

UNITED NATIONS



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THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

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MESSAGE ON INTERNATIONAL YOUTH DAY

12 August 2006

The theme of this year's observance of International Youth Day is "Tackling poverty together: young people and the eradication of poverty".

The world's young people, now numbering more than 1 billion, are a major human resource for development, and can be key agents of innovation and positive social change. Yet the scale of youth poverty robs the world of that potential. In a world of great riches, nearly one in five people between the ages of 15 and 24 must eke out an existence on less than one dollar per day, and almost half live on less than two dollars per day.

Moreover, while youth make up one fourth of the world's labour force, they account for one half of its unemployed. Labour markets are having difficulty providing stable occupations with good prospects for young people, except for the highly trained. Without decent work, young people are left particularly susceptible to poverty, which in turn complicates access to education and basic health services, further impeding employability. Over the long term, disadvantaged youth will confront steeper obstacles along the path to progress, and may not accrue the assets that commonly come through steady and long-term employment, such as access to assets and resources, strong social networks and decision-making status in the family or community.

Our challenge is clear: we must pay more attention to education, and in particular to the transition from education to employment. And the ability of youth to find full and productive employment must be a central objective of national development strategies, including poverty reduction policies.

The international community has recognized what experts are now calling the juvenilization of poverty, and made it a priority area in the 1995 *World Programme of Action for Youth*. The Programme has approached young people as equal partners in the global effort to eradicate poverty and achieve the Millennium Development Goals. Government commitment to the development agenda was renewed and reinforced by the 2005 World Summit, which has opened up a fresh opportunity to engage youth in action on the issues that affect them. On this International Youth Day, let us seize that opportunity, and redouble our efforts to support young people and free up their enormous potential, for the benefit of us all.