

**THE SECRETARY-GENERAL**

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MESSAGE ON INTERNATIONAL YOUTH DAY**12 August 2009**

The theme of this year's International Youth Day – “Sustainability: Our Challenge. Our Future” – is a global call to action for young men and women.

Our world faces multiple, interconnected crises with severe and far-reaching impacts that fall disproportionately on the young.

In 2007, for example, youth comprised 25 per cent of the world's working age population yet accounted for 40 per cent of the unemployed. The global economic downturn means that, in the near term, youth unemployment will continue to climb. Unemployment rates tell only part of the story, especially for the vast majority of youth who live in developing countries. For them, informal, insecure and low-wage employment is the norm, not the exception.

Climate change, meanwhile, continues to compromise economies and threaten tremendous upheaval, saddling young people everywhere with an unjust “ecological debt”. This is a potentially crushing burden. At the same time, I am encouraged by the contributions that young people have made to the debate on climate change mitigation and adaptation. Their views and proposals can help build the momentum necessary to “seal the deal” in Copenhagen later this year.

Indeed, young people have proven themselves to be key partners in sustainable development. They have gotten involved in international forums such as the Commission on Sustainable Development, and have helped their Governments and communities to formulate poverty reduction strategies, entrepreneurial schemes and many other policies and initiatives.

Young people often lead by example: practicing green and healthy lifestyles, or promoting innovative uses of new technologies, such as mobile devices and on-line social networks. They deserve our full commitment -- full access to education, adequate healthcare, employment opportunities, financial services and full participation in public life. On International Youth Day, let us renew our pledge to support young people in their development. Sustainability is the most promising path forward, and youth can lead the way.