

Message from Dr. Joan Clos, UN Under-Secretary General & Executive Director, UN-HABITAT 12 Aug 2013

There are more people under the age of 25 today than ever before; nearly three billion or almost half of the total global population. The majority of our youth is living in cities and towns in the developing world where nearly 90 per cent of the world's urban growth is taking place. It is estimated that as many as 60 per cent of all urban dwellers will be under the age of 18 by 2030, with a significant percentage of this growth being the result of youth migrating to urban areas. The theme of this year's International Youth Day, "Youth Migration: Moving Development Forward", has never been more relevant or more needed.

The United Nations has found that there are nearly twenty-seven million international migrants who are youth. They migrate for reasons such as crisis within their own country, accessing education or seeking job opportunities. Many of these youth are leaving rural areas and moving to cities. For example, a recent UN-Habitat report found that young Ethiopians migrate from rural areas to cities due to insecure land tenure. In examples all around the world, young people are taking on the responsibility and risks of moving, and it is imperative that governments at all levels develop policies that support them.

Young migrants to cities come face to face with many opportunities and challenges to their success. Youth are often searching for jobs and improved livelihoods in cities; migrating there due to the economic prosperity cities often bring. It is heartening to know that in India, young migrants in search of work usually find jobs, with less than 1 per cent of migrants failing to find employment. Yet, this is not always the case globally, with many youth finding themselves living in unfavourable conditions in slums and informal settlements, with jobs that are often insecure.

To meet this demographic challenge, creative solutions to improve urban policies to take advantage of and harness the potential of youth are needed; policies and

practices that will allow us to achieve the Millennium Development Goals and the new Post-2015 Development Agenda.

Unfortunately the current model of urbanization in most of these countries has not been very successful. We therefore need to rethinking our current approach to create more productive and more sustainable cities by focusing on strategic issues including urban legislation, land tenure, urban planning and designing, urban economy and municipal finance to prepare the cities to be places that generate jobs for its ever increasing population. Youth issues should be at the center of this urban transformation.

No developed country has achieved any level of prosperity without urbanization; cities account for approximately 70 per cent of global GDP, and as much as 55 per cent of the GDP in low-income countries. It is anticipated that 80 per cent of future economic growth will take place in cities. Well-designed cities provide an “urban advantage” where the proximity of goods, services and resources allows more efficient and effective production than more spread out areas. Youth, who are in the most productive times of their lives, are perfectly positioned to take leverage this advantage and cities – and therefore nations – would benefit by enabling them to do so.

We at UN-Habitat believe that youth are leaders not just leaders of tomorrow, but also of today. This year we celebrate the ten-year anniversary of the establishment of the first One Stop in Nairobi, Kenya. Every year our Urban Youth Fund provides support to over 200 youth-led agencies for their work in innovation. We have implemented new programmes and research on youth information and communication technology and governance, and have launched a “Youth and Land” initiative to explore through youth-led solutions related to issues such as tenure. Through the Youth 21 initiative we have worked with member states, youth and civil society to develop a blueprint to assure youth are

heard at the international level. These programmes put youth at the centre of their own and their communities' development.

We congratulate the Secretary General for his appoint of Ahmad Alhindawi as the first ever Envoy on Youth, and are encouraged by the next step the United Nations has taken in engaging youth through the creation of the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) regional and international forums.

UN-Habitat calls on other United Nations agencies and partners to continue working towards engaging youth at all levels, from the local to the international. Recent demonstrations around the world highlight the frustration of youth, but with those frustrations is also a desire to be positive change agents, partners who are willing to come to the table with concrete ideas and commitments to a more sustainable future. It is imperative we greet them with open arms and not closed fists. Our today and tomorrow depend on it.