

**Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon****UNHQ**

23 April 2012

**Remarks to the Commission on Population and Development**

Your Excellency Ambassador Hasan Kleib of Indonesia, Chairman of the Commission on Population and Development,
Your Excellency Ambassador Marjon Kamara of Liberia, Vice President of the General Assembly,
Excellencies,
Distinguished delegates,
And a special welcome to all the youth delegations here today,

Something is different about this year's Commission on Population and Development.

I am not talking about my own attendance – although I am the first Secretary-General in recent memory to speak to this Commission.

What makes this session different is the presence of so many dynamic young people.

Welcome. This is your United Nations.

Every year, this Commission attracts a handful of interested non-governmental organizations.

This year, we approved over 500 NGO representatives to participate.

I am delighted to see this room packed with dedicated people.

Let me say a special hello to the overflow crowd watching from Conference Room Five. Welcome!

The large number of individuals attending this session on youth is impressive – but that tells only part of the story. The real message is the energy here.

What is true for the Commission is also true for the world. This generation of youth is the largest in history. Even more important, this generation of youth is shaping history.

We saw that dramatically across the Arab world starting over a year ago in Tunisia.

And we see it globally now in homes and in communities, clinics and schools, governments and intergovernmental organizations.

Youth are more than a demographic force – they are a force for progress.

That is why I have pledged to appoint a Special Advisor for Youth. Empowering young people is a major platform in my action agenda for the coming years.

Since I took office as Secretary-General, I have met youth in all regions of the world – in rich capitals and in poor villages. What strikes me is that no matter where they are, youth tend to ask the same two questions:

First: Why isn't the United Nations doing more to help people who are suffering?

And second: What can I do to make a difference in our world?

I have heard these questions in various languages but the meaning is always the same. The world's young people have their eyes wide open. They are informed as never before. They are connected to one

another. And they care.

They want to protect the environment that will be home to their children. They understand what a waste it is to spend money on weapons that kill instead of food that nourishes. And they believe in the United Nations – even if they expect us to do much, much more.

I share their high expectations. And I value their desire to contribute. Above all, I want to help youth find their place in our United Nations – to work together on the major problems facing our world.

In 1994, the Cairo Programme of Action put people at the centre of population and development. The international community declared in one voice that when we empower individuals, especially women, we help whole societies.

Today we need to view young people through this same lens of empowerment.

Youth have great hopes for the future – but they cannot survive on hopes. They need food, jobs and health care.

They especially need reproductive health care.

We cannot ignore the facts. Many young people are sexually active. And because of this, they may face risks to their health, including sexual violence. They need the information and means to protect themselves.

Earlier this year, I had the honour to join Nobel Laureate Bishop Desmond Tutu to urge support for Every Woman Every Child.

Bishop Tutu spoke forcefully about the need to protect children from becoming brides. He pointed out that each year 10 million girls are married before they reach 18. And he advised us to imagine “the face of someone you love to make those numbers come alive.”

I would take that even further. Maybe you already have personal experience, but if not, put the face of someone you love on these numbers:

Nearly 75 million young people were unemployed last year.

Some 900 million people survive on less than \$2 a day.

More than 100 million adolescents are not in school.

Sixteen million adolescent girls become mothers every year.

And every day, more than 2,000 young people contract HIV.

We have a collective responsibility to drive these numbers down.

The Cairo Programme of Action is one of our most important internationally agreed path to a better future for the world’s youth. We must be guided by its wisdom and carry out its recommendations.

Excellencies,

All young people have potential power. But they have very different needs.





An adolescent girl struggling in poverty requires different protection than a male college graduate.

Our goal is to provide a safe, secure and healthy environment for all, regardless of their circumstances.

Two months from now we face a test. The world will gather for the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development in Rio. This is our one-in-a-generation chance to advance progress on the Millennium Development Goals for the sake of our planet and its people. Let us make sure that young people have their place across the international agenda.

By working for and with young people, we will create a new future.

Thank you.

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