



-OPENING STATEMENT-

H.E. Mr. Néstor Osorio, President of the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC)

Youth Forum

***“Shaping tomorrow’s innovators:
Leveraging science, technology, innovation and culture for today’s
youth”***

27 March 2013

United Nations Headquarters, New York

**Mr. Secretary-General,
Distinguished Delegates,
Young people,
Ladies and Gentlemen:**

Good morning — and a warm welcome to this 2013 Economic and Social Council Youth Forum. Thank you all for coming.

On behalf of the Economic and Social Council, I’d like to extend an especially warm welcome to the many young faces I see in the audience, and also virtually on social media and on the webcast.

I’d like to start our Forum with this short video prepared by the UN Department of Public Information and the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs.

[SHORT VIDEO]

**Dear young friends,
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

Last year we gathered to seek solutions to the scourge of youth unemployment. This year, we pose an altogether broader question: how do we better leverage science, technology, innovation, and culture to improve young peoples’ lives?

Young talented people have made exceptional contributions to society and history. Their names and stories are inscribed in books and their example

reminds us of how necessary it is to invest, promote and make full use of youth potential and capabilities.

Let's consider science and technology. Thomas Alva Edison, was 32 when he patented the world's first commercially viable electric light bulb. Isaac Newton was even younger when he invented calculus — “the language of physics” — publishing his first paper on the topic at age 24.

As for two of the world's most famous living entrepreneurs, Bill Gates and Mark Zuckerberg, they were 20 when opened shop at Microsoft and Facebook, respectively.

The world of culture has proven equally fertile ground for young talent. Michelangelo completed his “Statue of David” at 29. Celia Cruz of Cuba, Bob Marley of Jamaica and Miriam Makeba of South Africa, among others, became at a young age the greatest voices of our time.

Young people have left a lasting mark on science, technology, and culture across the centuries, and they will continue to do so in our own digital age.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

While youth represents hope and change, we still need to overcome important obstacles on education and employment.

On employment, according to the International Labour Organization (ILO), young people are three times more likely to be unemployed than adults and over 75 million youth worldwide are looking for work. In Europe and the Middle East, more than half of 15 to 24 year olds are unemployed. In still many more places, the duration of unemployment has hit record highs. The cost is wasted productive capacity; social unrest; and, not least, daily stress and suffering for young people and their families.

Unemployment is linked to different challenges: lack of access to an education that responds to labour market needs; lack of information and professional training; difficulties to ensure the participation and integration of young people in their societies.

In resolving all of these challenges, science, technology, innovation and culture have a great potential role to play.

Computers are taking over unskilled and entry-level jobs and young people with less skills and experience have a hard time to enter the labour market. Companies also complain about the lack of skilled workers for high tech jobs. This is the vicious circle we live in.

If the mismatch between the education provided and the requirements of employers is to blame, then we need to increase the opportunities for young people to be exposed and have access to high quality programmes in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM). On-line broadband access and digital media are key factors in improving STEM education.

We also have to make sure that girls and young women are not left out. In the past years, women's participation in STEM education has improved; however, men continue to dominate in the fields of computer sciences and engineering.

Education is a human right and closing the gender gap at all levels of education must be a priority to empower girls and young women, and to improve their living conditions.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Today, young adults expect more than quality schooling and decent jobs. They want an environment that is fit for themselves and their families. And they want the same rights and obligations afforded to everyone else. How can science and technology help?

Social networking websites, for example, played an important role to promote the so called Arab Spring, giving the youth a voice and making them an important player in the transformation of the region. The mobile phone boom, meanwhile, is proving to be a benefit to development, allowing many to browse the internet and transfer money wirelessly for the first time. More than half of Africa's one billion population now owns one. Soon smartphone users will even have the ability to diagnose a variety of medical conditions from the palm of their hand.

Technology and innovation are also opening up amazing new opportunities for young entrepreneurs in the creative economy. Start-up companies are bringing smart young entrepreneurs to change the course of history in arts, technology and advertising businesses.

Science and technology also offer tremendous promise in protecting the environment. Geo-engineering may offer hope to slow the planet's warming. In education, new forms of digital teaching, such as online universities, are taking the lead.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Young people need economic opportunity. Young people want the full enjoyment of their political and civil rights and freedoms. Speaking their minds; participating in politics; practicing the religion of their choice; and

living their lives without any form of discrimination are some of their legitimate aspirations.

Meaningful participation, openness, inclusion and accountability can be improved by using technology, science, and culture. They all can serve as a vital engine for positive change.

The Economic and Social Council has also a role to play and work to do, and we can equally turn it into a forum that gives meaningful voice to young people

In this regard, I welcome the appointment by the Secretary General of his Special Advisor on Youth, Mr. Ahmad Alhendawi. We have already agreed on establishing a virtual platform of ECOSOC for young people to voice their views on our work. It is our priority to bring ECOSOC closer to the youth.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Today, youth representatives, young entrepreneurs, young students and representatives of youth NGOs are here to tell their stories, voice their concerns, pose questions and share their unique perspectives.

You are the future of our societies. As such, you should be part of the solutions. Innovate your future.

Thank you.

Mr. Secretary-General, the floor is yours.