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71st session of the General Assembly

Remarks by H.E. Peter Thomson, Opening of ECOSOC Youth Forum 2017

Mr. President, Honorable Ministers,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a pleasure to address the ECOSOC Youth Forum today.

As the only dedicated platform at the United Nations that brings together young people to share their experiences and ideas, and engage in UN policy discussions, the ECOSOC Youth Forum has, in a few short years, become a dynamic, innovative, and essential fixture on the United Nations' calendar.

It is testament to the importance of the discussions that will take place over the next two days that so many Ministers from around the world are here along with UN officials, Government and Youth representatives, all with the aim of engaging youth leaders, developing a better understanding of the issues young people face, and discussing new ideas on how together we can shape a sustainable future for humanity.

The focus of this year's Forum on the 'Role of youth in poverty eradication and promoting prosperity in a changing world' could not be more fundamental to these efforts.

Poverty is an affront to human dignity, and one that disproportionately affects young people.

156 million youth around our world are currently living in extreme poverty.

And in our rapidly changing world of automation and digitization, slowing economic growth, and environmental destruction, unless urgent action is taken, the number of young people living in poverty actually risks increasing rather than falling.

Taken together the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Paris Agreement on Climate Change provide us with a universal masterplan to bend humanity's trajectory away from the precipice of unsustainability to which we are currently headed, to a safe, secure, and prosperous future for all.

Implemented urgently, effectively and at scale, these agreements will transform our world, to one in which extreme poverty is eliminated and prosperity is increased and shared more equitably. It will be a world in which the rights of women and girls are secured, the environment is protected, climate change is combated and people live in peaceful and inclusive societies with decent work for all.

Achieving this future requires bold, new ideas, innovative and strategic thinking, and urgent collaborative action to drive implementation of these agreements. It will require fundamental changes in the way we produce goods and consume them if our world is to be sustainable. Youth will have to be at the forefront of this transformation.

Thus, our best chance of achieving the transformation to a sustainable way of life must lie in ensuring that young people are fully engaged and that they are empowered as innovators in our development processes.

What does this mean in practice?

It means ensuring that young people are part of the inclusive new partnerships among all key stakeholders – Government, the United Nations, civil society, and the private sector – that will be needed to drive implementation on the scale that is necessary.

It means ensuring young people are a part of shaping new ways of running our economies, doing business, and managing labor markets, so that these systems are based on the principles of sustainability and equality with young people having access to education, health, and decent green jobs.

It means ensuring fora like this are strengthened, so that the voices of young people are heard and can help shape policies for the future.

As President of the General Assembly, I am committed to driving a universal push for progress in implementing each of the Sustainable Development Goals. For this push to succeed the Youth of today must understand the logic behind the goals and their universal, integrated, transformative nature. I firmly believe that the Youth of today will be the key force for achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030.

I have already written to all Heads Government urging them to include the SDGs on the education curricula of schools, so that we may broaden awareness of the 2030 Agenda, and all young people can learn of the goals as both rights and responsibilities.

Going forward, Youth development issues must be considered as a cross-cutting priority in all our SDG implementation initiatives throughout the 71st Session.

Before concluding, I want to thank Ahmad Alhendawi for his work over the last four years as Youth Envoy. His commitment to mainstreaming youth issues across the UN agenda has been highly successful. I wish him all the best in his future efforts for the good.

The Youth of today will be the adults who will inherit the success or failure of the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda.

As those with the greatest stake in our success, I call on all young people to bring your energy, passion, idealism, and ideas to the task of transforming our way of life on this Planet to the one set out in the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda.

I wish you all a successful Youth Forum and look forward to the outcome of your discussions contributing to the High-level Political Forum in July, and beyond.

Thank you.