



*...community builders in action*

*To every generation of youth comes an opportunity  
to make a contribution to the fortunes of humanity,  
unique to their time of life.*

*For the present generation, the moment has come  
to reflect, to commit, to steel themselves for a life of service*

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## **Discourse Report**

## Introduction

The advancement and involvement of youth in all aspects of social and economic development is apparent not only in Malaysia but throughout the world. According to the UNFPA State of the World's Population report 2014<sup>1</sup>, one in four people in the world today are aged between 15 and 24 years. In other words, there are 1.8 billion youth out of the entire world population of 7 billion. It is no exaggeration, then, to say that youth are the leaders of today. Youth, now more than ever are expressing their aspirations for a just, harmonious and sustainable society. It is timely for youth to be engaged as active protagonists in community building, particularly at the grassroots level.

A national youth discourse, entitled "Youth: Community Builders in Action" was held on 3rd October 2015 at Pusat Kreatif Kanak-kanak Tuanku Bainun. This Discourse organised by the Baha'i Community of Malaysia and supported by the Department of National Unity and Integration provided a space for youth from various youth organisations to collectively deliberate on the role and experience of youth in community building. The programme consisted of roundtable discussions led by peer facilitators who are actively engaged in community building processes at the grassroots.

More than a hundred people from 19 youth organisations participated in this inaugural Youth Community Building Discourse.

## Youth: Community Builders in Action

The event was graced by the presence of the Minister in the Prime Minister's Department, Y.B. Tan Sri Datuk Seri Panglima Joseph Kurup. The programme was opened with a multi-faith devotional on the theme, "Praying for Our Nation". The participants, regardless of their religious background, were united in spirit as they recited and meditated on the sacred verses and prayers from various Holy Scriptures recited during the devotional.

*"We share one planet; and we must find shared solutions, in partnership. Only by working together can we overcome the economic, social and environmental challenges we face."*

*- Sha Zukang*

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<sup>1</sup> The Power of 1.8 Billion Adolescent, Youth and the Transformation of the Future (UNFPA State of the World's Population 2014)

Following the devotional, Vidya Subramaniam, the representative of the Baha'i Community of Malaysia spoke on "Preparing for a Life of Service". Vidya, a youth himself, emphasised the fact that youth are in fact leaders today and can no longer be seen merely as the sign of a hopeful future. He added that the time had come for youth to see themselves as vital protagonists in society today. He further stressed that youth should not just be content with being participants in outmoded systems and structures of power but pride themselves with having high aspirations of a just, harmonious and sustainable society. He went on to say that in order to rise to that need, youth must be imbued with a strong sense of purpose – a moral purpose that impels them to transform both themselves as individuals and contribute to the transformation of society. In selfless service to society, he added, particularly in the context of neighbourhoods, youth can become agents of change and in turn make a contribution to the betterment of society.

*"Young people should be in the forefront of global change and innovation. Empowered, they can be key agents for development and peace."*

- Kofi Annan

Y.B. Tan Sri Datuk Seri Panglima Joseph Kurup in his address, further elaborated on the notion of youths dedicating their lives to service for the betterment of the country. The roundtable discourse commenced after the speeches. Each table consisted of 10-12 participants – two of which acted as facilitators moderating the discussion and one rapporteur. In total, 84 participants were involved in the discourse. All the participants either represented a religious organisation, civil society organisation, or university.

The following is a summary of the discussions that took place during the roundtable discourse.

## The Nature of Discourse

The discussion began with a question about the purpose and nature of the discourse. In general, the participants agreed that such a discourse is necessary to allow youth serving in various capacities to voice out their views and concerns with likeminded peers. Moreover, in the process of sharing their thoughts and experiences, the participants would also find that they were not alone in their efforts to engender positive change in their respective spheres of influence. This would then be a great source of motivation to the participants as they could discover solutions together.

*"We have a powerful potential in our youth, and we must have the courage to change old ideas and practices so that we may direct their power toward good ends."*

- Mary McLeod Bethune

Besides understanding what the discourse entailed, it was equally important to establish a consensus on the principles, qualities and attitudes needed in order to proceed with a clarity of vision.

Some of the characteristics that the participants in different tables had in common were open mindedness, humility and respect. The participants felt that it was imperative to set aside their differences and their ego during the discussion so that they could learn from one another.

## The Role of Youth

To better understand the role of youth, the participants went on to discuss the following quotation:

***“To every generation of youth comes an opportunity to make a contribution to the fortunes of humanity, unique to their time of life. For the present generation the moment has come to reflect, commit and steel themselves for a life of service.”***

The fortunes of humanity, as agreed by all, did not only involve material wealth. Participants cited examples of individuals who brought about a change to the fortunes of humanity, from human rights activists such as Malala Yousafzai to technological innovators like Steve Jobs and Bill Gates. In drawing these examples from real life, the participants also reflected on how the previous generations of youth rose to the challenge of instilling values in the current generation by being upholders of integrity and honesty.

*“We should not wait for someone else to come and raise our voice. We should do it by ourselves. We should believe in ourselves. Yes, we can do it.”*

- Malala Yousafzai

Regarding the question of the conditions of the world unique to the present generation, most participants immediately recognised the pervasiveness of information technology, especially the Internet. While it has indeed brought convenience to the lives of people all over the world, admittedly there are challenges in the form of eroding social ties and materialism that arise as a result. However, technology can also be used for beneficial purposes, such as exchanging knowledge and sharing positive messages through social media.

Next, the participants read the following quotation and shared their thoughts on the role of youth.

***“Every generation of youth is distinguished by certain characteristics and their lives are shaped by particular forces.”***

A short discussion on the meaning of forces was necessary, and some forces identified were education, materialism, religion, and peers. The insight gained from that was both positive and negative forces constantly operate in society, and therefore shape their understanding of their role as youth.

*“The Youth of a Nation are the trustees of posterity.”*

- Benjamin Disraeli

As for the question on the role of this generation of youth, the participants, on the whole, felt that they had a duty to engage in community building through service, acting as agents of change. Realising that they are protagonists in this enterprise, the participants also shared that they should promote unity and lead by example for the younger generations to emulate. These actions are driven by a higher purpose to make the world a better place. In connection to this, the concept of stewardship was raised, in the sense that the youth are responsible for ensuring a peaceful and safe world for the future generations, just as their forefathers did for the present generation.

## Conclusion

At the end of the roundtable discourse, the participants reflected on what they had learnt and felt throughout the two-hour session. Most participants were motivated to contribute further in their work as peer educators. Some found the roundtable discourse method effective in providing everyone an opportunity to share their thoughts. Many of them decided to follow up with the group (participants of their respective tables) after the discourse, exchanging contact details and setting up chat groups to continue the discussion on their role in society and the lines of action they could take.

On the whole, the youth expressed interest in participating in similar discourses along these lines in future. This is certainly an encouraging development and bodes well for the future of Malaysia. The participants are committed to community building and, it is hoped that through such discourses, they continue to share this vision within their circles of influence, thereby creating a ripple effect that will contribute to the fortunes of the nation.

“The endurance of youth under arduous conditions, their vitality and vigor, and their ability to adapt themselves to local situations, to meet new challenges, and to impart their warmth and enthusiasm to those they visit, combined with the standard of conduct...make them potent instruments for the execution of the contemplated projects. Indeed, through these distinctive qualities they can become the spearhead of any enterprise and the driving force of any undertaking in which they participate, whether local or national.”

- Baha'i: The Universal House of Justice

## Further Reading Resources on Youth

1. The Power of 1.8 Billion (adolescents, youth and the transformation of the future)  
[https://www.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/EN-SWOP14-Report\\_FINAL-web.pdf](https://www.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/EN-SWOP14-Report_FINAL-web.pdf)
2. New Straits Times Youth Expectations Survey (2004)  
<http://www.merdeka.org/v2/download/NST%20Youth%20%20Poll%20Presentation%201.pdf>
3. National Opinion Poll of Youth on Civic Engagement (2006)  
<http://www.merdeka.org/v4/index.php/downloads/category/2-researches?download=128:national-youth-survey-main-findings-report-2-0&start=60>
4. The National Youth Survey (2012)  
<https://asiafoundation.org/resources/pdfs/2012NationalYouthSurvey.pdf>

## **PARTICIIPATING ORGANISATIONS**

1. Rajeswari Hindu Temple
2. Sikh Community
3. Lady of Lourdes Catholic Church
4. Lutheran Church – Petaling Jaya
5. Amaddiyah Muslim Community
6. Grace Assembly of God - Klang
7. ABIM (Muslim Youth Movement of Malaysia)
8. IKIM (Institute for Islamic Understanding, Malaysia)
9. Nalanda Buddhist Society
10. KDU (Kolej Damansara Utama)
11. SEGI University
12. Monash University
13. International School of Kuala Lumpur
14. LaSalle Youth
15. Malaysia Rare Disorder Society
16. WOMEN : GIRLS
17. LPPK (National Population and Family Development Board) – Teen Educators
18. Pure Life Society (Children and Youth Centre)
19. KAKISENI
20. Baha'i Community of Malaysia





**YB TAN SRI DATUK SERI PANGLIMA JOSEPH KURUP,  
HON MINISTER IN THE PRIME MINISTER'S DEPARTMENT**



**VIDYA SUBRAMANIAM  
Youth Representative, Baha'i Community**

## PRAYING FOR OUR NATION



**CHRISTIAN**



**HINDU**



**ISLAM**



**BAHA'I**



**SIKH**



**BUDDHIST**

## ROUNDTABLE DISCOURSE : Community Builders in Action

