



UNITED NATIONS



NATIONS UNIES

**THE PRESIDENT OF ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COUNCIL
H.E. AMBASSADOR MARTIN SAJDIK**

**OPENING REMARKS AT THE
2015 YOUTH FORUM
YOUTH ENGAGEMENT IN THE TRANSITION FROM MDGS TO SDGS: WHAT WILL
IT TAKE?
NEW YORK, 2 FEBRUARY 2015**

Mr. Secretary-General,
Her Excellency, President of the National Assembly of Ecuador,
Ministers,
Youth representatives,
Distinguished Delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Good morning — and welcome to this 2015 Economic and Social Council Youth Forum. Thank you all for coming.

On behalf of the Economic and Social Council, I'd like to extend a special warm welcome to the many youth representatives here with us today and also to those joining us through social media and webcast.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Fifteen years ago, world leaders agreed on a bold vision through the Millennium Declaration and established concrete targets for improving the existence of many. There has been important progress across all the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Global poverty has been halved well ahead of the 2015 deadline; in developing countries, 90% of children now enjoy primary education; we halved the number of people lacking access to improved drinking water; and the fight against malaria and tuberculosis has shown results, to name but a few examples.



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However, there are areas where advancement has been too slow and targets have not been reached yet. This is particularly the case for youth that are still facing issues that need to be urgently addressed.

In order to arrive at an inclusive and people-centered post-2015 development agenda, it is more crucial than ever to explore and advocate for young people's development priorities for the future. As I have repeatedly said, we cannot discuss the future development goals without bringing the voices of young people into discussions to give them the opportunity to shape the future they want. In this context, this year's Forum poses a very important question: "Youth engagement in the transition from MDGs to SDGs: what will it take?"

Ladies and Gentlemen,

With 1.8 billion people, youth and adolescents represent one quarter of the world's population. Youth constitute the force of change for our societies. The energy and the creativity of young people have shaped the world in many ways and, as problem-solvers, have helped us to face the challenges of the present while building the future of tomorrow.

Martin Luther King was only 26 when he initiated the *Montgomery Bus Boycott*, contributed in strengthening social inclusion and transformative change. Steve Jobs was 21 when he started revolutionizing personal computer by co-founding Apple Inc. Malala Yousafzai was only 17 years old when she won the Nobel Peace prize in 2014.

As I speak to you today, I am sure that another Martin, Steve or Malala is present in this room. You all have the potential to transform your own countries and contribute to building the sustainable world that we are seeking. However, we need to create together the right environment for you to play your role.

A child born the same year as the birth of the MDGs (2000) will become an adolescent and celebrate his/her 15th birthday just as the deadline for the MDGs expires. Despite advances in child mortality reduction and access to primary education, this child is going to live in a world where youth unemployment tops the list of concerns for young people and enrolment in secondary level and higher continues to be a challenge, especially for girls and young women.

For the child born in 1990, the base year for calculating progress in achieving the MDGs, this person might be one of the 75 million young people that are unemployed or earn less than US \$2 per day – like 200 million other young people. This young person is more likely to be part of the 20% of all youth in developing countries that are not engaged in education, employment or training.



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Let's now imagine that this person is a girl or young woman. She is going to experience additional disadvantage and gender-based discrimination thus limiting her ability to be actor and beneficiary of development. Fewer girls and young women complete secondary level education, and young women aged 15-24 have HIV infection rates twice as high as young men for reasons beyond their control.

Young people are particularly vulnerable to human development threats. For example, the most recent Ebola outbreak left many young people with family and community support and also affected education, health and employment opportunities.

But I am thoroughly convinced that the future may be different. The future will be different if young people are active participants and partners in decision making and governance processes at all levels.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The 20th anniversary commemoration of the World Programme of Action for Youth (WPAY), which set out priority areas to advance youth development, coupled with ongoing work towards the development of a post-2015 development agenda, creates a strong opportunity for young people to play a central role in both shaping and implementing the new development agenda.

The 20th anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Programme of Action is the opportunity to reaffirm this role has to be equally played by young women and young men.

The question is no longer if youth engagement is necessary but how to strengthen it.

I know that many of you have been actively involved in many of the global, regional and national processes feeding into the post-2015 development agenda. Now we want to hear what role you play in the transition from MDGs to SDGs. We want to hear your views on what needs to change in the way policy is made and results are to be monitored as we make the shift. How can we transform these emerging commitments into reality? How can we ensure that no one, least of all, young people, are left behind?

The Economic and Social Council is providing the platform for you to make your contribution.

I encourage all of you to actively engage in all the sessions of this unique forum.

For development to be truly sustainable, your ideas and solutions are vital.



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I for one, and many of the Member States represented here today, are keen to hear what you have to say. Again, welcome to the 2015 ECOSOC youth Forum.

Thank you very much.



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