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Mr. Prime Minister, honourable Ministers, Chairman of the National Youth Service Council of Sri Lanka, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen, it gives me great pleasure to be with you today at the opening of the Second Meeting of Young Commonwealth Leaders here in Colombo, Sri Lanka.

Much is often said about the potential, the role, the responsibilities and the special attributes of the young. Their qualities, like a litany, attract no end of flattering descriptions. When it comes, however, to the provision of vehicles for the expression of what young people feel, when it comes to the struggle against conditions that choke the aspirations of youth, words are not enough.

I need hardly remind you, ladies and gentlemen, that the grave international economic conditions of the day affect most severely the young among us. As this Second Meeting of Young Commonwealth Leaders sits on the eve of UNCTAD V in Manila, we do well to consider the range and the complexity of the problems before us.

The industrialised sections of the international community have, of late, moved towards a recognition that the often desperate plight of poor nations must be faced squarely. The move towards good will reflected in decisions now being taken at international negotiations is half-hearted and hesitant and has so far achieved only watered-down compromises.

The Second Meeting of Young Commonwealth Leaders has not been convened to give lip service to the qualities of youth and point to the forum that the Commonwealth is able, occasionally, to give to young leaders. This meeting is intended to exercise the qualities of young leaders; it is hoped that young leaders can contribute fresh insights and strategies whereby the Commonwealth-wide scourge of youth unemployment linked clearly to an unjust international economic order, can be better met, combated, and the way paved for its uninterrupted reduction. When I said that it gave me great pleasure to be with you here in Sri Lanka, I meant that in a very real sense. The Government and the young leaders of Sri Lanka have both launched important programmes to combat youth unemployment. The Sri Lankan experience is one where consistent efforts have been made to realize the qualities of youth.

The Government of Sri Lanka recently led the Commonwealth by establishing a Ministry for Youth Affairs and Employment in 1978. The recognition of the crucial nature of youth unemployment which this represented is a very important reason for choosing Colombo as the venue of the Second Meeting of Young Commonwealth Leaders. Other Commonwealth countries have begun to tender such recognition. At the end of 1978, the Government of Australia established its own Department of Employment and Youth Affairs.

The energy, organisational skill, and imagination of the National Youth Service Council of Sri Lanka has been a source of constant comment by my colleagues in the Commonwealth Secretariat's Youth Division. The development by the Council of a new 'Youth in Business' scheme, to assist unemployed youth to become self-employed, is one example of Commonwealth co-operation involving the National Youth Service Council, the Commonwealth

Secretariat, and the Government of Malaysia. The organisation, by the Commonwealth Youth Programme, of a 'Youth in Business' seminar in Kuala Lumpur in early 1978, helped to stimulate awareness of new techniques to encourage self-employment and to exploit the informal sector. And, of course, the energy and attention to detail by the Government of Sri Lanka and the National Youth Service Council in hosting and servicing this Second Meeting of Young Commonwealth Leaders, gathered to discuss youth unemployment, is evident in the arrangements from which we are all now benefiting at this inaugural session.

What sort of international effort can be engendered by this meeting of Young Leaders to meet the needs of all Commonwealth countries? We meet here bearing in mind the alarming nature of the problem: even in industrialised Commonwealth countries, young people from 15-25 form 40-50% of the total unemployed - almost as much as the entire adult population from 26-65. In developing Commonwealth countries, young people comprise 70% of the total unemployed and, in a few countries, the figure is as high as 80%. What do these figures mean, ladies and gentlemen? Percentages roll easily from the tongue. What they mean involves the future of all our countries. The ILO estimates, for instance, that for the continent of Africa to reach anything near full economic capacity and, thereby, take her place fully and self-reliantly on the world stage, 150 million new jobs must be created by the year 2,000. For whom is this job creation particularly pertinent if not the rising generation? But, Mr Prime Minister, it gives me cause for concern as a servant of the Commonwealth, contemplating what remains to be done, to reflect on how little has sometimes been done in years past. For, since the Commonwealth Secretariat was established in 1965 up to 150 million young Commonwealth citizens have tasted extended periods of unemployment.

There are some things about a New International Economic Order which bear especial consideration by young leaders. The first of these concerns the thorny question of aid. Of late, there have been some very encouraging decisions by a small number of industrialised nations. The transformation of long-term loans into outright grants have helped many of the poorest countries. Similarly, the further development of the soft-loan 'windows' of international lending agencies will assist poorer countries. But the sort of aid which I think will have the most significance is that which will help the poorer nations to stand on their own feet and become truly self-reliant. The provision of greater technical assistance of the kind that they require and ask for, should therefore be an important concern of international deliberations.

Secondly, a New International Economic Order, with the best will in the world, cannot come overnight. Young leaders will wish to discuss the issue of priority. Should special consideration be given to the very poorest, the least developed nations? Remember that only recently many international economists were prepared to write off altogether the least developed - under the pernicious justification that these countries were 'too far gone' to be assisted. Thankfully this sort of thinking has diminished - or perhaps it is still there, only it is no longer respectable to voice such thoughts openly. To counter its resurgence, the strategy of effective, special assistance to the poorest nations is something which young Commonwealth leaders can perhaps assist in developing.

Let me tie together the two points I am making. The progress being made towards fairer conditions of international trade will be of no assistance

to those very poor countries that have yet to develop export industries, or who have to rely on a very small range of export industries. Technical assistance, for these countries is an urgent requirement. We must beware of talking too rhetorically of a North and South. The South should not allow its own division into one group of trading nations which stand to grow from strength to strength or, at the least, from a position of weakness to relative strength; and a second group which can take nothing from the results of the current round of negotiations, a group that will become further deprived as they see their fellows developing enhanced economies. If this happens, it can only mean a group of countries, of Commonwealth countries to a large extent, where youth unemployment cannot be contained - where youth unemployment will grow and ensure the misery and deprivation of an entire generation. There is no guarantee, only a hope that this will not happen. Great responsibility, therefore, devolves upon the young leaders of Commonwealth countries.

Not that Commonwealth Governments have, individually, been unconcerned and inactive in the struggle against youth unemployment. In many parts of the Commonwealth unemployment has generated a large social problem. Young people have figured in numerous instances of violent behaviour as they have turned their energies from constructive thought to impatient defiance. Commonwealth Governments have tried, however, to provide opportunities for young people. These include the reform of education systems, and the establishment of national youth service schemes.

A number of Governments have been active in establishing schemes that depend to a large extent on the initiative and judgement of young people themselves. The young people serve as a spark by which greater economic activity is generated throughout the community and, through them, greater employment is provided to all age groups. Examples include the Young Pioneers of Malawi and their involvement in rural land development; the Village Polytechnics of Kenya and their enhancement of village economic life; the Youth in Business and Youth in Agriculture schemes of Malaysia, whereby an entrepreneurial culture has been developed, centred around young people who have been trained and financially assisted to become self-reliant and to act as catalysts in developing the informal sector. Such schemes demonstrate the faith of Commonwealth Governments in young people. Because of this faith, they look to this meeting of young Commonwealth leaders with great interest.

They perceive the educative role which young leaders can perform. Here, let me address myself separately to young leaders from the industrialised and the developing countries. Firstly, it is young leaders who will most readily perceive the necessity to proceed beyond good-will, as I mentioned earlier. Young leaders from industrialised countries will be aware, for instance, that despite lofty resolutions from the leaders of rich nations, trade protectionism actually increased in 1977. Yet the World Bank believes that if the lowest tariff barriers, those against raw materials, were removed, this alone would quickly result in the poor countries getting half of the extra foreign exchange they require to raise their growth rates to the U.N. target of 6% a year. Real development requires also the bringing down of trade barriers against manufactured goods. But, from where in the industrialised countries will the lead come for such firm and necessary action? Young leaders from these countries will see their role clearly in educating the electorate, and in advising Government leaders, that the long-term results of lowering or removing altogether such trade barriers need not result in their own industries being swamped by foreign competition.

The International Labour Organisation, a representative body consisting of the trade unions, managements and governments of the world, asserts that at the worst only one million people in all the rich countries put together would need to find new employment. Besides, it is pointed out, such an effect would be spread over two decades, involving no more than one hundred thousand jobs a year, a much smaller dislocation indeed than the effects of trade cycles and modernisation. And studies reveal that the increased world trade brought about the enhanced development and higher consumption in poor countries would create many more jobs in the rich countries than were lost.

Ladies and gentlemen, let us not be one-sided. The goodwill upon which we hope to build in the richer countries must be matched by good faith in the poorer ones. The call for distributive justice on an international level must be met also in the national context. This is a very challenging role for young leaders in the developing world. Development 'with a human face' must wear the very noblest of human qualities. The call from the developing world for distributive justice must, therefore, be a credible one. In this light, the educative role of young leaders must start from a basis of vigilance and be pursued without rest.

There is one further question which Commonwealth Governments would ask, quite apart from what kind of leadership young leaders can give to young people. This is, what can young leaders do to assist and guide Commonwealth governments? The Second Meeting of Young Commonwealth Leaders can provide the fresh thinking Commonwealth governments so earnestly seek in the field of youth unemployment; it can also provide encouragement and support for governments setting about the daunting task of realigning the international economic order and, by so doing, it can strengthen the confidence of Heads of Government that young leaders can indeed deliberate constructively and effectively.

In addition, the meeting will be able to stress the correlations between seemingly disparate things. It will be able to combine consideration of the international economic order with consideration of domestic problems; it will be able to consider economic questions alongside social ones; most importantly, it will be able to link young leaders with Commonwealth governments in a joint, constructive and continuing process - in much the same way as constructive and complementary action is generated by the Government of Sri Lanka and Sri Lankan young leaders.

Ladies and gentlemen, at this point a question may have shaped in your minds. Are we perhaps asking a little too much in calling for the young to lead us where we ourselves have not yet stepped? Obviously, we are asking them to inaugurate and be active agents of a vast process of regeneration in our affairs. Admittedly, young people show at times a hostile indifference to processes that they feel abandoned them or at least misunderstood them or did little or nothing for them. And yet, I strongly believe they are society's most precious resources - the means of its own regeneration. I cannot believe otherwise without disrespect to what I know of youth from the young men and women I have worked with, from my perception of myth and history and from the intuition of poets. I recall Dionysius the young god who dies every year to achieve the renewal of life, a myth re-enacted in many cultures and literatures through the ages in many forms, not to draw attention to his sacrifice but to his regenerative potency. And we note the theme of regeneration (brought about through the agency of youth) at the heart of Shakespeare's writing. Young people, ladies and gentlemen, have the power and the will to try.

Youth is indeed a value, an embodiment of qualities which poets and philosophers, no less than ordinary men and women, make many a plea to retain alongside the antinomy of age. Power with wisdom has been man's eternal search, and I see power here in the category of imagination, passion and vital encounter with reality, in order to give reality the shape of man's desire. Fresh and youthful infusions of power are necessary to reorder our tragic world. In parts of the Commonwealth this power is dramatically active: a throne of blood has just crumbled in Uganda, the course of renewal through dethronement of the past is vigorously asserting itself in Zimbabwe and Namibia as the struggle against racialist sham and shame-faced defiance intensifies in those two countries. To the question which I perceive as lingering, namely, whether the infusion of youthful principle and initiative is truly possible in international economic and national social problems, I would say, yes. I take heart from the spirit of idealism, endeavour, and commitment, displayed at the Meeting of Young Leaders held in Ocho Rios, Jamaica. The message of Ocho Rios was that young people are not defeated or defeatist, that they wish to contribute, to participate, to overcome obstacles, and to help their nations to overcome obstacles.

Ladies and gentlemen, what a bleak world it would be without the contribution of the young. Do you remember how in the Shakespeare parable the world of the craggy old egotistical King Lear fell to pieces, how his mind fell into chaos, when he banished Cordelia, so young and so true, from his court? The young have perception, they have vision. They are quick to perceive iniquity and are capable of seeking the relationship between national and international realities. It is natural for those who see first the need for change to be the agent of that change.

But too often it is not easy. Let me say quite frankly - sometimes Governments fear the young - sometimes Governments do not fully grasp the wisdom contained in the words of Frederick Douglas who said - "Those who profess to favour freedom and yet deprecate agitation, are men who want crops without ploughing up the ground." It is not that I favour agitation for its own sake, or even agitation at all if it can be avoided. What all Governments should seek is a way whereby the energy and concern of young people is not channelled into mindless agitation, but positive co-operation and commitment to national goals and international reform. The young will not be led meekly, however. It is in their nature to declare impatience, to agitate for speed, for courage and a commitment which they feel is equal to their own. I find this sort of agitation truly positive. There is nothing to say that young leaders cannot occasionally lead us. If the opportunity to participate in the great struggles of the day is afforded, alienation cannot be justified: I believe it cannot exist. Romain Gary, in his Prix Goncourt winning novel, 'The Roots of Heaven', wrote of the multiplicity of mankind - a multiplicity, incidentally, well represented in the Commonwealth. He referred to what Islam calls "the roots of heaven," but which is a feeling known by different names to all men and women. He wrote: "The thing that makes them fall on their knees and raise their eyes and beat their tormented breasts... Our need for justice, for freedom and dignity are roots of heaven that are deeply embedded in our hearts, but of heaven itself men know nothing but the gripping roots..." It is surely in the hearts of the young where such roots are best nourished.

Mr Prime Minister, I have a faith in young people. The social and economic regeneration of all Commonwealth countries depends on their courage. Much remains to be done. I, for one, am quite confident that it will be done.