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## ADDRESS BY

ATTORNEY GENERAL ROBERT F. KENNEDY

To The Fifth General Assembly

WORLD ASSEMBLY OF YOUTH

University of Massachusetts

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Mr. Secretary General, delegates and friends, it is my honor and privilege to be with you this afternoon. I have a keen appreciation of the role of a free youth organization in the world today, and I know how ably the World Assembly of Youth has lived up to that role.

You have existed during a turbulent period of history since WAY was founded in 1948. And throughout these difficult years you have maintained the independence essential to gaining respect and recognition for your judgments on world issues.

Although those judgments have not always been in accord with ours here in the United States -- or with our policy -- we have recognized the intelligent concern with which you started. And we have always heard the clear ring of independence in your voice.

We have also noted that your organization is a training ground for the young leadership of the developing nations. That, as you know, is a vitally important contribution. I trust that it will continue and that some of you here as delegates today will be sharing the leadership responsibility for your own countries in the very near future.

In this respect you are perhaps more fortunate than you realize:

First, because you are gaining the advantages of a good university education;

Second, because you already have awareness and concern for the problems of our time that leads you to face them directly -- as you are doing here; and

Third, because you are reaching the threshold of leadership and public service at a time of unparalleled challenge and opportunity.

I am not suggesting that the challenges you will face -- or that the world faces today -- are easy. You know they are not. You know they are broader in scope, more important, incomparably more complex, than the challenges of former times.

Yesterday, we sought telescopes to see all the planets. Today we seek vehicles to reach them.

Yesterday, we fought wars which destroyed cities. Today, we are concerned with avoiding a war which will destroy the earth. We can adapt atomic energy to produce electricity and move ships, but can we control its use in anger?

Automation provides us with wondrous increases of production and information, but does it tell us what to do with the men the machines displace? Modern industry gives us the capacity for great wealth -- but do we have the capacity to make that wealth meaningful to the poor of the world?

These are not problems to be mulled over and adjusted to for a century; they must be solved in a single generation, in our generation -- or even sooner. How we respond to those problems -- and the new ones that surely will come hard on their heels -- will determine the shape of our world.

These problems are not for individuals to solve. They are not even for individual nations to solve unaided. As our problems grow more complex, our world grows smaller, and our need for solutions becomes common.

This gives a universality and enhanced importance to some of the challenges that have existed since the beginning of time. It creates the special atmosphere of challenge and opportunity which we face today. Toynbee has called this, "the first age since the dawn of history in which mankind has dared to believe it practicable to make the benefits of civilization available to the human race." And President Kennedy later said: "Never before has man had such capacity to control his own environment -- to end thirst and hunger, to conquer poverty and disease, to banish illiteracy and massive human misery."

This is our great opportunity today. How we react to it is the central issue of our time.

Although this is the age of nuclear power, automation and flight to the moon, for the great mass of people in the world these developments are as unreal as if they existed only in the world of science fiction.

Two-thirds of the present world population -- about two billion people -- live in the so-called "developing nations" of Asia, Africa and Latin America. The "developing" refers to technology for, as we all know, many of these countries had advanced civilizations when people in Europe and America were living in caves.

But these areas had fallen behind in the race for technological progress. Their problems today are the basic problems of population, and hunger and education, and it is these which demand and must receive world-wide attention and world-wide solution.

I believe that we recognize now -- perhaps for the first time -- that the gap between the developing and the developed nations of the world must be closed. And for this reason the attention of the world is turning to the problems which may engage your energies and your leadership talents tomorrow.

In all of the developing nations a rapidly expanding population is closely related to every other problem. From the very beginning -- hundreds of thousands of years ago -- to almost 1900, the world grew to a population of 1.5 billion. In the last 60 years it has doubled to 3 billion. It is estimated that it will double again to 6 billion by the end of this century.

By this time tomorrow afternoon there will be 100,000 more people in the world; at this time next year there will be nearly 50 million more.

And the problems of developing nations are accentuated because they get such a high percentage of world population growth -- about 80% of the increase over the last decade, for example. It is estimated that at present growth rates North America will go from 200 to 300 million by the end of this century, but Latin America will go from 200 to 600 million during the same period.

This is clearly a basic area in which world progress must be made in the coming years. There must be much better knowledge of population trends, particularly as they relate to economic and social progress. There must be medical and social research, to extend the boundaries of our knowledge. The wisest leadership and calm judgment will be required to reconcile conflicting views.

Closely related to population is the problem of hunger or the world's supply of food. It was last summer before the World Food Congress that President Kennedy said: "We have the ability, we have the means, and we have the capacity to eliminate hunger from the face of the earth. We need only the will."

But hunger has not been eliminated yet. Statistics from the United Nations indicate that in the developing countries wheat yields are as low as six bushels per acre and men go hungry for bread. Other countries eat cake with yields as high as 40 bushels of wheat to the acre. Most of the world, we are told, exists on a daily diet a scant 400 calories above the starvation level and 750 calories below the level enjoyed by the privileged one-third.

Within the last week we read that one of the world's great nations faces catastrophe because its food grain production has practically stood still for five years while its population was increasing by 50 million. In the face of shortages, hunger and even starvation, unrest is said to be mounting and the maintenance of law and order difficult.

It is true that we have learned much about food production in recent years. We have developed fertilizers and irrigation techniques, cooperatives, controls and incentives. We have learned something from the succession of food failures in Communist countries going back nearly half a century. The individual farmers have stubbornly refused to produce more than their own needs in a police state. The great advances in food production have all come in a democratic agricultural system functioning in a free society.

But we have only begun. We still have much to learn about production, and storage and particularly distribution. This, along with population, is one of the basic problems to which the attention of democratic leaders throughout the world will be devoted for many years to come.

Another of the basic problems that will require wise -- even inspired -- leadership is that of education. Here again there is the startling imbalance which leaves the developing nations at such a sharp disadvantage.

There is practically universal agreement on the importance of education to the development process. The bottleneck to development is always human resources -- people. The essential need is for many people, trained to do special jobs, and the critical few, educated for the complex art of management.

To understand this is to understand the great thirst for education in many of the developing countries. There is an awareness that educational opportunity is the means of individual as well as national advancement. There are frequently strong pressures on governments to make this opportunity available on a broad scale.

But often where the need and desire are greatest, the resources are least and unusual problems are encountered in seeking to go from nothing to a complete educational system overnight. One African country is reported to have 750,000 children in first grade, 400,000 children in second grade and only 80,000 getting out of sixth grade each year. At the same time this country does not have enough elementary graduates to fill its high schools and it graduated only 400 high school students in a recent year. This grotesque pyramid reveals a staggering drop-out rate and the rate of lapse back into illiteracy has been estimated at 80-90 percent.

This is only one isolated example of the myriad problems existing in the basic area of education. It will be necessary to develop broad strategies of education closely related to political and economic development, aimed at the requirements of world cooperation as well as the needs of a particular country.

So if your interest persists and your enthusiasm does not flag, these are some of the problems you must grapple with. There is an urgency about them because the current of rising expectations is already swift.

As Simon Bolivar once wrote: "The veil has been torn asunder. We have already seen the light and it is not our desire to be thrust back into the darkness." And so it is with the developing nations. They are impatient and they will not longer tolerate the hunger, disease and illiteracy that they have endured for centuries.

But if you bring your intelligence and will to bear on these problems, you will be dealing with the central issue of our time. There is more than peace and stability involved, because the development gap is a very real challenge to the free representative governments of free men everywhere. If we meet this challenge successfully, we shall have carried the torch of freedom to the world of the future.

It is true that the effort required is staggering -- both in your own countries and in world organizations such as this. But, as President Kennedy said shortly before his death, "if we maintain the pace, we shall in due season reap the kind of world we deserve and deserve the kind of world we have."