

**Report of the General Assembly Side-Event**

**Youth in Africa: Opportunities and Challenges**

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## **I. Introduction**

As part of the activities to mark the International Year of Youth, which was launched in August 2010 by the United Nations General Assembly, the Office of the Special Adviser on Africa (OSAA) hosted a panel discussion titled, “Youth and the Future of Africa: Challenges and Opportunities” on 01 December 2010 at United Nations Headquarters in New York.

The inauguration of the International Year of Youth marked an important new step in the international community’s initiatives to focus on the role of youth and to strengthen their voice in global affairs. The International Year of Youth provides a timely opportunity for UN system partners, including OSAA, to undertake various initiatives to reflect on the unique contributions of African youth to peace, security and development in the continent.

The purpose of the panel discussion was to analyse the complexity and gravity of the challenges facing youth in Africa and to explore and identify strategic options for fully taking into account youth perspectives into policy design and implementation in Africa. The event was organized by OSAA in collaboration with the Division of Social Policy and Development of DESA and the UN Inter-Agency Network on Youth Development.

The participants focused on four main themes: youth education, particularly for girls, youth employment, the effects of armed conflict on youth, and the impact of HIV/AIDS on youth. The event explored opportunities to collaborate with young people as partners in peacebuilding, conflict prevention and sustainable development. The event focused on the positive role youth can play by encouraging inter-generational dialogue, and promoting a positive image of young people as a key resource of stability, peace and sustainable growth and development in the continent. It also discussed strategies for local and national governments and the international community to effectively promote the crucial role of African youth.

The event included remarks by high-level speakers and a panel discussion with young panelists from Africa selected by the United Nations, taking into consideration regional representation as well as gender balance. The panelists had expertise about youth issues in Africa.

The meeting was attended by over 100 persons, including Permanent Representatives to the UN, United Nations Agencies, representatives of civil society, the academia, private sector and the international media. In addition, AU, ECA and other relevant African policy and research institutions participated in the event.

## **II. Opening Session**

The opening session consisted of welcome and opening remarks by the Moderator, Mr. Cheick Sidi Diarra, Under-Secretary-General, Special Adviser on Africa and High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States, and statements by Mr. Sha Zukang, Under-Secretary-General of DESA, United Nations, H.E. Mr. Teté Antonio, Ambassador, Permanent Observer of the African Union to the United

Nations and H.E. Mr. Jean-Francis R. Zinsou, Permanent Representative of the Republic of Benin to the United Nations.

## **Welcome and Opening Remarks**

***Mr. Cheick Sidi Diarra, Under-Secretary-General, Special Adviser on Africa and High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States.***

Mr. Diarra articulated the background and rationale for the event, highlighting the importance of the IYY and its theme of “Dialogue and Mutual Understanding” to generate much needed attention for youth participation and youth development at local, national and global levels. The USG stated that the IYY provided an important opportunity to increase commitment to youth, promote youth participation and enhance inter-cultural dialogue and understanding among youth. He stressed that the International Year of Youth Year helped to promote the message that it was within the power of young people to better the circumstances they find themselves in.

In outlining OSAA’s broader mandate of supporting the implementation of the programme activities of NEPAD, the USG stressed that OSAA has been involved in several of the Programme’s youth-related activities, in particular in the advocacy for youth participation in peace and development, as well as the participation of youth in the promotion of peace and security and good governance in Africa. He said that it was in this context that OSAA convened the special event to place the spotlight on the opportunities and challenges facing the youth in Africa.

Mr. Diarra stated that Africa was the only continent where the youth population was continuing to rapidly expand while the number of young people is stabilizing in other regions of the world. This ‘youth bulge’ was both a challenge and an opportunity. The energy, dynamism, creativity and optimism of the vast youth population in most of Africa offer an important opportunity to boost development, if the potential of the young people is appropriately harnessed. But at the same time, he said, large numbers of young people are lacking education, skills and job opportunities, which constitute a threat to stability, peace and security in many African countries.

The USG said that it was therefore important to set the youth issue as a policy priority at the global, regional and national levels, through their involvement as central stakeholders. Unfortunately, the perceptions of, and reactions to, the youth bulge had been disproportionately negative, focusing more on youth’s potential roles in fomenting instability and insecurity rather than their obvious potential to play positive roles in fostering peace, security and development on the African development.

In his concluding remarks, Mr. Diarra stated that in order for the positive potential of youth to be unlocked, governments and the international community must reconceptualise how they perceive, engage with and respond to the needs of youth. He stressed that young Africans must be involved in decision-making processes at all stages and given legitimate aspirations. It is only through fair and equitable participation in the economic, social and political spheres that the

marginalization of youth can end, and that equal opportunity should be given to young males and young females.

***Mr. Sha Zukang, Under-Secretary-General of DESA***

In his opening remarks Mr. Sha Zukang stated that the event organized by OSAA contributed to raising awareness about youth, which is one of the most valuable and under-utilized resources in the world today. During the Year, UN system entities will place special focus on their youth programmes and encourage Member States, NGOs and other partners to do the same.

Mr. Sha Zukang called for increased advocacy efforts to highlight the power of investing in youth. These efforts could include public information campaigns, educational programmes and media events which would bring attention to the dynamism and productivity that young people bring to the public and private sector.

Another objective of the IYY is to mobilize and engage young people through local governments, academia, the NGOs, media and the private sector. He called on all organizations to make special efforts during the Year to reach out to youth, to employ them if possible, and also to engage them through volunteer positions, internships and community-based activities.

The USG remarked that it was easy to forget how much young people looked to their elders for guidance and support. He noted that youth would seek to follow the example of the older generations in countless ways, especially in how the latter treated those from different cultures, religions and generations.

The IYY called for the increase of inter-cultural understanding among youth. In this regard, it was important to promote activities and events to foster tolerance of others' backgrounds and viewpoints.

In highlighting the strong support demonstrated to the IYY, the USG mentioned events which had taken place in Darfur and Addis Ababa and reaffirmed the readiness of the United Nations to assist youth and youth-led organizations in reaching their goals, especially those that related to Africa. He also invited youth to continue helping the UN reach its goals, key among them the eradication of poverty, hunger, disease, the halting of climate change and the advancement of women's rights, and emphasized the energy, enthusiasm and talents of the youth and their potential to help solve the ever-increasing complexity of today's challenges.

***H.E. Mr. Teté Antonio, Ambassador, Permanent Observer of the African Union to the United Nations***

Ambassador Teté Antonio referred to youth in Africa as one of the most vulnerable groups in society, in critical need of support. He highlighted the challenges faced by youth in the continent, from a lack of sufficient educational opportunities, health and social services and environmental degradation and violence, including gender-motivated violence. He stressed that limited employment opportunities for youth not only weakened national economies but also created the potential for increased crime, violence and social unrest. He stated that where

opportunities for gainful employment and job security existed, young people were less likely to become involved in illicit activities or armed conflict and were more likely to contribute to the positive and peaceful development of their countries.

As a response to the youth challenges, the African Union adopted the African Youth Charter in 2006. It came into force in April 2009. The Youth Charter encourages the youth of Africa to strive for liberty and accountability, to mobilize against HIV/AIDS, say no to drugs, and to raise their voices to reject conflict and impunity. It also urges youth to acquire education and appreciate their cultures and languages.

The Permanent Observer of the African Union also remarked that in promoting the African Youth Charter there is a need to recognize that youth living in Africa faced challenges brought about by limited access to resources, health care, education, training, employment and economic opportunities. Member States of the United Nations recognize that young people in Africa are a major human resource for development, positive social change and technological innovation.

He stated that the future of sub-Saharan Africa depended to a large extent on the investment made in education, health and employment sectors in support of youth in the region. It is vital to give special attention to youth from countries emerging from conflict, especially through the provision of access to employment.

Mr. Teté Antonio concluded by noting the valuable efforts made by the UN and the international community in promoting youth issues, but stressed that the main responsibility for youth advancement lies with African governments and the people of Africa.

***H.E. Mr. Jean-Francis R. Zinsou, Permanent Representative of the Republic of Benin to the United Nations***

In his statement, Ambassador Zinsou highlighted the enormous potential of youth in contributing to the positive development of their countries if their energy, enthusiasm and ideas were given creative outlets for expression and actualization. The success of these efforts depended on the participation of youth at all stages of policy-planning and implementation. In this regard, he stressed that youth should be empowered to participate in the development agenda, namely, in poverty reduction, achievement of the MDGs and the objectives of NEPAD. On its part, Governments and international partners should provide financing and technical support to youth to allow them to realise their potential as agents of change.

Ambassador Zinsou contended that youth represented great opportunity, but also risks. As policy-makers, African governments needed to maximize opportunity and minimize risks. In this regard, he outlined special tools and instruments to engage with youth in an efficient manner, namely, legal instruments such as the African Youth Charter, which defines the rights, duties and liberties of youth empowerment; the 2009-2018 Ten-Year Action Plan of the African Union, for development and advancement of youth; and the African Day of the Youth, celebrated on every first day of November.

In addition, Ambassador Zinsou outlined seven Areas of Action for Youth Development:

- (i) Education and professional training: The need of African youth for formal education. Training and technical skills will enable them to participate in activities in every sphere of society;
- (ii) Employment and the challenge of migration: Thousands of youth cross the Saharan desert to Europe to fulfill their dreams, and thousands of them die during the transition. This phenomenon is a clear sign of the seriousness of the situation and despair of African youth and demonstrates the serious need for decent employment for youth;
- (iii) Youth and entrepreneurship: The limited access to financing is identified by youth as a major obstacle towards entrepreneurship. Therefore, there is a need to increase micro-financing institutions, especially designed for youth to promote entrepreneurship;
- (iv) Youth and Information, Communication and Technology (ICT): The digital sector is a promising sector for youth, both in terms of employment generation as well as promoting innovation and creativity. Therefore, both public and private investment in this area is vital;
- (v) Enhancing the health sector, in particular in preventing the spread of HIV/AIDS: This is one key problem that was currently eroding Africa's capacity and, if left unchecked, would compound the skills and capacity shortage on the continent as well as deprive youth of opportunities to develop the essential skills needed for meaningful participation in the continent's development;
- (vi) Protection of the environment and sustainable development: Youth are concerned about the destruction of the environment. It's important to promote job creation in the environmental sector;
- (vii) Engaging youth in policy-planning and implementation: It is important for African governments to integrate the priorities of youth in their economic planning, as well as providing them with opportunities to participate in decision-making;

Finally, Ambassador Zinsou stated that youth are not only the leaders of tomorrow, but could also be the leaders of today and give Africa the means to tackle the challenges and seize the opportunities to promote durable peace and sustainable development in the continent.

### **III. Presentation by Youth Panelists**

The Opening Session was followed by the presentations by the four youth panelists (see Annex II for their biographies) on the four themes: youth education, particularly for girls; youth employment; the impact of HIV/AIDS on youth; and the effects of armed conflict on youth.

## ***Youth Education***

The presentation on youth education by Mr. Plapa Koukpamou underscored the lack of adequate investment and educational opportunities for youth education, leading to an unfortunate waste of the most important and vital human capital in Africa.

Mr. Koukpamou outlined important efforts which have been made during the past decades in local, national and international levels to improve primary education in Africa through the *Education for All* programs. In contrast, little has been done to maintain the flow of students towards secondary education following the completion of primary education. He pointed out that if *Education for All* has been positive in increasing primary enrolments, it failed to address the education system as a whole.

Mr. Koukpamou recalled that his middle and high school years in Togo were spent in classrooms with no less than 80 students, however as he entered Lome University in Togo, there were more than five hundred students in each of his classes, with one professor. This situation was similar in many countries where secondary education constituted a bottleneck in the educational systems.

The speaker stated that there was no question that most young Africans faced educational challenges, but the deficit was much worse when it came to girls and persons with disabilities. Tradition and religion still played an important role in the education of youth in general and girls in particular. In some communities, girls were seen as housekeepers, and therefore not in need of education. Furthermore, he added that girls were more likely to drop out of school because of early pregnancy and the 'baby-mother phenomenon'. Despite the adoption of many conventions to protect women, girls in Africa still faced a real danger of sexual abuse, acute poverty and lack of law enforcement which continue to exacerbate the problem

Furthermore, Mr. Koukpamou argued that the huge deficit of ICT infrastructure in Africa seriously undermined the chances of youths' ability to compete in the global village. Those unable to physically attend classes only had the alternative of dropping out of the education system completely. He called for change in this situation as African youth were also falling behind, especially in the areas of access to technology and information, as the rest of the world moved ahead.

The speaker referred to Africa as a continent full of wealth in its soil, waters and on its surface, with tremendous human capital which is mostly young. . He argued therefore that the deficit in youth education in Africa is the result of conflict, poor management, corruption, waste, and a lack of vision for the continent. It is part of a chain of problems that operated in a vicious cycle. Without overlooking monetary aid, the real assistance that would pull African countries out of poverty were fair trade, the continued fight against corruption at local, national and international levels, and the promotion of real democracy, transparency and accountability. He said that was how youth from Africa envisioned the end of the chaotic situation in which they lived. In conclusion, Mr. Koukpamou called on the world community to help so that courageous and bold actions could be taken. Such help is vital to fully implement appropriate and effective conventions, treaties and policies which would ensure that African resources benefited African countries. Specifically, and to get the most out of the investments, governments should extend Education for All to the secondary and tertiary levels. Vocational curriculum should be

reinforced, modernized and focused on the demands of the continent. Ethics, justice, transparency and accountability should be, not simply taught in classrooms, but seen in the management of countries.

### *Youth Employment*

In her presentation, Ms. Grace Akallo emphasized that youth employment was a key concern in Africa; it is one of the single most serious problems facing the youth. This is because in Africa, young people represent a large proportion of the population, with people aged below thirty years, accounting for over 75 per cent of the population. The challenge was to make sure that this large and very active section of society was engaged in productive activities that would not only improve their own well-being but also contribute to the enrichment of the quality of life of all in Africa.

The speaker pointed out that youth were an important component in the existence and development of human societies. Indeed, the future of any society could only be guaranteed and assured by its youth. The energy and resourcefulness of the youth served as new fuel for the development of that society. For this reason, it will not be possible to sustain development momentum if large numbers of young people are neglected and marginalized in Africa.

It was also emphasized that youth unemployment has also created a dependency syndrome and a vicious cycle of poverty. This was more acute in places that have suffered from conflict, because their education or training was interrupted by war and some of them were forced to serve as child soldiers. Without job experience, specific skills and education, it was difficult to compete for employment opportunities when they did become available.

Ms. Akallo also said that in Africa, the problem of youth unemployment was more complex than in some other parts of the world. Slow-growing economies were unable to generate enough job opportunities to absorb the large number of young people. In most cases the government, was the lone employer in these countries and is increasingly unable to provide jobs for its growing population. She therefore stressed the importance of increasing investment in Africa, particularly from the private sector. In this regard, she proposed the need for African governments to provide a conducive environment for investment. By encouraging private sector to invest, governments could, to a greater extent, find the means to address the unemployment problem for different categories of youth, namely, the uneducated; the educated but unskilled; and the skilled but unemployed.

Therefore, Ms. Akallo stated, the current educational systems prepared youth mainly for administrative jobs. Despite the need for employment in administrative services, this hindered youth creativity. In order to encourage creativity and to keep pace with the rapidly changing global environment, skills need to be constantly updated and matched to the changing requirements of the job market. To highlight this point, Ms. Akallo mentioned the recent discovery of oil in her native country Uganda. It was unfortunate that while the country had sufficient manpower, outside expertise was required to drill oil in the country. It was crucial that in this instance, local youth were provided with sufficient technical skills and know-how to work in the extractive sector.

On the issue of trade, Ms. Akallo addressed the need to increase access for goods produced in African countries. She argued that some countries in Africa, for example Uganda, had the capacity to cultivate crops throughout the year; yet there was no market for these crops and so youth who had the potential to work in the agricultural sector were compelled to migrate to urban areas in search of jobs.

In other suggestions Ms. Akallo proposed to improve investment and macroeconomic environments, encourage and support entrepreneurship and the private sector, improve access to education and skills, address the issues of early marriage and motherhood, tackle the problem of youth in violent and post conflict settings and improve labour market conditions. She concluded that this could be achieved only if youth themselves were involved in the development of programs which pertained to them and their communities.

### *Youth and HIV/AIDS*

Ms. Avril Rua made a presentation on the impact of HIV/AIDS on youth. In her overview of current problems, Ms. Rua noted that over 80% of the global youth population infected with HIV/AIDS were from sub-Saharan Africa. In view of this alarming statistic, a lot remained to be done to address the external factors that impeded progress in the fight against HIV/AIDS among youth. These factors included stigmatization, which has the effect of discouraging testing and disclosure, discrimination and ostracization after disclosure of status; early marriages, which make young women prone to HIV/AIDS exposure and possibly transmission; fear of violence in the domestic setting and cultural factors that make it a taboo to discuss HIV/AIDS, let alone contract it. Criminalization of HIV transmission also posed a huge impediment, as it not only discouraged testing and disclosure, it also infringed upon the basic human rights of persons infected with the virus.

As part of prevention strategies, Ms. Rua stressed the need to educate youth on the modes of transmission. This would go a long way in helping young people understand the disease and take steps to curb it.

Ms. Rua went on to discuss the enormous impact of the disease on public health given the large share of youth in the composition of society. African countries required the most resources to fight HIV/AIDS because they also faced the greatest challenges in devoting adequate financing to fight the HIV/AIDS epidemic. It was imperative therefore to address the threat and its implications and propose a wide range of measures and policies to be put in place that promote public health.

Ms. Rua addressed some of the challenges faced by youth in dealing with the threat and emphasized the lack of forums to express their views on ways to reduce its impact. It was therefore imperative to increase the availability of forums in which youth could provide input for HIV/AIDS policies, both in the development and implementation phases, especially at the grassroots levels. Youth should be encouraged to talk about HIV/AIDS openly as this could help to dispel myths and inaccuracies about the disease. It was essential that policies and measures put in place were culturally sensitive and adhered to traditional norms in societies. In this regard, it

was essential to involve entire communities in the planning and implementation phases. This was particularly crucial as the topic of HIV/AIDS was taboo in many societies. Ms. Rua stressed that in order to get the maximum benefits, policies must also be implemented and targeted to the right audience.

Finally, Ms. Rua called for scaling up interventions and encouragement of testing, which were also important factors that needed to be emphasized in the fight against HIV/AIDS. Ultimately though, the youth themselves must take the initiative and put pressure on leaders, not only to adopt effective policies but also to implement them for the benefit of all citizens.

### *Youth and Armed Conflict*

In his presentation on the effects of armed conflict on youth, Mr. Jonathan Bashi Rudahindwa presented a broad array of issues and challenges facing youth in conflict environments, such as in Chad, the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Somalia, Sudan/Darfur, and outlined the serious effects of war, particularly on youth. Youth had become victims of gruesome killings and maiming, widespread rape and other forms of sexual violence, displacement, as well as forced recruitment as combatants. He outlined the difficulties facing former youth soldiers when attempting to reunite with their families and in their reintegration back into their communities, as well as the lack of support available for youth once they had returned to their communities. He spoke of the need for long-term reintegration strategies which addressed the needs of both ex-combatants and civilian communities.

With regard to the economic integration of young soldiers, Mr. Bashi Rudahindwa pointed out the critical need to identify specific training needs to ensure short-term and medium-term relief, while supporting the planning of long-term training for their job security and empowerment. The reintegration of youth had to occur in conjunction with a more comprehensive strategy of social development and poverty eradication and policies aimed at addressing the structural causes of armed conflict.

Mr. Bashi Rudahindwa referred to the collection of information by the United Nations system partners, such as UNICEF, DPKO, Children and Armed Conflict and local NGOs. This allowed the international community to take appropriate actions in addressing armed conflicts and their effects, in particular on youth. He appealed to the UN and NGO networks to continue with the collection of information at the field level.

Noting several positive developments, Mr. Bashi Rudahindwa referred to the recent actions taken on the release of children through the formal process of “Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration” and the reform and implementation of national legislation criminalizing child recruitment, sexual violence or other grave violations against children and the arrest and transfer of war criminals to the International Criminal Courts through the collaboration between the Governments and the Court. Furthermore, he also referred to the Action Plan which was signed between the United Nations and the Sudan People’s Liberation Army, which set the timetable for the release of children and defined continuous preventive measures against recruitment of children.

With regard to recommendations on dealing with the impact of armed conflict, Mr. Bashi Rudahindwa proposed strategies which youth could implement themselves in areas of conflict with the support of the UN system. He stated that in the Gulu region of northern Uganda, more than 200 registered youth groups were providing social services and support to communities, including HIV/AIDS-awareness and income-generating activities, even in the absence of steady financial support. Furthermore, he spoke of the establishment of the UNICEF Voices of Youth, a youth platform which informed youth of their rights, a network on child soldiers and the 'Zero under 18' campaign for achieving universal ratification of the Optional Protocol on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict by 2012, as well as other youth-oriented United Nations resources such as the Cyberschoolbus.

Mr. Bashi Rudahindwa outlined the remaining serious obstacles to alleviating the effects of armed conflict on youth, in particular the lack of adequate resources to carry out youth-related projects, lack of political will on the part of governments who were slow in the enforcement of international treaties and national laws for the protection of youth, weak legal and judicial infrastructure, and in some cases the deliberate obstruction of the course of justice and the failure to focus on command responsibility. He spoke of the importance of awareness-raising, particularly through existing platforms of local organizations, organizing conferences in local communities, schools, universities and panels or workshops on youth and armed conflicts and group campaigns on social websites such as Facebook.

## **IV Discussion**

The presentations by youth panelists were followed by a question and answer segment, moderated by Mr. Diarra. The youth experts representing UN agencies, namely, UNESCO, ILO, UNAIDS and the Children and Armed Conflict, provided information on the work of their respective areas and gave input on the role of the UN system on youth and related issues. The presentations and the questions from the audience contributed to a frank and fruitful discussion on issues and challenges facing African youth.

The Permanent Representative of Tanzania noted that while there were many challenges facing African youth and Africa's effort to address them, there were also many positive developments. In particular, many African countries were working to meet MDGs and had achieved impressive success, especially in regard to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) Goal 2 of Achieving universal Primary Education.

He acknowledged a point raised about the need for more investment in secondary and tertiary education and noted that as African countries achieved success in universal primary education they were under pressure to invest more in secondary and tertiary education as one necessarily required the other. He noted that the key challenge was having enough teachers and professors, and pointed out that in the past years, ODA used to be directed towards the training of teachers as this was seen as an important way of improving the quality of education. He called for this type of assistance to be revisited so that donors could help Africans build local capacity of their teachers and lecturers.

The Permanent Representative noted that there were improvements in governance and the rule of law, due in large part to the African Peer Review Mechanism and pressures from the international community and pointed out that a majority of countries in Africa now chose their leaders through the ballot and that dictatorships were few.

He said there was a changing global landscape and this had effects on the value chain and supply chain of goods, services and skills. He noted that in the long-term this would also require a change in the educational system to better address new issues.

The Permanent Representative noted that a lot was happening in Africa despite the still existing digital divide and lack of access to the latest information and communication technologies. Many Africans were already using their current knowledge in software development. He said that there was a need to better harness this ability through appropriate policies. However, he noted that, unfortunately, current policies tended not to take a comprehensive approach on this issue.

The permanent Representative of Tunisia noted that at present youth were not in decision-making positions. He spoke of the need to for youth to be partners in creating policies that the governments would then implement. He added that youth could not be passive recipients of policy and that their ideas were needed, since it was their future that was being decided upon.

A representative of the non-profit organization, Uganda Forum for Youth with Disability, noted that there were 300 million people living with disabilities and 80% of them were in developing countries, many of which were in Africa. The representative noted that 90% of the people with disabilities were not in school, had no education and therefore had no access to employment. He called on the UN system to make youth with disabilities a priority issue in their policies.

He also pointed out that young girls with disabilities faced discrimination and lacked effective protection against HIV/AIDS. They were often vulnerable to rape and sexual violence and had little or no legal protection. He noted that the quality of life of societies could be best judged by how societies treated its most vulnerable citizens. Furthermore, he called for disabled youth to be better represented in UN conferences and consultative processes as well as in the decision-making structures. He gave the example of the government of Uganda where the NGO he worked for had managed to get youth with disabilities to be represented in parliament. He also called for more investment in the education of people with disabilities. In particular, he noted that the teacher-training curriculum should include training on how to educate children with disabilities. He also noted that governments should work towards inclusive education and inclusive schools.

The Representative of the Uganda Forum said that Africa was the only continent without a regional charter on people with disabilities and called on the African Union to look into ways of having a regional charter similar to the United Nations Convention on People with Disabilities and how it could be implemented within the African context.

A representative of the United States delegation noted that the UN Agenda in general dealt with many of the issues that faced the youth, and that its economic, social and peace and security

mandates all had a focus on youth. She said the youth should make sure that they engaged with the UN, not just on the youth specific issues but also to ensure that they were represented and had a voice when the UN took up broader issues that had an effect on them.

The US representative noted that the US was engaged in many programmes specifically focusing on youth while others dealt with broader issues relating to youth. She noted that one of the pillars of US policy was engagement in development assistance. She added that the presence of the youth representatives at the meeting showed the need for the UN to open itself to hear more from civil society and other groups, and not just those that have ECOSOC or DPI accreditation.

A representative of International Caring Communities, a non-governmental organization, noted that the event showed the value of bringing to the UN people who the organization did not necessarily think of as traditional partners. He called on the UN to make use of public figures such as Olympic medal winners who were well recognized and who could help better reach out to youth on issues affecting them. He said that organizations such as the International Olympic Committee would make valuable partners with the UN system.

A participant from the Peacebuilding Commission asked how people who were remote from the UN could have their voices heard in the UN system. A representative from the Esperanto community noted the importance of having women represented at all levels of decision-making, citing the decision by Scandinavian countries to have 40-60% of women in all leadership positions. He also asked how ethnicity affected Africa and its conflicts.

A Representative of the Permanent Mission of Palau to the United Nations noted that there was very little representation of Small Island Developing States in such meetings and that youth from her region suffered from many of the same challenges faced by African youth.

In response to the question on how people remote from the UN could have their voices heard, the panelists recommended community outreach through community leaders that were linked to national NGOs and the international community. On the issue of conflict, panelists noted that Africa had to do more to resolve its own issues without looking to the West for solutions, as this was the only self-sustainable solution.

The moderator, Mr. Diarra, referred to the Cardozo report, which outlined how the UN could best facilitate access to UN processes, especially by civil society in the South and in Africa. The report proposed supporting NGOs from those regions to actively participate in the UN processes and that this was now becoming the norm. He called on NGOs present to avail themselves of the ECOSOC accreditation process, as well as DPI accreditation.

After summarizing the presentations made earlier, Mr. Diarra thanked all participants and declared the meeting adjourned.

## ANNEX I

### Statements made by UN Entities

#### *UNAIDS*

The representative of UNAIDS said that there was much good news coming out of Africa in recent years with regards to lower HIV/AIDS infections and prevalence in youth. In 15 countries, worldwide infections rates among the youth had fallen by 25 percent, and 13 of those countries were in Africa. She noted that this fall was significant, given that only 40 percent of youth had comprehensive knowledge of how HIV infections occurred and how to prevent them. She noted that despite this, there was a lot that remained to be done. She said the UN system had to work more with youth, and mentioned the June 2011 Comprehensive Review of HIV/AIDS global response and called for participation of youth. In response to the comments made by the representative of the Uganda Forum for Youth with Disabilities, she noted that there was an event scheduled to take place on 02 December 2010 on HIV/AIDS and people with disabilities.

#### *UNESCO*

The representative of UNESCO reiterated that education was a key factor in addressing most of Africa's social issues and noted that despite gains in universal primary education, there were bottlenecks at the secondary and tertiary level. She noted that this was unfortunate since attainment of secondary education seemed to have the most effect on social issues. Girls who had secondary education were most likely to delay pregnancy, seek and access contraceptives, and be more capable of negotiating safe sex. She noted that while universal primary education was critical to having basic skills, more had to be done by the UN system to help countries address the gaps at secondary and tertiary level.

#### *ILO*

The representative of ILO noted that the fast growing youth population posed a problem for countries if the economies were not growing fast enough to produce decent jobs for youth. She noted that ILO had just launched a publication on global employment trends among youth, which covered analyses of 65 countries. The findings showed that some of the best practices that seemed to have a significant effect included governments providing subsidies (either in kind or in cash) to employers hiring youth, for example, longer periods that included training. However, employers' training was not always appropriate and did not always give youth the skills they needed to find employment. What worked best were government provided training opportunities which provided youth skills and thereby prepared them to compete in the labour market.

#### *UN Volunteers*

The Representative of the United Nations Volunteers informed the participants that 05 December 2010 was designated as the International Volunteers Day. She noted that Member States and the UN system had come to the realisation that the achievement of the MDGs by 2015 would require the participation of increasingly larger segments of the population, in particular youth. Volunteerism provided an opportunity to bring young people into development work and to give them an opportunity to develop skills as they prepared to enter the labour market. She noted that

youth needed to realize that volunteering was not just giving ones time, but it was an opportunity to acquire skills and capacities.

The Representative of UN Volunteers noted that the UNV website ([www.unv.org/](http://www.unv.org/)) had a link titled, 'Tell the Story' where volunteers could share information of the types of changes they had achieved through their work.

In response to a comment from the audience, she said the UNV system was implementing online volunteerism and urged youth representatives to ensure that youth were represented in National Volunteering Committees.

## Annex II

### Programme of work

#### General Assembly 2010 Youth Side-Event

##### Panel Discussion

Youth and the Future of Africa: Challenges and Opportunities

Wednesday, 01 December, 10 a.m. to 1 p.m.

United Nations Headquarters

**CHAIR/MODERATOR: Mr. Cheick Sidi DIARRA, Under-Secretary-General, Special Adviser on Africa and High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States**

- 10:00 – 10:30      Opening remarks (5 minute presentations)
- Mr. Cheick Sidi Diarra, Under-Secretary-General of OSAA, UN
- Mr. Sha Zukang, Under-Secretary-General of DESA, UN
- H.E. Mr. Teté Antonio, Ambassador, Permanent Observer of the African Union to the UN
- H.E. Mr. Jean-Francis R. Zinsou, Permanent Representative of the Republic of Benin to the UN
- 10:30 – 11:15      Presentations by Youth Panelists (each presentation: 5-10 minutes)
- (i) youth education, particularly for girls  
(ii) youth employment  
(iii) impact of HIV/AIDS on youth  
(iv) effects of armed conflict on youth.
- UN Youth Experts from ILO, UNAIDS, CAAC and UNESCO will be present
- 11:15 – 12.45      Q & A Session
- 12.45 – 1:00      Wrap-up of Session by the Moderator

## Annex III

### Youth Panelist Biographies

#### Plapa Koukpamou (Togo)

Mr. Koukpamou has undertaken extensive work on youth, both in his country Togo and in USA. He has participated in various youth forums and worked on the *World Programme of Action for Youth to the Year 2000 and beyond* since 2005. His work included the conducting of surveys to assess the implementation of the *World Programme of Action for Youth to the year 2000 and beyond* in Togo. Mr. Koukpamou has represented youth in Togo at the *Francophonie youth summit* held in Cairo, Egypt (2005) and attended the *Tenth Year Evaluation of the World Programme of Action for Youth to the Year 2000 and beyond* at the United Nations in 2005 as representative of youth from Togo. Mr. Koukpamou worked for two years as Information Technology Associate at Baruch College of the City University of New York and Lehman High School in New York in the areas of maintaining technology infrastructure and operation and providing technology support to faculty and staff. He also has three years of law firm experience in New York and another three years as a volunteer in *Young Volunteers for the Environment (YVE)* in Togo.

#### Grace Akallo (Uganda)

Ms. Akallo is a former child soldier and co-author of *Girl Soldier, A Story of Hope for Northern Uganda's Children*. She is a spokesperson for children of war in northern Uganda. Ms. Akallo is a peace activist and has served as keynote speaker at Ugandan peace events. Her work areas include informing and equipping citizen advocates to reach out to their elected officials for tangible support for peace and reconstruction in northern Uganda. She plans to start a foundation called *Gift of Grace* to help create educational opportunities for war-affected children. Ms. Akallo is currently a graduate student in International Development and Social Change at Clark University in Massachusetts.

#### Jonathan Bashi Rudahindwa (The Democratic Republic of Congo)

Ms. Bashi Rudahindwa was born and raised in Bukavu, province of South-Kivu, in Eastern Democratic Republic of Congo. Since 1996 Mr. Bashi Rudahindwa and his family experienced the Congolese war and had to flee to their village. Later he moved to Kinshasa, the capital of the DRC, where he lived for eleven years and received his formal education. He went to college at the Protestant University of Congo, where he earned a bachelor in law with distinction. Mr. Bashi Rudahindwa pursued legal studies in order to defend and advocate for victims of human rights violations in DRC. During his studies he was involved in several extra-academic activities and projects to raise awareness on human rights violations and the promotion of democracy in DRC. Following his undergraduate studies, he was selected by the United States State

Department as a Fulbright Scholar. Mr. Bashi Rudahindwa is currently pursuing a master's in law at the Indiana University School of Law-Indianapolis.

### **Avril Rua (Kenya)**

Ms. Rua was born and raised in Nairobi, Kenya where she completed her primary and high school studies. Thereafter, Ms. Rua joined Moi University School of Law, located in Eldoret Kenya in 2005 and graduated with a law degree (LLB) in 2009. Before joining Moi University she was involved in volunteer/AIDS in Nairobi. She was also a student volunteer and later an intern at the Legal Aid Centre of Eldoret (LACE) which provides free legal services to persons infected and affected by HIV/AIDS, and who are patients of the Nobel Prize nominee Academic Model Providing Access to Healthcare (AMPATH). As an intern (and currently a lawyer) at LACE, Ms. Rua undertook work with indigent persons, many of whom youth in ensuring access to justice and recognition and enforcement of their rights. Ms. Rua is currently enrolled in a Masters Degree in International Human Rights law, with a focus on health law at the Indiana University School of Law in Indianapolis