

JOINT STATEMENT BY HEADS OF UN ENTITIES



FOR THE LAUNCH OF THE INTERNATIONAL YEAR OF YOUTH



United Nations



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This year, 12 August marks a crucial date for young people and societies around the world. Today, we celebrate the launch of the International Year of Youth, under the theme Dialogue and Mutual Understanding. Twenty-five years ago, in 1985, we celebrated the first International Youth Year. The challenges for youth development that were identified during that year laid the foundation for the **World Programme of Action for Youth**, and its 15 priority areas still provide us with a useful guide to enhance the wellbeing of young women and men. While progress has been achieved in some of these areas, much remains to be done to ensure that all our youth become skilled, healthy and productive members of society.

We recognize that adolescence and youth mark the transition from childhood to adulthood, a time when many important social, economic, biological, and demographic events set the stage for adult life. **Education** plays an essential role in this transition to adulthood. Although youth literacy rates have increased considerably since the first International Year of Youth, progress has been uneven, with sub-Saharan Africa and Southern and Western Asia falling behind, and the rural-urban gap widening. We need to increase investments in and access to education, especially secondary education, which is the minimum level of education needed to succeed in our increasingly globalized economy and to guarantee young people a smooth transition to decent jobs. Youth un- and under**employment** incurs significant costs to the economy, society, the individual and his or her family. Lack of decent and productive work, if experienced at an early stage of life, often permanently compromises a person's future employment prospects. Inability to find decent employment can lead to social exclusion, vulnerability and idleness among youth, which may find an expression in anti-social behaviour. To provide the unprecedented number of job seekers entering the labour market in the coming years with decent employment prospects, we need to improve our knowledge of which employment and labour market policies are most effective and commit to implementing them.

The current financial and economic crisis and the preceding spike in food prices have proven a major setback to our efforts to eradicate **poverty, hunger and malnutrition**. Targeted investment in both urban and rural youth is a critical starting point for reducing poverty and achieving the Millennium Development Goals. It is crucial to provide incentives and capacities for youth to remain in their rural communities and be actively engaged in the rural economy, both in the agricultural and non-farm sectors. Stronger urban-rural linkages should also be created in order for young people to obtain access to markets and decent work opportunities.

Related to the issue of urbanization and the abandonment of the rural settings is the deterioration and exploitation of the natural **environment**. Young people are already imagining more sustainable lifestyles and their involvement in protecting the environment, be it in climate change mitigation and adaptation, the fight against desertification, or the management of forests, is critical to ensure sustainable development for future generations. In this regard, the active participation of youth in the Rio+20 preparations and Conference is crucial and must be supported.

We all agree that **health** is a human right and an integral part of youth development. Many young people die prematurely or see their future health jeopardized by preventable health problems such as HIV infection, too early or unwanted pregnancy, injuries, the use of tobacco or alcohol, and malnutrition. Investments in health care, including universal access to evidence-based sexual and reproductive health programmes are crucial to prevent unwanted pregnancies, maternal mortality, sexually transmitted infections and other threats to young people's health. We must put young people at the centre of the **AIDS** response and ensure that young women and men have access to accurate information and skills as well as youth-friendly, gender-sensitive services to prevent HIV infection. Engagement and leadership of young people is critical to ensure an effective response that addresses the specific needs and realities of young people.

Youth policies often tend to be driven by negative stereotypes of young people, in particular in the context of **drug abuse, violence and delinquency**. We must use the opportunity that this year presents to change this perception



and to recognize that the vast majority of young people are productive members of society. When substance abuse and juvenile delinquency do constitute a problem, it is frequently the result of a comprehensive inability to provide adequate opportunities and services to young people.

Around the world, children and youth are affected by **armed conflicts**. They are killed or maimed, sexually violated, made into orphans, abducted and forcibly recruited for military purposes. They are deprived of education and health care, and left with deep emotional scars and trauma, preventing them from enjoying a decent adolescence that is the foundation for a healthy and prosperous society. Collaborative efforts of the international community have led to progress in protecting children and youth affected by armed conflicts. However, much remains to be done, such as ending impunity of those who violate the rights of children and youth in conflict, securing universal adherence to international standards – such as the Optional Protocol on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict - as well as providing assistance to former child soldiers. Furthermore, it is critical that we support young people in playing a key role in promoting peace, security and good governance.

Evidence shows that **girls and young women** face a double burden. Not only are they discriminated against as a result of their age, but also due to their sex. Specific policies, legislation, programmes and measures that address the concerns, needs and rights of young women and girls are indispensable to ensure they are adequately prepared and protected in this stage of life. Initiatives focused on strengthening the capacities and skills of young women and girls are essential to enable them to actively and effectively participate in social, political, cultural and economic life. Efforts must be made to break down stereotypes of the role of girls and young women in society. Increasing the participation of young women in decision-making processes and leadership positions is essential to guarantee sustainable progress, human development and democracy.

Similarly, other **vulnerable groups**, such as indigenous youth, youth belonging to ethnic minorities, migrants, out-of-school youth, youth trapped in hazardous work and other worst forms of child labour, as well as youth with disabilities deserve our particular attention. Actions should be strengthened at all levels to better respond to their needs as well as to remove barriers to their access to and active participation in education, training and employment, with the aim of ensuring that all youth become engaged citizens and productive contributors to society.

It is important to recognize that **leisure-time activities, sport, tourism** and **volunteerism** can contribute to the physical, social, emotional, intellectual, psychological, ethical and cultural development of young people. In particular, sport gives youth a healthy start and teaches important values such as discipline, cooperation and commitment. Sport brings people together on an equal playing field that transcends social, ethnic and cultural divides, and a greater focus on sport can promote the development of important skills and attitudes that are key to the future of our youth. Like physical recreation, tourism is an important means of individual and collective fulfilment for youth and an irreplaceable factor of self-education, mutual tolerance and learning about the legitimate differences between peoples and cultures. Moving to volunteerism, many youth around the world volunteer in their communities, thereby making tangible contributions to peace and development. Civic engagement is central to building cohesive communities and to promoting young people's integration into society. Greater efforts should thus be made to guarantee that young women and men have the opportunity to participate in these types of activities.

To address the persisting challenges outlined in the priority areas of the World Programme of Action for Youth, the UN Inter-Agency Network on Youth Development has developed a framework approach to guide its work during this International Year of Youth and to maximize synergies with concurrent international observances, namely the International Year for the Rapprochement of Cultures, the International Year of Biodiversity, the International Year of Forests and the tenth anniversary of the International Year of Volunteers. The framework identifies three overarching objectives: increase commitment to and investment in youth; increase youth participation and partnerships; and increase intercultural understanding among youth.



Quality investment in youth development yields greater economic growth and social wellbeing for generations to come. Missed investments in young people's intellectual and human potential are costly to reverse, both for youth and for society. In order to achieve positive outcomes in the areas of education, employment, health and citizenship, a holistic approach to youth development is needed, focusing not only on young people themselves, but also on those factors that help shape their behaviours, such as families, communities, schools, the media, the legal system and social norms. To make the best use of scarce public funding, policy makers need to invest in programmes and activities that, based on empirical evidence, have proven to be successful in achieving their intended goals. An effective portfolio of programmes and policies that includes prevention and protection measures, second-chance initiatives and development policies that disproportionately affect young people needs to be developed and implemented. In targeting our investments, a specific focus on Africa, the youngest and poorest developing region in the world, is a necessary element for success.

Moreover, we need to institutionalize mechanisms for the participation of young women and men in decision-making processes and to support youth-led organizations and initiatives. We all know that young people are among the most affected by the key development challenges of our time, but are also at the forefront of developing innovative solutions to these problems. Youth have traditionally been a catalyst of not just social and cultural change, but of technological innovation as well.

The theme of this year and the existence of a number of political hotbeds around the world highlight the importance of cultivating dialogue and intercultural understanding among youth. Their open-mindedness, mobility and affinity to information and communication technologies transcend geographical boundaries. Youth can be a bridge between cultures and can serve as key agents in promoting peace and dialogue. We – the older generations – stand to learn and to benefit from their energy and creativity.

At the beginning of this International Year of Youth, we commit to working together within the UN system to tackle the challenges and seize the opportunities facing young people. We pledge to make youth a priority in our work and to collaborate with them in order to identify ways in which our organizations can promote their wellbeing more effectively. We call on the international community to support our efforts and to recognize the central role that young people play in the achievement of the internationally agreed development goals and the attainment of peace and security. We urge Governments to enter into meaningful dialogue with young people in order to develop a mutual understanding of how to jointly address the development challenges facing us.

We hope that in twenty-five years from now, the young people of today will look back at this International Year of Youth and recognize that it has laid the foundations for making the world a better place for themselves and for succeeding generations of young women and men in every region, country and community around the world.

The undersigned,



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International Year of Youth: Dialogue and Mutual Understanding

In December 2009, the UN General Assembly adopted resolution 64/134 proclaiming the International Year of Youth from 12 August 2010 to 11 August 2011. Under the theme International Year of Youth: Dialogue and Mutual Understanding, the Year aims to reach across generations, cultures, religions and civilizations and promote the ideals of peace, respect for human rights and solidarity.

The UN Inter-Agency Network on Youth Development is coordinating the activities of the UN system for the Year, with the UN Programme on Youth leading this effort. The Network strives to increase the effectiveness of the UN's work by strengthening collaboration and exchange among all UN entities working on youth. Members of the Network adopted the UN Framework Approach for the International Year of Youth to provide a concrete framework for collective efforts and to set the strategic objectives for the Year. The Framework identifies the following three key objectives:

Create awareness » Increase commitment and investment in youth

- Increase recognition of youth development as a smart investment by the public and private sectors
- Advocate for the recognition of young people's contributions to national and community development and to achieving the Millennium Development Goals
- Promote understanding of inequalities amongst youth and how to effectively address the needs of the most disadvantaged
- Foster research and knowledge building on youth to better inform youth policies and programmes

Mobilize and engage » Increase youth participation and partnerships

- Institutionalize mechanisms for youth participation in decision-making processes
- Support youth-led organizations and initiatives to enhance their contribution to society
- Strengthen networks and partnerships among Governments, youth-led organizations, academia, civil society organizations, the private sector, the media and the UN system, to enhance commitment and support for holistic youth development

Connect and build bridges » Increase intercultural understanding among youth

- Promote youth interactions, networks and partnerships across cultures
- Empower and support youth as agents of social inclusion and peace

The progress achieved during the Year will lay the foundation for further work in youth development, including increased implementation of the World Programme of Action for Youth.



The World Programme of Action for Youth

In 1995, on the tenth anniversary of the first International Youth Year, the United Nations adopted the World Programme of Action for Youth (WPAY). The Programme of Action provides a framework to guide public, private and international action on youth development. It concretely illustrates the international community's commitment to young people and its resolve to address the development challenges they face comprehensively.

The World Programme of Action for Youth initially identified 10 priority areas to guide policy and action in the area of youth development. In 2005, the General Assembly added five additional priority areas to better align the Programme of Action to the new challenges of the twenty-first century. The additional areas were elaborated in a supplement to the WPAY, which was adopted at the sixty-second session of the General Assembly in 2007.

For each of the interrelated priority areas, the WPAY outlines the challenges and presents action-oriented proposals to advance the well-being of young people. It also outlines the means of implementing the Programme of Action with Governments taking the lead and the international community providing technical support.

The 15 priority areas of the World Programme of Action for Youth are:

- Education
- Employment
- Hunger and poverty
- Health
- Environment
- Drug abuse
- Juvenile delinquency
- Leisure-time activities
- Girls and young women
- Youth participation in society and in decision-making
- Globalization
- Information and communications technology
- HIV/AIDS
- Armed conflict
- Intergenerational issues

Inter-Agency Network on Youth Development

The United Nations Inter-Agency Network on Youth Development is a network consisting of close to thirty UN entities whose work is relevant to youth issues. The aim of the network is to increase the effectiveness of UN work in youth development by strengthening collaboration and exchange among all relevant UN entities, while respecting and harnessing the benefits of their individual strengths and unique approaches and mandates. The UN Programme on Youth serves as the permanent chair of the Network with a co-chair rotating annually.

In the framework of the World Programme of Action for Youth (WPAY) and its 15 priority areas, the Network advocates for, supports and reviews progress on the implementation of UN Resolutions, Conventions and the internationally agreed development goals that are youth-related. The Network also contributes to increasing the understanding and visibility of the UN System's work on youth development.

The main objectives of the UN Inter-Agency Network are:

- To identify key joint priorities and plan collaboratively to implement related initiatives.
- To share good practices and expertise and to promote effective cooperation among the entities in programming at country and regional levels.
- To identify global strategic opportunities, ensure coordinated input, facilitate and support sustainable follow-up mechanisms.



For more information on the Joint Statement by Heads of UN Entities
for the Launch of the International Year of Youth,
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