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Statement
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High Level Event of the General Assembly
to mark the 20th Anniversary of the
World Programme of Action for Youth

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**Your Excellency, Acting President of the General Assembly,
Mr. Alvaro Jose de Mendonca e Moura**

**Your Excellency, United Nations Secretary-General Mr. Ban
Ki-moon**

Excellencies, Ladies and gentlemen, Colleagues and friends,

Here in this Assembly, almost twenty years ago, Member States adopted a landmark document to improve the situation of youth around the world.

The World Programme of Action for Youth is a milestone in articulating a vision for youth development and directing both the

national and international community's response to youth needs.

Not only does the Program of Action provide a policy framework and practical guidelines for national action and international support to improve the situation of youth, it also constitutes the first global blueprint for effective national youth policies.

To this day, this document remains one of the most important internationally agreed frameworks to the better future young people deserve.

Over the past 20 years, we have witnessed notable progress in youth development agenda and a dramatic increase in the number of countries with a national youth policy, laws and national programs on youth.

While important progress to empower and enable youth globally has been made-- let's make no mistake, there are daunting challenges facing this largest generation of young people.

Many young people continue to experience limited access to quality education, health services and meaningful political participation.

More than 500+ million young persons live on less than 2 dollars per day.

Globally, 1 in 8 youth are unemployed...

126 million youth cannot read or write...

63 million adolescents of lower secondary school age are currently out of school...

An estimated 600 million young people are living in conflict zones and fragile states...

And every minute a young woman is newly infected with HIV...

We meet here today, 20 years later, **to review AND renew** our collective commitment to this Program of Action.

Today's youth are more connected and tuned in to the world than any generation before.

They are growing up fast, in a world that is changing even faster. But the good news here that young people see the challenges before them in fresh ways and are responding with enthusiasm, imagination and innovation.

I personally have been fortunate to have had the opportunity to travel to all regions of the world and meet with young people and youth organizations.

Regardless of where I go, no matter which region, the concerns and aspirations of young people for their future and the future of their communities are remarkably similar.

For me... youth development is the young people I met with in Mathara, a slum area near Nairobi Kenya, who were working to humanize the plight of youth in the slums and showcase their stories.

Youth resilience is the young people I met in Somalia, who against all odds were organizing Somali youth to build a brighter future for a country riddled with decades of conflict.

Youth courage is the young people I met in the Dominican Republic working to prevent teenage pregnancy and child marriage.

Youth progress is the young parliamentarians from all over the world that I met with in Geneva, who were charting new political ground in a political sphere that lacks youth access and representation.

Youth inspiration is the young people I met with in Gaza who realized that the path to peace is paved with reconciliation, forgiveness and compassion.

So if we wonder what the World Programme of Action for Youth is all about – it's about taking all these stories from the margins to a central stage.

With the right investments, young people everywhere can reach their full potential as individuals, leaders and agents of progress.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen

Almost 5 years ago, back in 2011, I had the opportunity to meet with the Secretary-General for the first time when he visited Egypt right after the Egyptian revolution and met with young leaders back then. The Secretary-General message was, it's time to listen to young people.

That message is what the world needs today. And we are starting at home; the UN wants to listen to you.

Over the past few months leading up to this event, young people around the world participated in digital campaign #YouthNow. The campaign gave a platform for youth to engage on critical conversations with the United Nations and other stakeholders.

To date, the campaign has reached 770 million impressions with active engagement from all over the world.

Youth are proving once again that they have the power and the tools to be equal partners in development. They do not want to be talked AT—they want to be engaged in a meaningful way.

Today we need to join forces to advocate for quality education to all youth.

And it's imperative that governments and the private sector respond to the youth unemployment crisis, by prioritizing job creation and supporting young entrepreneurs, those who decided to become job innovators, not only job seekers.

Urgent efforts must to be made to protect, promote and fulfill the human rights of young people and we must fight discrimination against all youth groups.

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

In September this year, a window of opportunity will open for a new promise for development and prosperity. Heads of States will meet in this very room to agree on a new sustainable development goals that will steer global development efforts for 15 years to come.

It's upon all of us to take ownership of this new development agenda.

That's why it is critical to involve young people in the planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and actions affecting their lives.

And the math here is simple: When we are talking about the next generation of development priorities, we are talking about the next generation of individuals.

So as we gather to assess the progress of WPAY and renew our commitment to its full and accelerated implementation, allow me to propose some concrete suggestions and lessons learned from the past 20 years of the program of action:

1. First) The Political will--- It is essential to ensure the existence of the political will to make YOUTH a national state priority.
2. Second) Legislation and policies: We need youth friendly legislation and policies that are protective of youth rights and conducive to youth development, from legislation related to employment and facilitating small enterprises, to political participation and voting.
3. Third) We need economic will and resources--- Youth policies and programs need financing and it's time to introduce a youth budgeting similar to the gender budgeting at the national level. And let's remember that youth policy without a budget is not a policy, its merely a mental exercise
4. Fourth) Youth need meaningful mechanisms to engage--- Public participation is more than just voting. It's not a quota or a box to tick. Youth need access to political processes that are meaningful and lead to real impact. Autonomous, inclusive youth participation structures should be established and empowered.
5. Fifth) We need better knowledge about youth--- This requires investing in tools and research that help us better understand youth and track progress on key areas of youth development.

6. Last but not least) Accountability--- Youth want to feel their voices matter. They want mechanisms that ensure the accountability towards them and their priorities.

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

The Program of Action outlined clearly the investments and actions needed to enable youth to realize their full potential and act on it for a better future for all.

#YouthNow is not just a slogan – it's a call for urgency and a call for investing in youth now. Youth are speaking NOW but expecting us to deliver yesterday. Let's not fail them.

I thank you very much.