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Launching International Year of Youth, UN urges dialogue, respect across generations



12 August 2010 – The *International Year of Youth* kicked off today with calls from United Nations officials to harness the talents and energy of the world’s young people to promote better understanding and dialogue between different generations, cultures and religions.

Dialogue and mutual understanding is the theme of the Year, which was formally launched today – to coincide with International Youth Day being observed every 12 August – in the General Assembly Hall at UN Headquarters in New York.

Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon used his [message](#) for the Day to urge UN Member States to boost their investment in social and economic programmes that benefit the estimated 1.2 billion people worldwide aged between 15 and 24.

“The energy of youth can ignite faltering economies,” he said. “I am regularly inspired by the goodwill, talent and idealism of the young people I meet across the world. They are making important contributions to our work to eradicate poverty, contain the spread of disease, combat climate change and achieve the Millennium Development Goals ([MDGs](#)).”

In the course of the International Year, the UN and its youth organization partners will focus on the need to encourage dialogue and ensure that young people are included in important policies and decision-making processes.

“In a world which different people and traditions are coming closer, more frequent contact than ever before, it is crucial that young people learn how to listen intently,

empathize with others, acknowledge divergent opinions, and be able to resolve conflicts,” Mr. Ban said.

The International Labour Organization ([ILO](#)) unveiled a report yesterday showing that global youth unemployment has reached an all-time high. According to the report, of the world’s 620 million economically active youth, 81 million were out of work at the end of last year.

“The global economic crisis has had a disproportionate impact on young people; they have lost jobs, struggled to find even low-wage employment and seen access to education curtailed,” the Secretary-General noted in his message.

The UN Human Settlements Programme ([UN-HABITAT](#)), meanwhile, announced that it will make grants to 51 projects proposed by youth people from 31 countries. The grants will be drawn from the Programme’s Urban Youth Fund, which awards funding amounting to \$1 million each year.

Today’s launch of the International Year is being marked with speeches, musical performances, video screenings and poetry recitals at UN Headquarters.

Sha Zukang, the UN Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs, discussed the UN Inter-Agency Network on Youth Development, while the UN Population Fund ([UNFPA](#)) Executive Director, Thoraya Obaid, delivered a joint statement of the heads of UN entities demonstrating the support of the UN system for issues related to youth development.

The world’s youth account for about 18 per cent of the world’s population. Some 87 per cent of them live in developing countries, where they face the challenges of limited access to resources, health care, education, training, employment and other economic opportunities.

During the International Year, the UN will focus on three overarching objectives – increasing commitment and investment in youth; raising youth participation and partnerships; and boosting inter-cultural understanding among youth.

The UN first marked the International Year of Youth in 1985. A decade later, the General Assembly adopted the World Programme of Action for Youth, setting a policy framework and guidelines for national action and international support to improve the situation of young people.

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