



PRESIDENTIAL STATEMENT

on the occasion of the 2016 ECOSOC Youth Forum

Youth Taking Action to Implement the 2030 Agenda

1-2 February 2016, UN Headquarters, New York

The 2016 Youth Forum of the Economic and Social Council, convened in New York from 1 to 2 February 2016, has come at a point in time, in which the world has to come together to turn its commitment, embodied in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), into tangible action. This Forum was the first high level discussion in the Council to plan how to implement the new SDGs and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Youth will play a leading role in turning the comprehensive vision of this “*21st Century Declaration of Interdependence*” —as the Deputy-Secretary General referred to it— into action.

The level of engagement during this year’s Youth Forum has shown that the youth is ready to act to implement the SDGs. With the largest number of participants since the inception of the Forum five years ago and with the largest number of delegations from capitals and highest level national authorities on youth, including 21 Ministers, we witnessed how the Forum offered an critical platform for Member States, young people and other key stakeholders to dialogue how youth can be involved in the implementation of the SDGs and contribute to the intergovernmental review of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

We looked at youth issues and youth engagement in the SDGs from a thematic perspective as well as from a regional angle and identified key priorities that will guide us in operationalizing the SDG framework as we move forward. While we were warned of common pitfalls when it comes to youth development, we also set the stage for engagement with insightful contributions from a wide variety of participants, including high-level government representatives, and had the opportunity to take note of promising practices and existing experiences that could be applied or adapted by Member States across the board.

A key message that emerged from the 2016 ECOSOC Youth forum was the recognition that young people are not only key actors in advancing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, but they are also directly affected by the challenges the SDGs seek to tackle. One of these challenges is the prevailing employment crisis young people face all across the globe. As President of the Economic and Social Council, I welcome the launch of the UN system’s **Global Initiative on Decent Jobs for Youth** by the ILO Director-General, Guy Ryder, at the opening of our Forum. The Global Initiative on Decent Jobs for Youth, endorsed



by the UN's Chief Executives Board for Coordination, is the first ever comprehensive UN system-wide effort to promote youth employment.¹

I commend the Global Initiative and its strategy, which represent a unique collaboration and partnership platform to enhance efforts by the UN system and beyond to tackle the youth employment challenge and assist Member States in targeting a crucial goal of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Through strategic alliance building, regional and country-level action, pooling expertise and enhancing knowledge, and innovative and sustainable funding modalities and resource mobilization, this Initiative aims to scale up action and to increase impact through effective, innovative and evidence-based interventions.

Our discussions at the Forum highlighted that the Youth around the world are not mere beneficiaries of the Sustainable Development Goals, but key drivers for the successful implementation of the 2030 Agenda. The role of young people and their organizations must be recognized as a leading one, as youth take action across all areas crucial for the implementation of the agenda, including in politics, business, academia and civil society. The following key messages and recommendations emerged from our discussions during the Forum:

- Young women and men constitute half of the world's population, and we need to approach the issue of youth with a sense of urgency. We should not only work for youth, but work with youth to promote sustainable development.
- We need participatory and inclusive political processes for all the diverse voices of youth to be heard, in particular the marginalized young people.
- Youth unemployment continues to be one of the most challenging issues of our time with around 40 per cent of young people in the labour market either unemployed or working in poverty. The challenge is not only to create jobs, but to create decent jobs for young people.
- We must enhance the quality of education and training to meet today's labour market needs. This requires strengthening partnerships involving the private sector and youth organizations. We also need to promote science, technology, engineering and math education, in particular for women and girls.

¹ Under an ILO led-process, the following entities of the United Nations worked collaboratively throughout 2015 to develop the Strategy of this Global Initiative: FAO, ITC, ITU, UNCTAD, UNDESA, UNDP, UNEP, UNESCO, UNFPA, UN-Habitat, UNICEF, UNIDO, UNRWA, UN-WOMEN, UNWTO, WIPO, the World Bank Group and (ex officio) the Office of the Secretary-General's Envoy on Youth.



- We need to invest in and promote youth entrepreneurship which is considered as a key driver for young people’s economic empowerment as well as for achieving the SDGs.
- Promoting gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls requires action on various fronts to achieve not only SDG5 but all the other sustainable development goals. We need more women in leadership positions both in public and private sector. We need to end all forms of violence against women or girls. We must unlock the full potential of women and girls to turn our societies into more inclusive, peaceful and prosperous ones. To this end, men and boys must be engaged to accelerate societal change.
- Young people need better health education and healthcare that is accessible, affordable and of good quality.
- Youth can foster the innovative use of social media and communication tools to further the call for comprehensive climate action and to follow-up on progress or lack thereof of the Paris Agreement on Climate Change and SDG13. We need to promote the organization of youth-led climate change events.
- Youth engagement is imperative for the achievement of SDG16 on peaceful and inclusive societies. Youth are often those most affected by the continuation or outbreak of violent conflicts. Increased participation of the youth in decision-making at all levels is key to conflict resolution, recognizing young people as peace-builders and beacons of hope to overcome war and violence. The adoption of the Security Council Resolution 2250 (2015), which calls for increased representation of youth in decision-making at all levels for the prevention and resolution of conflict, was considered a historic step in recognizing the role and potential of young people.