination or energy. It seems to me that here in Cyprus it is still possible to promote communication and contact between the young and the not so young so that this country might move even further forward.

Finally, Mr Chairman, the complexity of youth problems, their urgency and their potential dangers are, I think, sufficiently known and appreciated to ensure that they cannot be disregarded. I hope that this seminar will not only produce scholarly discussions and an interesting report, but that there will emerge concrete programmes of action, so that our efforts would not go to waste.

May I thank you, Sir, and your colleagues for your presence and your encouragement in the area of youth development, and may I say on behalf of those of us who have come from abroad how pleased we are to join hands with you in this venture.