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Youth education and employment key to progress in Africa – Migiro



African Union member States hold their annual Summit at the Sipopo Conference Centre, Malabo, Republic of Equatorial Guinea

30 June 2011 –

The United Nations today urged African countries to empower the continent’s youth through schooling and jobs, stressing that the foundation for peace and development lay in giving young people opportunities to build better lives for themselves.

“If we are to bring lasting peace and sustainable development to the continent, we must empower Africa’s youth,” Deputy Secretary-General Asha-Rose Migiro told heads of State at the annual African Union (AU) summit, which is being held in Malabo, the capital of Equatorial Guinea, and whose theme is youth empowerment for sustainable development.

She pointed out that 35 per cent of Africa’s total population is between the ages of 15 and 35, the phase in people’s lives when they lay foundations for their future, build careers and plan families.

“For too many young adults in Africa, this is a time of dashed hopes, frustration, and political, economic and social exclusion,” said Ms. Migiro. “But there is a way for African nations to defuse the youth time bomb – by empowering youth and reaping the benefits. You have recognized this yourselves – by choosing the theme of this meeting and by prioritizing youth development in your development agenda,” she added.

She said that the United Nations will continue to work closely with Africa's leaders to maintain and strengthen peace by supporting the efforts of the African people to realize their right to choose their own leaders.

“Countries that prioritize democratic principles generally fare better in avoiding armed conflict, promoting stable and equitable development, and building socially inclusive societies,” Ms. Migiro.

“The young men and women of Africa need to know that their dreams can and will be achieved – not through violence and crime, but through the ballot box and the decent jobs that will come from thriving economies,” she added.

She pointed out that the continent has over the past decade undergone a period of rapid economic growth, a stark contrast to the stagnation and reversals of previous years.

Attractive investment opportunities are expanding beyond the minerals and energy sectors, and a middle class is also emerging in several countries, although extreme poverty, hunger and inequality remain a major concern.

“For Africa, this is, in many ways, an era of opportunity. Our job is to ensure that it is an era of opportunity for all,” she said.

Ms. Migiro reminded the African heads of State that this year marks the tenth anniversary of the coming into force of the Optional Protocols to the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The protocols prohibit the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography.

[Secretary-General](#) Ban Ki-moon has launched a global campaign to promote the universal ratification of the protocols, Ms. Migiro said, but only 18 AU Member States are parties. “I call on all 53 AU Members to become parties and implement them fully,” she said.

On Sudan, Ms. Migiro noted that despite the recent outbreaks of violence in Southern Kordofan and Abyei, the upcoming independence of Southern Sudan was another milestone for Africa, and for the continent's partnership with the UN.

“The United Nations will remain committed to supporting South Sudan's peaceful development and to good neighbourly relations between north and south,” she said

She also reiterated that the UN remains committed to the search for a political solution to the ongoing crisis in Libya.

“There should be no doubt about our aims. The objective – and the obligation – of the international community is to protect civilians and to work for a durable peace that meets the legitimate aspirations of Libyan people,” she added.

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