

UNITED NATIONS



NATIONS UNIES

THE DEPUTY SECRETARY-GENERAL

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**ADDRESS TO THE HIGH-LEVEL SEGMENT OF THE ECONOMIC
AND SOCIAL COUNCIL
Geneva, 3 July 2006**

Thank you Mr. President,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a pleasure to join you today on behalf of the Secretary-General, who regrets that he cannot be here for what he considers an important date on his annual calendar: the opening of ECOSOC. As you all know, this is a time of challenge and renewal for the United Nations. Events of recent years have not only highlighted the failings of the international system, they have galvanized change.

But today it is the other pillar of the Secretary-General's reform that I will dwell on: Development.

Every day, 30,000 children die of preventable diseases, and every minute a woman dies because of complications in pregnancy and childbirth. In the 1990s, some 60 countries in various parts of the world actually grew poorer. Today, nearly three billion people subsist on less than \$2 a day, the same number as ten years ago. Clean drinking water remains out of reach for more than 1 billion people, while environmental degradation continues to render once-fertile soils incapable of supporting the most basic needs of families.

This sobering reality demands a strong response from the United Nations. And I am here to tell you that all of us in the Organization need this Council to lead the way.

ECOSOC has always been the UN's principal body for coordinating and advancing development policy. Yet its track record is decidedly mixed. Confusion over the overlapping

mandates with the Second and Third Committees of the UN General Assembly, as well as with the Bretton Woods Institutions, have plagued the Council and hampered its work.

Fortunately, today we have the makings of an antidote. The Millennium Development Goals present an opportunity for ECOSOC to rally around a concrete set of clear, universally acclaimed and achievable targets. The World Summit has already charged the Council with making sure that these Goals are implemented. It is now up to the Council to have these benchmarks, and the broader “UN Development Agenda”, define its work.

As a principal organ, the Economic and Social Council has always mattered to the United Nations. Now, you have a chance to play a more pivotal role in the daily lives of ordinary people everywhere.

To do so I believe the Council must, as the pending General assembly resolution envisages, seek to become an inter-governmental lobby for the Millennium Development Goals and the other conference goals. It should be the political and policy level global forum for tracking and correcting progress towards the Millennium Development Goals. A place where ministers commit, and are held accountable for action on those commitments.

Already, the Council is preparing for important changes. These include the introduction of Annual Ministerial Reviews, as well as a biennial Development Cooperation Forum.

Such change can make ECOSOC the development parliament of the United Nations. Millennium Development Goal by Millennium Development Goal, region by region, ECOSOC’s members must review progress, correct setbacks, hail advances, win new resources, and urge future reforms so as to help keep the world on track for 2015.

In this context, I am especially pleased that this year’s High-level Segment addresses the grave and growing problem of global unemployment.

Let me use my time in front of you to address a particular concern of Kofi Annan: the special challenges of youth employment.

Excellencies, people aged 15 to 24 are only a quarter of the world's working population but they comprise half of its unemployed. Across the world the young remain more prone than other age groups to work longer hours for lesser pay with little job security. In economic upturns, they are the last to be hired, and in downturns, the first to be fired.

This lack of opportunity for the young is an appalling waste of human resources, energy and creativity. And with approximately 1.2 billion young people worldwide coming of working age in the next decade, it is an issue that will push its way up the agenda of policymakers and politicians.

Youth unemployment has many faces: young farm workers thrown off the land by over-population, land degradation, and shifting or unclear land ownership issues; their young cousins, migrants in the new mega-cities of the South, eking a living at the bottom on the informal system; the children of the new Southern Middle Class finding that growth has not created better jobs-or even more jobs; and their young counterparts in the North finding that the first rungs on the career ladder are equally perilous because of training, education and structural economic issues.

These different faces of youth unemployment require a variegated response.

Yet common to them all are: adapting to a global economy and dramatic pace of change, employment oriented growth strategies, training, and education, and above all new job creation.

In Germany, a national agreement guarantees a place to all young people applying for vocational training, while the United Arab Emirates provides young nationals with training and enhanced career opportunities through a skills development fund.

Ideally, the young should also be given entry channels from educational institutions into the labour market, or be provided opportunities for on-the-job learning. Once young people have some working experience, their chances of finding new employment increase dramatically.

Japan, for example, offers a youth trial employment scheme that provides financial incentives to companies offering short-term on the job training to unemployed youth. Similarly, Croatia subsidizes employers taking on salaried apprentices and interns.

Any comprehensive youth employment strategy must also address the disadvantaged position of vulnerable groups, including women and the poor.

Entrepreneurship—by which the young become their own employers—is another important avenue for youth empowerment. Microfinance initiatives in many parts of the developing world have sought to do exactly this, with largely favourable results. Indeed, some countries have gone even further: Mexico, for instance, provides support to young men and women in formulating project proposals, obtaining finances and in running small enterprises.

The UN System, for its part, is working with Member States to address this challenge through the Secretary-General's Youth Employment Network—a collaboration between the United Nations, the World Bank and the International Labour Organization. Yet the issue is one where ECOSOC can provide crucial leadership; it can guide policy, influence action, and oversee implementation.

Of course, I hope a similar approach is also brought to bear on the many other development goals before the Council. The target year of 2015 is approaching very fast. Our agenda for at least the next decade is clear. Let us not disappoint the many millions of people who look to us, and to our Organization, for help in bettering their lives and those of future generations.