

UNITED NATIONS



NATIONS UNIES

**Statement by
Mr. Sha Zukang
UNDER-SECRETARY-GENERAL FOR ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL AFFAIRS
ON THE INTERNATIONAL DAY OF YOUTH**

New York, 12 August 2010

Excellencies – Minister Labidi, Minister Kerekou, Under Secretary of State McHale, Mrs. Obaid,

Young friends,

Dear colleagues,

I am honoured to be here with you as we celebrate the International Day of Youth and as we commence the International Year of Youth.

More and more countries have become aware of the need to address the concerns of youth and celebrate their contributions to society.

At intergovernmental meetings at the UN, the African Union and the Iberoamerican Summit, Member States have increasingly highlighted the central role of youth in developing stronger economic and social foundations and in reaching the Millennium Development Goals.

Public information efforts have also increased. The African Union declared 2008 as the African Youth Year, and 2009-2019 as the decade of youth development. The Russian Federation and the Iberoamerican Summit have also carried out youth year campaigns in recent years.

For the UN's part, the establishment of the UN Inter-Agency Network on Youth Development has been instrumental in coordinating youth-related projects and expanding them. This Network has grown from 24 UN entities in 2007 to 32 today.

In this International Year of Youth, the Network will encourage UN entities to focus on three main objectives as they liaise with governments, NGOs and the private sector.

The first objective is to increase awareness about the power of investing in youth. Awareness-raising can take many forms. Public information campaigns and events should promote youth development as a smart investment by public and private sectors. Programmes that educate youth about social inequalities can teach our future leaders to

address the needs of the disadvantaged. Research that targets the needs of youth should be carried out.

The second objective is to mobilize and engage youth. Youth-led organizations and initiatives are prevalent in many countries but they need more engagement by local governments, academia, NGOs, the media and the private sector. In the next year, the Inter-Agency Network will work to strengthen these partnerships so that young people are more involved in all types of decision-making processes in society.

A third objective is to increase intercultural understanding among youth. It is so important that we foster cultural and religious tolerance in our young people. We need to encourage and inspire youth leaders to be open-minded about others' viewpoints. The World Conference on Youth in Mexico later this month will do this on a global scale.

But there are countless other ways to promote intercultural understanding – workshops, debates, seminars, writing contests are just a few. Over the next year, I call on governments and youth organizations to take every opportunity to join UN agencies in hosting activities and events like these that foster dialogue on tolerance and intercultural understanding.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Allow me to briefly touch on the importance of employment and sustainable development in the context of youth issues.

In many countries, the majority of unemployed people are youths. Governments need to take concrete measures to address this, including through the creation of environmentally-sound or “green” jobs. They provide healthy, sustainable livelihoods and give young people a chance to directly fight climate change.

I also call on governments to accelerate all sustainable development initiatives, for these have a direct effect on the current state and the future of our young people. Furthermore youth should be engaged in the creation of these initiatives. So many young people are deeply committed to living sustainable lifestyles – they shop responsibly and advocate for environmentally accountable behaviour. Let us harness their energy and enthusiasm as we strive to add environmentally sound practices to all economic and social development efforts.

Young friends,

On a final note, I would like to mention the Heads of UN entities in the Inter-Agency Network on Youth have prepared a joint statement that outlines the UN's commitment to youth development.

I am very pleased to ask Thoraya Obaid, Executive Director of UNFPA to take the floor and read the statement on behalf of its signatories as we launch the International Year of Youth

Mrs. Obaid you have the floor.