

**THE SECRETARY-GENERAL'S ENVOY ON YOUTH  
OPENING SESSION OF THE HIGH-LEVEL SEGMENT OF ECOSOC  
/MINISTERIAL SEGMENT OF THE HIGH LEVEL POLITICAL FORUM  
NEW YORK, MONDAY 16 JULY 2018**

Your Excellencies,

[Ms. Marie Chatardova], President of the Economic and Social Council,

[Mr. Miroslav Lajcak], President of the General Assembly,

[Ms. Amina Mohammed], Deputy Secretary General,

Honourable Ministers,

Distinguished Delegates,

Ladies and Gentlemen.

Our world is currently home to the largest population of young people in history, standing at 1.8 billion between the ages of 10 and 24 worldwide. Close to 90 per cent of them live in developing countries. What is more, their numbers are expected to grow, especially in the least developed regions.

The way in which the shifting demographics in the world today are leveraged, and how young people navigate their transition into adulthood, is critical now more than ever for the progress of humankind and the health of our planet. With this large and increasing number of young people across the globe, it is abundantly clear that in order to achieve national and global progress for sustainable development, we must foster a generation that knows about, cares about, and takes ownership over the global development agenda.

The 2030 Agenda critically recognizes the key role that today's youth generation is to play in its achievement.

But for too long, young people – particularly those who are most marginalized and living in circumstances shaped by poverty, climate change, conflicts, or inequality - have been treated as beneficiaries for development policies and agendas, rather than active agents shaping those.

This needs to change. As I always say, young people are the sustainable development generation, the SDG generation.

Young people will be ones leading this agenda in the years to come. In fact, in many places they already are.

Young people today are also the most interconnected generation the world has ever seen. They have largely been brought up in the age of modern technology, are digitally savvy and those who have access, operate online for a substantial part. From the favelas of Brazil to the refugee camps in Jordan, young people are using technology to find new solutions and drive action in their local communities.

To solve the most pressing issues of our time, we must tap into the dynamism of young innovators, activists, entrepreneurs and advocates, who have the potential to disrupt the status quo and be a strong force for positive change. Young people constitute a tremendous asset and investing in them will open the door to an unparalleled multiplier effect to achieve the world we all want, a sustainable, peaceful and a just and equitable world.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

This year, the High Level Political Forum focuses on the *transformation towards sustainable and resilient societies*. Young people are active partners for the realization of the SDGs under review.

Their ideas and commitment contribute to ensuring universal and equitable access to clean drinking water and sanitation - *SDG 6*.

Their innovative capacities and energy consumption choices are crucial to the success of *SDG 7*.

This generation is leading the way for the promotion of choices that increase the eco-efficiency of consumption and minimize waste and pollution - *SDG 12*.

They are recognized as important partners in advancing *SDG 11* and the United Nations' New Urban Agenda that aims to make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, and resilient.

As in previous years, youth representatives, activists and advocates dialogued with Member States and presented their contributions related to the SDGs under review during the annual Youth Forum of the Economic and Social Council, January this year. At the same time, policymakers shared their experiences in engaging young people in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, while also highlighting how they are addressing young people's needs and priorities in their national SDG implementation strategies.

While the United Nations still have a long way to go to meaningfully engage young people in all its processes, the ECOSOC Youth Forum has become a turning point in making the United Nations more accessible to young people and offers an important conduit to feed in youth perspectives and concerns into the deliberations of the High Level Political Forum. It has been recognized for its important contributions as such in past Ministerial Declarations of this Forum.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

A sustainable and prosperous future is achievable when young people are part of the equation.

As we are now in the third year of implementation of the SDGs, I am encouraged to note the growing recognition of the leading role young people can play not only in the implementation towards sustainable development, but also in the follow up and review of the process itself. Given our commitment to ‘leaving no-one behind’, youth inclusion in the review process is of critical importance.

This year, 47 countries have volunteered to submit their national reviews on the implementation of the SDGs. Notable progress is being made in setting up institutional arrangements and creating an enabling environment for implementation, and the frequency of references to the inclusion of youth is heartening.

But while it is positive that many countries mention youth, we need more detail provided regarding efforts to ensure that the process is inclusive and that engagement is meaningful.

I would like to acknowledge the countries who are truly walking the talk when it comes to meaningful youth inclusion. In several instances, young people have been able to directly contribute to their countries’ reporting efforts, through seats in national SDG commissions or through the inclusion of independent contributions written by young people;

Other countries have brought a youth delegate to take part in the official presentation of their national progress here at the HLPF. These are some of the best practices that I would like to see implemented by more member states.

Let me share with you, three recommendations on how to...

**Firstly** we know that numerous young people and youth-led organizations meaningfully contribute to the implementation of the SDGs every day without having a seat at the formal table.

Young people find creative and innovative informal ways to participate. Whether this is through their own development work, campaigns to improve meaningful youth participation, shadow reporting, providing citizen-generated data, designing their own youth-led monitoring frameworks or championing awareness of the Goals at the local and national level – they are committed to making the 2030 Agenda a success. It is of utmost importance that these contributions are recognized, particularly the value of informal data gathering, which is happening in many places.

I wish to encourage the active involvement of young people in data collection; both as the target for data collection efforts, as well as collection, analysis and dissemination.

It is also paramount that countries bring youth delegates to the HLPF. Including young people in the official delegation and offering them an opportunity to provide input to the delegation's work adds value and builds intergenerational equity. By connecting with young people at the local level, youth delegates can bring a representative voice that would otherwise go unheard.

I call on this Forum to consider a broader and systematic engagement with young people to be ensured in its ongoing deliberations as a response to the 2030 Agenda's recognition of young people's role as critical agents of change.

Secondly, we need strong youth structures to ensure that young people, including young women and girls, indigenous youth and those living with disabilities, are recognized stakeholders in local and national processes. Institutionalizing youth participation gives young people a chance to know the review process and follow-up to the SDGs, build capacity to take an active role, collaborate with other groups in society in the joint effort of achieving the SDGs and holding their governments accountable.

At the local level, this could be through engaging youth representatives in municipal participatory planning, budgeting, or monitoring processes, making the 2030 Agenda directly relatable to young people's lives.

Thirdly and finally, as we deliver, we need to deliver for young people. Especially those young people living in the most marginalized communities in the most vulnerable parts of the world. Investing in universal quality free education, investing in universal health coverage, empowering young women and girls to realize their full potential. Investing in young people can move the needle on achieving the SDGs in the lifetime of one generation.

But we need evidence and data as to how the SDGs are impacting the lives of young people. Without data disaggregated by age along other factors, we risk forming our idea about young people's lives from stereotypes and over-generalizations. There needs to be concerted action to address the gaps in data for young people and to ensure the measurement of development adequately reflects their lives.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

In my capacity as the UN Secretary-General's Envoy on Youth I meet with young people from all over the world. And wherever I go, from Somalia to Iraq, from India to Russia, I am struck by how often my peers ask me the same questions; "what can I do to help solve the challenges in my community?"; "how can I help to drive sustainable development?".

The "desire to participate" is a defining characteristic of the young people I encounter. We have to work hand in hand with young people in this journey towards 2030. Setting aside our egos, power struggles, myths and misconceptions on what young people can bring to the table.

We know, that achieving these ambitious 17 goals and targets is not an easy task and I do not wish to simplify that. Young people are here, they are here now, and they are knocking on the doors of power to offer their potential to walk this journey with you.

And if you decide to answer those knocks on your doors, you will find a partner that you can count on in every step of the process.

Thank you.