

## **Mr. Chairman, distinguished delegates:**

It is an honour for me to address the Third Committee of the UN General Assembly today on behalf of the young people of Slovakia.

The great philosopher Aristotle once said: "Youth is easily deceived, because it is quick to hope."

Indeed, youth is a time of great expectations and hopes to which only sky is the limit. Unfortunately, reality often falls short of these expectations. Instead of enjoying a joyful time of play, developing their qualities at school and work, young people in many regions are struggling to survive. Being the first - and the most vulnerable - victims of armed conflicts, poverty and inadequate health care, there is not much space left for optimistic plans for the future.

Are we - fortunate people sitting in this room with our university degrees and decent jobs - fully able to imagine the situation of young people out there in the "streets of the world"? People who were not given the chance to attend school and have their say on decisions concerning their future? Are we - young people, youth delegates of different countries - able to persuade our governments to do more to answer the needs of youth? To implement programmes and measures that will help young people develop their potential and use it for the benefit of all? Are the governments really giving the youth the opportunity to speak up on global issues when from 192 UN member countries only around 30 include young people in their delegations as youth delegates to the UN General Assembly?

Let me emphasize that youth do not want to be just observers, waiting for the governments to do something on issues affecting them. Currently in many parts of the world, despite their many assets and promising potential, more and more young people are finding themselves without jobs or livelihoods. Making up 25 per cent of the global working-age population, the share of young people in total unemployment is as high as 44 per cent.

In helping to solve a problem of this kind and scale, youth have proven that they are able to act as a serious partner. For example in Bratislava, the capital of Slovakia, students and young people working on a voluntary basis organise an annual event matching companies and young job-seekers. Through the years it has become a very effective instrument for both youth and employers to get to know each other, gain new skills and information and often sign new employment contracts as well. In other projects, non-profit organisations help young people develop their ethical business thinking by practical programmes offered free of charge.

Unemployment rates tell only part of the story, especially for the vast majority of youth living in developing countries. In the absence of opportunities in the formal labour market, informal, hazardous and low pay employment is the norm, not the exception. This fact is alarming, taking into consideration that the work - and for young people in particular - is an important part of the process of self-realization, helping them determine their own values, priorities and building self-confidence. Suitable work fosters creativity and maximizes the potential of young people, enabling them to contribute and create added value for the society.

Unemployment, however, causes a dangerous chain reaction of devastating consequences for youth, their families and communities and the future prosperity and development of countries. The factors causing youth unemployment are as diverse, as are the regions and cultures young people come from. Therefore targeted interventions to

capture needs of youth in their heterogeneity and mitigate the heavy economic and social costs of youth unemployment, are necessary.

Without a concerted effort to achieve the 8th Millennium Development Goal, which explicitly refers to creating employment opportunities for young people, a new generation will grow up feeling it has no stake in society. Strategies to address these challenges need to be comprehensive and include preparation of young people for the labour market as well as preparation of the labour market for young people. Clearly visible is the need to increase financial commitments to youth employment initiatives and closely link the educational system to the needs of the labour market. Given more recognition, non-formal education has a great potential to serve as a bridge linking the formal educational system to the labour market.

Young people are an important resource and have proven themselves to be key partners in sustainable development. Investing into the capacity-building of the young generation is one of the best strategic decisions for the future. By harnessing their powerful potential in the working process, the world can benefit enormously from a new wave of participation and intellectual creativity and come closer to the full achievement of the Millennium Development Goals.

Thank you for your attention.

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Slovak Youth delegate 2009