Statement

By

Mr. Maged A. Abdelaziz
Under-Secretary-General and
Special Adviser on Africa

at the

High-Level Meeting on

Women and Youth Entrepreneurship in Africa:
The Impact of Entrepreneurial Education on Development

Opening Session

Monday, 13 June 2016
UNHQ, New York
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my great pleasure to welcome you to this High-Level Event on “Women and Youth Entrepreneurship in Africa: The Impact of Entrepreneurial Education on Development”.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank our fellow co-organizers, including the Permanent Mission of Italy to the United Nations, whose collaboration on this event has been a continuation of Italy’s longstanding commitment to its strong and growing partnership with the continent of Africa. We are also honoured to have partnered in this event with the Permanent Observer Mission of the African Union to the UN, the Permanent Missions of Ghana and Kenya, UN Women, the Office of the Secretary-General’s Envoy on Youth and the E4Impact Foundation, founded and lead by my dear friend, Mrs. Letizia Moratti.

E4Impact’s innovative and very successful approach to supporting women and youth entrepreneurship in Africa, which has been recognized and endorsed at the highest levels of the African Union, was the galvanizing force behind this event and I am pleased that Mrs. Moratti is here today, along with several African women and youth entrepreneurs.

Today’s event takes place at a very important moment for women and youth on the continent, particularly for women and youth entrepreneurs. With one of the fastest economic growth rates and highest returns on investment in the world, Africa is among the world’s greatest growth centres.

But this is only the beginning of the story. While Africa is moving forward, women and youth remain an untapped economic force for even higher rates of growth in Africa. In most African countries, only about one third of women participate in economic activity, and gender gaps in employment are high. In addition, African youth – both men and women – represent almost two-thirds of the continent’s unemployed, hindered by lack of employment, not only for lack of opportunities but also for inadequate access to education and training.

The role of women and youth in achieving Africa’s ambitious plans for structural economic transformation is underscored in the global 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, as well as in the African Union’s Agenda 2063, the continent’s historic, 50-year transformative framework for development, peace and security.

While the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063 enjoy many synergies between them, nowhere are they more closely aligned than on their emphasis on the importance of women and youth for the achievement of their respective visions.

The 2030 Agenda and its Sustainable Development Goals features various goals and targets focused on promoting women and youth empowerment, including Goal 4 on education; Goal 5 on gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls; Goal 8 on inclusive growth, employment and economic empowerment; and Goal 17 on partnerships for sustainable development. With respect to Agenda 2063 and its First Ten-Year Implementation Plan, Aspiration 6 of the Agenda explicitly calls for an Africa whose development is people-centred, relying especially on the potential offered by its women and youth.

Both the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063’s First Ten Year Implementation Plan include targets that focus on reducing unemployment and underemployment of women and youth;
supporting the formation and growth of micro-, small- and medium-sized enterprises; and substantially increasing the number of women and youth who have relevant skills for entrepreneurship, including business management; identifying and securing financing; communications; human resources; ICT and how to access relevant markets.

Furthermore, both agendas emphasise the importance of multi-stakeholder partnerships for the achievement of their aims, including public-private partnerships and partnerships amongst governments, private sector, non-profits, philanthropic organizations, academia and even individuals who are willing to support. The E4Impact Foundation is an excellent example of power of partnerships in this respect, having partnered with Italian and African universities in Côte d’Ivoire, Ghana, Kenya, Sierra Leone and Uganda, and expanding its support to other African countries. The Foundation has also forged ahead with a ground-breaking partnership with the African Union, which was marked by the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding with the Chairperson of the African Union Commission on the margins of the first Italy-Africa Ministerial Conference held last month in Rome.

Today, we will have the benefit of hearing from a wide range of stakeholders, including Member States, intergovernmental organizations, philanthropic organizations, representatives from academia, and successful African women and youth entrepreneurs who can provide concrete insights borne from their first hand experiences.

The Co-Organizers look forward to having a rich and energized discussion of how to leverage the vision, skills and strength of African women and youth entrepreneurs as an integral part the continent’s structural economic transformation.

And now, without further ado, it is my honour to introduce a video message from H.E. Dr. Nkosazana Dlamini Zuma, Chairperson of the African Union Commission, who is represented here at the podium by my dear friend H.E. Ambassador Tete Antonio, the Permanent Observer of the African Union to the United Nations.