

Address
by Dr. J.A. Maraj
Director, Education Division, Commonwealth Secretariat
at the Closing Session

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

At the kind invitation of the Honourable Minister of Education, it has been my privilege to serve as Chairman of our deliberations on youth and development during the past three days.

The outcomes of the seminar will, I am sure, enable us to describe the situation in Cyprus much more adequately when we meet the Youth Officials in June and the Ministers later, but I hope, Mr Minister, that we have done more than this. There can be no doubt that by bringing together all parties concerned with youth a beneficial exchange of views has been facilitated and people have been stimulated to think without the usual blinkers, as it were.

One fact which has become more evident as the discussions have progressed is that opportunities for co-operative action among all interested parties are inadequate. It is my hope that by initiating this coming together participants will continue to work more closely in the effort to meet the needs of young people. Furthermore, we trust that opportunities for youth to participate in the social and economic progress of the country, as people in their own right, will increase; from our deliberations it is more than clear that young people are able and willing to make an important contribution to the development of this society.

Our discussions, Mr Chairman, have ranged over a wide number of topics - the role of youth in society, education and training, employment, service to the community and so on. Several suggestions and recommendations have been made and these will, of course, be incorporated in the report of this seminar. Whether or not the seeds which have been sown during the last three days will come to bear fruit will depend wholly on the use which is made of the ideas which have been thrown up by those who are in positions of authority and whose responsibility it is to effect changes and implement recommendations.

One of the recommendations was for urgent attention to be given to the provision of youth leadership training. The Commonwealth Secretariat would be pleased to meet a request for assistance, in the form of consultancy services, for instance. Increased provision for exchanges of young people was also suggested, not only for exchanges of young people as young people but rather as young farmers, teachers and so on. There might also be a role here for the Secretariat. If, for example, a person working in the youth field wished to visit a developing Commonwealth country with a view to examining youth work being carried out there, it might be possible for the Secretariat to assist through the operation of the Clearing House Fund which, though modest, exists for precisely this sort of purpose.

Frequently during discussions the point has been made that no close studies of the needs of young people have been made, that no reliable data have been compiled for certain areas of activity. There appears to be a need for information of this kind to be collated, since without basic data co-operative and effective planning cannot be carried out.

The proposed establishment of a semi-official co-ordinating body to plan, implement and evaluate programmes for youth was warmly welcomed by the seminar. In view of the likely gap between this seminar and the establishment of the committee, I should like to suggest that the participants of the seminar continue the good work by forming themselves into an unofficial group, perhaps entitled the 'Cyprus Youth Liaison Committee'. The representatives of the youth organisations might organise seminars among their own members; inter-organisational seminars could also be held, at the local, district or national levels. In this way it might be possible to ensure that the progress made this week is not lost, that more young people are stimulated into thinking constructively and are motivated to purposeful activity.

An interesting proposal has been made, Mr Chairman, for a re-convening of this seminar in approximately six months time. This is, I think, a most satisfying recommendation in that it is evidence of the belief of the participants that the present seminar has been worthwhile and also of their genuine concern for improvements to be made in spheres which affect youth. The Secretariat would be very pleased to assist in a second seminar and I would hope that it might provide a target date before which some of the ideas raised might be put into practice. As I have said before, the seeds for action have been sown and the real work begins where this seminar ends.

Before closing, Mr Chairman, I should like to express my gratitude to the four local speakers who introduced agenda items with such comprehensive and informative papers. Without their assistance we would certainly not have been able to move so quickly on to the larger issues which we have covered in this short time. The participants too have left us in their debt, for they have approached the tasks with an open mind and brought to bear in the discussions an incisiveness which left us in no doubt that they "mean business".

The seminar could not have been held at a more appropriate venue. Mr Marcou and his staff enabled us to enjoy Cypriot hospitality and courtesies in countless ways and I am sure I speak for the entire group when I say to him and his staff how delighted we were to share his world and how grateful we feel to them for making us so comfortable and welcome.

Finally, Mr Chairman, my thanks go to you and to your Government for this opportunity to be of service. May our labours be as fruitful as the efforts of those who cultivate your lands and whose harvest seems ever abundant.

Thank you.