

Closing Address  
by the Hon. Mr A. Mavrommatis  
Minister of Labour and Social Insurance

Mr Chairman, Ladies and Gentlemen:

I am afraid that my closing address cannot possibly follow on the traditional lines, that is to say review the work of the seminar, sum up its conclusions and the consensus of opinion and end with the proverbial "the success of this conference can only be gauged after the necessary tabulation and careful consideration of the views expressed". With the exception of the very last part of the phrase which I hereby endorse and repeat, I shall prove to be unconventional in so far as the summing-up part is concerned because due to pressure of work I could not attend the conference, follow its proceedings and start preparing my closing address.

Before proceeding, I think I must say that the choice of venue was very good indeed, not only because the view and the surroundings at the Deaf School, as well as its facilities, leave almost nothing to be desired but also because it has a symbolic meaning in symbolising the care and at the same time the proximity that we feel we should have for that less fortunate section of our youth, namely the handicapped.

In Cyprus, although I think we have been blessed by a young generation which has time and again proved itself in almost every field, we have yet done by comparison very little for them. Recently our youth has acquitted itself perfectly well and came out with flying colours in the struggle for independence. Although we had in the past been quite willing to use - and I am using the word "use" in its literary sense - our youth in furthering most of our aims and objects, some of them very noble but fortunately fewer not so noble, yet what we did for them, apart from offering educational facilities and very few and only rudimentary other facilities, was nothing much.

Lip service to what we always call "our hope for the future" has, however, always been paid. Fortunately, during recent years at least three Government Ministries and also the private sector have started more serious efforts in the field of youth. But again there has been no coordination and at the same time we never really involved them in the development process.

As Dr Maraj has stated, it is not a question of what the country is to do for them but what they can do for their country.

We should first of all realise fully the changing role of youth in society today, and also bear in mind that, though fortunately as yet we in the developing countries have not been plagued by the difficulties regarding youth movements in more affluent societies, this is possible. We have also our own local problems which we should first identify and then prepare a concrete programme of action to redress and improve. In forging this remedial policy we should never lose sight of the fact that we should involve the young themselves in the process. Recently I had a rather difficult task to convince a committee of colleagues of mine to adopt a recommendation of the International Labour Organization concerning special schemes for youth employment and training schemes for development purposes. These schemes were designed to give young persons the necessary skills to enable them to adapt to the pace of changing society and to take an active part in the development of their country, thereby meeting problems which have come into prominence on a very wide scale during recent years. My difficulty was due to the fact that many of us, whether we are willing to admit it or not, still adopt an extremely conservative and at the same time fatherly attitude towards our youth. We always think that we know better what is best for the young ones and that all they should do to progress is to follow our edicts. Despite initial difficulties I am in the happy position to say that the sub-committee has unanimously agreed to recommend the adoption of the relevant instrument. I am certain that during your deliberations you have covered such problems as employment, that you have paid special attention to the problems that our secondary education graduates face nowadays and to the ever increasing problem of employment of our university graduates. I feel confident that the contribution of Dr Maraj and his collaborators for the solution of such problems must have been very much appreciated.

The Ministry of Labour is now providing a wide range of services covering basic aspects of youth needs such as:-

- a) employment and vocational guidance
- b) leisure activities
- c) industrial health
- d) welfare and safety
- e) cultural and social development

- f) participation in socio-economic development
- g) care and rehabilitation of the delinquent, deprived and handicapped, and
- h) welfare of youth.

The Ministry of Education to a great extent and the Ministry of Agriculture to some extent provide similar or comparable services. Yet this range of activity is estimated to cover a lot less than five per cent of the total youth population and in this figure we include services offered by voluntary organisations. It is very significant that we have ourselves studied the services for youth and when foreign experts were called in to help we all identified our principal problem, namely co-ordination. In our efforts to provide more co-ordination we have set up the Pancyprian Social Development Board as a main co-ordinating body in the field of social development. One of its first tasks was to appoint a youth sub-committee with the youth institutions to study the whole subject and report back to the Board. I am given to understand that this sub-committee has almost completed its task and its report is to be studied by the Board during its next meeting.

I am confident that the report and the conclusions of this seminar will contribute greatly towards our efforts for the development of youth services in this country. Before concluding I wish to thank the Commonwealth Foundation and the Commonwealth Secretariat for their invaluable assistance in making this seminar possible. I want also to thank Dr Maraj and his collaborators for their contribution, the organisers of this seminar, and in particular the Ministry of Education and the Deaf School for making available their premises.

Finally, I want to thank all the participants for devoting their time to the seminar and for their contributions thereto.