



MEDIA ADVISORY

UN General Assembly updates decade-old youth action plan to meet new challenges

7 October 2005 – Seeking to keep pace with the emerging challenges of today's world, the United Nations General Assembly has updated its decade-old programme of action for youth by adding measures to address globalization, information technology, HIV/AIDS, armed conflict and pressing intergenerational issues in an increasingly aging society.

"Many young people today continue to suffer poverty, discrimination and inequality, and far too great a number still lack access to proper education and health services," General Assembly President Jan Eliasson said on Thursday to the record number of youth delegates from around the world gathered for the review of the World Programme of Action for Youth.

"Most of those who have become infected with HIV/AIDS are in their teens or early twenties," he added. Few could have predicted the sometimes negative impact of globalization and information technologies that young people between the ages of 15 and 24 are experiencing today, he told the mixed audience of General Assembly members and some 55 youth delegates from 30 countries.

The five new areas of focus endorsed by the Assembly reflect the emerging issues outlined in the Secretary-General's 2005 World Youth Report, and add to a 10-point World Programme on Youth adopted in 1995, which includes education, employment, hunger and poverty, health, environment, drug abuse, juvenile delinquency, leisure time activities, girls and young women, and full and effective participation in society and in decision making.

In her opening address, Deputy Secretary-General Louise Fréchette said, "We are gathered here because we know that young people are our future. They will inherit what we create in our time, both good and bad."

She mentioned the "distressing statistics" that a quarter of all children living in the developing world are malnourished, as are half of all children in Sub-Saharan African and Southern Asia. Hundreds of millions of children are not in school, and 11 million under the age of five die each year from preventable diseases, she said.

Noting that almost half the world's population is under the age of 25, she said they would have to deal with the challenges before them, including 200 million youth living in extreme poverty, 130 million illiterate, 88 million unemployed and 10 million living with HIV/AIDS.

The adoption of the resolution capped a day of debate in which young people stepped up to the podium and communicated their countries' positions on a host of issues. That included Itzel

Barrera de Diego, youth delegate of Mexico, who summarized the outcome of the round table discussion between Member States and youth organizations held on Wednesday. Youth meant potential energy and solutions, she said, and that potential energy had to be harnessed. "Many generations had had the opportunity to eradicate poverty, but today's generation will be the first to succeed."

She proposed establishing a volunteer-based Youth Advisory Council to the United Nations, whose mandate would include bringing young delegates to participate in General Assembly sessions. She also called for the creation of national youth councils that would offer the perspective of young people in policy-making, and for the elaboration of a United Nations convention on the rights of youth.

Ramahoona Peter Matlosa, youth delegate from Lesotho, pleaded for more attention from the international community to the HIV/AIDS crisis affecting young people. For many youth around the world, achieving the goals of the World Programme of Action for Youth was just a dream requiring many more resources, he said.

A young woman who is herself a refugee from Northern Uganda, Victoria Uwonkunda, the representative from Norway, called on the world body to recognize the need to integrate displaced children in new host countries, where without government integration there was a danger of creating a new lower class.

With the effects of globalization, said Jlang Guangping, Delegate from China, his country had changed radically over the past 10 years, but some of those changes would require new government programmes for young people, including some that would focus on intergenerational problems and the negative effects of globalization.

Increasing employment opportunities in her country had positive and negative consequences, said Mai Taha Mohamed Khalil, Delegate from Egypt. The negative result was an increase in illegal activities, including terrorism. Globalization did not always result in evenly distributed resources either, she said, because many had still not realized their ambition for better jobs.

Unemployment and HIV/AIDS were some of the many challenges affecting youth in Nicaragua, Delegate Tremino Rivera said. Sex education seminars would help reduce the birth rate and reduce the spread of sexually transmitted diseases. The funding for these programmes should be found by reducing external debt in cooperation with development partners, he added.

The World Programme of Action for Youth is considered the first "global blueprint" for developing effective policies for young people. Updating the programme, the General Assembly urged governments, in consultation with youth organizations, to develop comprehensive policies based on the World Programme and to evaluate them regularly as part of follow-up action on the Programme's implementation.

For further information, please visit <http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unyin/ga60.htm> or contact Charlotte van Hees, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Tel: +1- 917-367-4053, e-mail: vanhees@un.org, and Edoardo Bellando, Department of Public Information, Tel: +1-212-963-8275, bellando@un.org.

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