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Africa's young people vital to sustainable development, says UN chief



Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon (file photo)

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One of Africa's greatest untapped resources is its young people, [Secretary-General](#) Ban Ki-moon stressed today, urging the continent to take advantage of the skills and talents of its youth to promote sustainable development.

Mr. Ban spent Africa Day today in Ethiopia, the final leg of a three-country, five-day visit to the continent that has also taken the United Nations chief to Côte d'Ivoire and Nigeria.

In a [statement](#) marking the Day, whose theme this year is “Accelerating Youth Empowerment for Sustainable Development,” Mr. Ban warned that “despite advances in education and economic growth, progress remains fragile, inequalities are widespread and young Africans face major difficulties in finding decent jobs and participating in decision-making.”

He noted that in North Africa this year, where protests led to the downfall of long-term regimes in Tunisia and Egypt and open conflict in Libya, a lack of basic freedoms “was among the factors that led young people to take to the streets demanding change and fulfilment of their legitimate aspirations for better lives.

“Empowering youth is essential for sustainable economic growth and sustainable management of the earth's ecosystems and resources; the clear challenge for many countries now is to pay just as much attention to sustainable political progress.

“As Africans strive to overcome threats to peace and development, the continent will continue to need strong and dedicated support from all its partners. On Africa Day, let us reaffirm our commitment to work in partnership with Africans of all ages to realize their potential by building an environment conducive to prosperity, democracy and peace.”

He underlined the need for Africans “to realize their right to choose their own leaders and ensure that elections are a route to peace, not violence.”

Africa Day commemorates the founding of the Organization of African Unity (the predecessor of today’s African Union) on 25 May 1963. During his current visit to the continent, Mr. Ban has been trying to mobilize “global support for reducing child and maternal mortality rates.

“Progress in this area has been slower than it is on all the other Millennium Development Goals (MDGs),” he said, “despite proven policies, practices and technologies.”

Meanwhile, the UN Environment Programme (UNEP) today presented its new Africa Water Atlas that details the state of the continent’s water resources.

The 326-page atlas uses more than 100 satellite images, 225 maps, 500 graphics and 250 ground photographs and provides a brief profile of the water situation and progress towards the MDGs in every country.

“The publication makes a major contribution to the state of knowledge about water in Africa by synthesizing water issues by looking at them from the perspective of challenges and opportunities,” UNEP said in a statement.

For its part the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) is holding events throughout the week, including screenings, art exhibitions and thematic debates. Special attention will be paid to the themes of the role of women and youth in the African Renaissance and the construction of peace.

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