Good afternoon, Chairman Larsson, Fellow Panellists, Ladies and Gentlemen. This session has so far examined this great crisis issue from a variety of perspectives and I thank you for giving me the opportunity to look at youth employment from a global point of view.

While Ms. Lin Lean Lim has already addressed this issue in relation to the International Labour Organisation’s (ILO) response to the challenge, I would like to reiterate the figures so that the enormity of the problem is kept at the fore.

According to the ILO, the world’s youth unemployment rate in 2003 was 14.4 percent, more than double the total world rate of 6.2 per cent. In number terms, we are talking about 52.4 million young men and 35.8 million young women who are unemployed. These are staggering figures by any one’s reckoning and this really demands the issue be given top priority. This is especially so in those areas, such as sub-Saharan Africa, North Africa, South Asia, Western Asia, Southeast Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean, which not only struggle with the “largest present-day youth unemployment challenges, [but] also [face] the largest potential growth in the number of people seeking work over the next decade and beyond.”

We are living in a globalised world, where what were formally domestic issues, have become international issues. No more is this more apparent than in economic terms: the movement of capital, investment, trade and finance. Each niche has international links. Business cannot take place in isolation. No one would dispute this. Similarly, the development of nations, their prosperity and stability, are equally interconnected. We know this too, and we take it seriously. So then have we been so late to identify another issue that has global ramifications, in spite of insistence from many quarters that it is a only “domestic issue”?

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2 *ibid.* p. 5
I am of course talking about employment, and youth employment in particular. If we only look at the trends in migration – from east to west, from north to south, from rural to urban – we know that employment is a universal and interconnected issue. Therefore, if we want to seriously tackle this issue, we must make our response a global one – with respect, of course to the domestic context.

I am happy to say that we are making strides in this direction, but the journey has only begun and the road is exceedingly long and – dare I say it – not always straight!

Following on the Millennium Summit of the United Nations (UN) in September 2000, a United Nations High Level Panel was formed to look into the critical issue of youth employment from a global perspective. Twelve leaders and policy experts were appointed in 2001, with the mandate to advise partners, while also making recommendations and mobilizing opinion and action in favour of youth employment, particularly in developing countries.

As the Chair, Mr. Allan Larsson, has already delineated the four priorities – the so called “Four E’s”: employability, equal opportunities, entrepreneurship and employment creation – which the High Level Panel, along with the assistance of the ILO, the World Bank and the UN, put forward to the General Assembly, I will not elaborate. Suffice to say that at its second meeting, the High Level Panel, agreed to continue its advisory capacity in the following areas:

- In mobilizing action at the country level for the development of National Reviews and Action Plans
- In contributing to the 2005 five year review of the Millennium Declaration with respect to youth employment and its impact on the other Millennium Development Goals
- In advising on the development of new indicators and statistics on youth employment both to inform policy and to assist in monitoring
- In continuously working together with groups trying to identify effective roles of young people in developing action plans on youth employment.

However, none of this could be possible just by a group of 12, with support from the ILO, the UN and the World Bank and I think that the Youth Employment Network (YEN) – an early initiative after the adoption of the UN General Assembly Resolution on Promoting Youth Employment – is the necessary focus to deal with the issue on a global level.
The importance of the Network is not only in its ability to link countries, initiatives and partners together, but also because of the principal under which it operates. The YEN recognises that past policy failures in the field of youth employment, can in large part be blamed on the inadequate attention and consultation given to all the stakeholders, including youth organisations.

The strength of the YEN is that it now focuses on the strategic importance of involving all sectors of society, governments and multilateral agencies, as well as national, non-governmental and youth organisations too, along with the business sector and various civil society initiatives.

Forming collaborative partnerships is very important, even to those who are not yet members of the Network, because it allows the issue of youth employment to be seen, understood and tackled in the wider context of policy issues. Let us be clear, youth employment is not an isolated policy matter, domestically or internationally.

- We also need to develop youth employment policies that are **foreword looking**.
- We need to develop youth employment policies to be long term or **sustainable**.
- We need to develop positive youth employment policies that have equally **positive repercussions** for employment policies in general, and in other areas involving the social, cultural, security and economic development of countries.

Given these requirements, let us see, in practical terms, what countries are doing about this. At the moment, there are a number of Lead Countries, which have committed themselves to successful youth employment practices that provide useful examples to others too. Currently, there are nine Lead Countries. These are, Azerbaijan, Brazil, Egypt, Hungary, Indonesia, Iran, Namibia, Senegal and Sri Lanka.

Given the time constraints, let me look **Indonesia** as a case study. I choose this example, not only because of its geographical proximity to us meeting here in China, but also its regional importance as one of the most populous countries in Asia.

Indonesia has more than 6 million unemployed men and women between the ages of 15 and 29. This represents three-quarters of the total unemployed population. The youth unemployment rate is about 15% in rural areas, while it is about 25% in urban settings. Among those young people who have jobs, 46% are underemployed, working less than 35 hours a week. The vast majority of

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working youth are in the informal economy, lacking adequate income, social protection, security and representation.

The ILO office in Jakarta, along with the Coordinating Minister of Economic Affairs, established an Indonesian Youth Employment Network known as I-YEN. I-YEN involves senior policy makers from the Ministries of Economic Affairs, Manpower and Transmigration and Education, as well as representatives from workers’ and employers’ organisations, youth and civil society and the academic community. The main work of the I-YEN has been in the drafting a **National Youth Employment Action Plan**. This involved the participation, not only of traditional stakeholders, but also more than 400 young Indonesians, who addressed such concerns as

- the high price of education
- the inability of educational qualifications in securing jobs
- the unequal opportunities in the workplace, particularly for women and
- the lack of policies conducive to the creation of business start-ups.

I-YEN also interviewed over two thousand young people detailing their educational and skills, their abilities to enter the job market and the characteristics of working youth. These findings have now been fed into the development of a **Career Guidance Manual** for the use of secondary and technical schools in pilot regions.

**A Pocket Guide for Youth Seeking Work** is also being developed – along with the ILO - to provide young people with the necessary information on how to profile themselves when they seek jobs.

I-YEN, together with the World Bank and the UNDP, are working with the Ministry of Education and youth organisations to focus on the special needs of marginalized youth through the development of life-skills programmes for in-school and out of school youth, especially the poor.

Other important activities include the development of a set of vocational training policy guidelines to support young people in the informal sector and a national awareness raising campaign.

I do wish that there was time to elaborate on the initiatives of some of the other Lead Countries, but I think that what we can learn from Indonesia has value in other areas as well. These are, the provision of **technical assistance, broad based partnership, government support** and most importantly, **national ownership**.
The YEN is expanding. Already in conjunction with the Lead Countries, we have Mainland China, India, Nigeria, the Philippines and Vietnam also becoming active in the process. *Hong Kong* too, as Mr. Mathew Cheung has mentioned, has also taken up the issue very seriously, and more importantly, done so in partnership with all sectors of the community. I do think, that given what we have heard today about the way that the Mainland is addressing the issue internally, it has the potential to take on a leading role within the framework of the Youth Employment Network, to set an example, not only within the region, but in the world.

To conclude, let me reiterate the three areas in which the High Level Panel seeks to anchor the work of the YEN:

1. **Linking Policy to Action** - that is, initiating assistance to Lead Countries and ensuring strong participation of young people in the elaboration and implementation of National Action Plans
2. **Mapping the challenges** of youth employment – that is, using new tools to monitor the situation and take stock of lessons learnt, while also developing a joint research agenda on youth employment
3. **Promoting initiatives** and programmes that have a proven impact on youth employment through network development.

As Kofi Annan once said,

> Young people are a source of creativity, energy and initiative, of dynamism and social renewal. Given the chance to go to school and to find work, they will contribute hugely to economic development and social progress.⁴

I have no doubt that initiatives like the YEN will lead us to this possibility.

Thank you.

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