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Top UN official issues call for stepped-up investment in young people



26 August 2010 – With half of all of the world’s nearly 2 billion young people living on less than \$2 a day, now is the time to invest in “the leaders of today and the makers of tomorrow,” according to the head of the United Nations Population Fund ([UNFPA](#)).

In a message to the World Youth Conference in León, Mexico, the agency’s Executive Director, Thoraya Ahmed Obaid, **stressed** that “young people are not just the future; they are very much the present.”

The world is currently home to 1.8 billion people between the ages of 10 and 24, making it the largest youth generation in human history, and the vast majority live in developing countries.

They face a raft of obstacles, Ms. Obaid noted in her message, which was delivered yesterday by her deputy, Purnima Mane.

At present, some 100 million adolescents are not in school, while nearly half of all sexual assaults are perpetrated against girls aged 15 and younger.

Some 16 million adolescent girls become mothers annually and complications from pregnancy are the leading cause of death worldwide for girls between the ages of 15 and 19.

In addition, 2,500 young people are infected with HIV every day.

"Yes, the challenges are many," the UNFPA chief acknowledged. "But they are not insurmountable. Together we can overcome them if we work together and redouble our efforts to guarantee that all young people have the knowledge, skills and opportunities to reach their full potential."

Failure to make the necessary investments in young people's education, health and employment will perpetuate poverty and ignorance for decades to come, she cautioned.

Development policies, Ms. Obaid emphasized, must be rooted in human rights.

"Stand up for your rights whenever and wherever you can," she told the audience. "Speak out for all your sisters and brothers around the world who are vulnerable."

The official noted that young people are not a homogenous group, rejecting a "one-size-fits-all" approach to solving their problems. "Therefore, countries need tailored public policies that address the situation and reality of youth, whether they are rural, urban, indigenous, male, female, living with a disability, or affected by drugs or conflict."

She also urged leaders to listen to young people and involve them in making decisions that affect their lives.

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