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Statement by UN Youth Delegates of Romania, Bianca SARBU and Adrian SOLCAN

Mr. Chairperson, Honorable Delegates,

We have the honor of addressing you today as Romania's Youth delegates to the 64th UN General Assembly. It is the fourth time Romania has youth delegates at the United Nations, and we commend our Government for its commitment to youth participation in decision-making. In this sense, we call upon all Governments to include youth delegates in their national delegations to the UN during relevant discussions in the General Assembly and in the Economic and Social Council and its functional bodies. We also wish to thank the Romanian youth organizations and the UN bodies for their openness to our participation in the New York working sessions.

Involving youth in decision-making process is boosting the implementation of youth policies. By delegating increased responsibility in our hands we become empowered and motivated to actively promote positive changes in our societies. It also leads us to recognize our role and position and make decisions for ourselves and our communities from a well-informed standpoint. Involvement sets free and turns one into an independent, dynamic and creative individual and, nonetheless, a responsible citizen in a global society.

Building with vision leads to sustainability. And this calls for clear steps and confidence that our actions have a positive impact on those we represent. We are aware of the fact that such an enterprise, in the medium to long run, requires a lot of planning, effort and various resources. It is but a fact that young people are among the most important resources of the world. Therefore, our empowerment is imperative!

Looking back to Romania, we realize that we are privileged with an efficient educational system based on universal values. Nowadays education is becoming increasingly expensive and consequently less affordable for many children and youth, thus affecting the progress of our societies.

First of all, we would like to recognize the steps made by the international community in achieving the MDG on universal basic education. The 2008 launch of "Education for All – Class of 2015" can be considered a benchmark for the struggle against illiteracy. There is a direct link between the socioeconomic conditions and the access to education for young people. In the current economic junction there is an increase in the number of those lacking the access to basic education. Therefore, we came here to plead for basic affordable universal education and try to make a call to continue your efforts in this regard.

Secondly, we would like to underscore that investment in education is the answer to combating poverty, gender-inequality, health issues and unemployment and to reaffirm the importance of linking education with employment. Formal education should remain a core factor in the development of any young individual and opening the education system to the added value of non-formal education should be further explored.

Mr. Chairperson, Distinguished Delegates,

On youth in economic crisis. The world has been currently experiencing an acute financial and economic crisis. It is a truism to state that in a crisis context, vulnerable groups suffer most. As Romania's youth delegates at the UN, our attention stays with youth as one of the most vulnerable groups worldwide. According to the International Labor Organization, a total of 59 million people have joined the ranks of the unemployed since the beginning of the financial meltdown in 2007, out of whom over 40% are young. Statistics also indicate that despite passing the mid-way point for reaching the Millennium Development Goals, an estimated 55 to 90 million more people (approx. 45% of them – young people) were forced into extreme poverty in 2009, a forecast calculated before the current economic crisis took hold. Poverty is the number one enemy of youth and more generally, the number one enemy of a fair society.

On youth unemployment in Romania. In our home country, Romania, the trend has followed less of a steeper curve: in the first months of 2009, around 20% of the total unemployed were young people, which marked an increase by 1.4 percentual points in comparison to 2008. Still, according to World Bank statistics, the percentage of young people living under the poverty line in Romania is expected to rise from 7.8% in 2008 to 10.7% by the end of 2009. These data are indeed worrisome. Nevertheless, Romanian national authorities have embarked on several legislative projects to develop and implement strategies that provide young people with real chances to find decent and productive work.

The lack of employment opportunities creates a downward spiral in the sense that unemployment brings about poverty, which is likely to limit the access to education, basic health services, and other components pertaining to well-being.

In light of the financial and economic meltdown, governments seem to have recognized their increased role in providing young people with means and ways to overcome the transition phase from childhood to adulthood and more specifically, have looked into modalities of providing them with employment opportunities. Drawing on the Decent Work Agenda and the commitments made in the 2008 Declaration on Social Justice for a Fair Globalization, the Global Jobs Pact marks the willingness of ILO and its constituents to prioritize crisis response and consequently, face the increase in unemployment, deepening poverty and inequality. However, as shown by the statistics before, there is unfortunately little convergence between commitments and real actions (or at least, their effects), what makes us think of an old Latin saying that not just "*verba volant*", but also "*scripta volant*" (that is, not just spoken words but also written ones may vanish).

On youth participation. For concrete effects to be apparent, we call upon governments and civil society worldwide to start taking action and view the current financial and economic crisis as an opportunity to boost the economy via effective and innovative mechanisms, and furthermore create incentives for youth participation in the decision-making process.

Therefore, we envisage at least three main directions of action.

Firstly, we need to address one of the main causes of youth unemployment. Therefore, it is high time for the educational curricula to be revised worldwide, and made more comprehensive while minding both the specificities of the labor market and the components of social and sustainable development. To the extent possible, international education standards should be made consistent across countries and regions. This way – upon completion of their studies, youth would stand good chances to access the labor opportunities not only in their home countries, but also in the international market.

Secondly, not just the employers' wishes should be taken into account, but also those of the potential employees – in this case, of young people. Young people need to be included in the decision-making process at all levels where the legislative setting for the labor market is shaped. This would be a fair approach to youth as we could promote and lobby in our own interest. Participation can be achieved – among others – via information and communication technologies as concrete tools to empower youth's voice and make it heard in the legislative process.

Thirdly, more focus should be placed on youth initiatives in the financial and entrepreneurial fields. Creativity and innovation are generally said to be attributes of youth's age. Therefore, making basic resources available to young people (e.g. via grant schemes, microeconomic stimulus packages or other systematic, multidimensional self-employment programmes) would bring youth into the labor market and elicit their creativity and innovation potential to the benefit of all.

Mr. Chairperson,

Our strong belief is that "*facta manent*" - facts remain! While both spoken and written words might fade away, facts (as in: concrete actions) last over time through their contribution to secure sustainable economies and well-developed civil societies.

The bottom-line of our speech here today is **action**: let's take action together, let's try to go beyond formal agreements and covenants, and urge the implementation of the commitments made heretofore in the field of youth employment and beyond!

Thank you for having us here today and allowing us to share our views with you!