

Presentation on the role of youth and youth organizations

(Presented on 1 July 2003 at the Second Meeting of the High-Level Panel of the Secretary-General's Youth Employment Network)

1. Young people are a crucial segment of society; they are the basis for future development. Young people are social actors of change and can serve as a pressure group to lobby governments in defining their priorities. It has been clearly stressed that "youth are not only the leaders of tomorrow, but the partners of today". The UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan underlined the role of youth as actors who have real expertise complementary to that of academics and researchers. It is important to strive towards the involvement of young people as active citizens.
2. We are pleased to note the increased number of young participants at the second Meeting of the High-Level Panel on Youth Employment, with greater representative distribution at the international and regional levels, including representatives of youth organizations active at the global, regional, national and grassroots levels with local and national membership and democratic structures. All of them are working to develop policies aiming at improving the situation of young people world-wide and creating emerging community leaders.
3. The composition of the group underlines that there are no national or regional, social or political divisions. Our common goal is to spur a united, more collaborative approach, and a determination to work on youth employment as one of our highest priorities and toward fulfilling the steps envisaged in the road map.

The contribution youth groups can make

4. As National Action Plans (NAPs) are being drafted, coordinated and eventually implemented, we will place our emphasis on working towards these NAPs at the national level. Young people and youth organizations must be taken as active actors at the national level. (Donor conferences held to raise funds for the development of NAPs should involve youth participation.)
5. We intend to mobilize our national member organizations to press for the development of NAPs and work towards their implementation. To improve our work in this respect, we will all need 1) to send an official document to our national member organizations that recognizes the role of youth in this process; and 2) to determine on a country-by-country basis which organizations are the best partners.
6. One of our priorities should be the mobilization of young people to participate in the decision-making processes and in developing proposals and solutions to the problems, in particular those related to youth employment.
7. In certain parts of the world we are witnessing situations where actors historically do not receive recognition. Young people have to fulfil their role in society. International

youth organizations can play a more important role by using reliable statistics and communications products to push for the involvement of young people in community development. The YEN itself can also play a role at the national level, by supporting youth organizations.

These are all elements to which we will devote ourselves, but we cannot do all of this alone – we need continuous understanding and the tools and support to help us achieve these aims.

- a. We need to share and use good and reliable data, as well as best practices, both with the ILO and the World Bank. Training and equipping young people in their organizations for leadership skills, capacities, and advocacy, as well as the mobilization of more young people, are important segments of our work that have to be strengthened.
- b. We are favourable to the idea of an International Youth Award. We see the role of youth and youth organizations in its establishment and sustainability. An IYA could be both a medium to recognize national achievements in the field of youth employment, as well as a vehicle for highlighting those countries where there is room for improvement. Based on the data and knowledge gained from its membership, it is the youth organizations - and not the Youth Employment Network's core UN-system institutions - that should be responsible for the distribution of the International Youth Award.
- c. We will work at international level through coordination and cooperation, using this as a tool to ensure implementation at the local level.
- d. We need permanent standing and association with the Panel, through a structure that would be based on an enlarged and more representative group in order to mobilize more young people. We, the 14 individuals, are not those who should constitute this group. Instead, the group should include organisations that are membership-based, representative and that have a firm grassroots presence all over the world. These include:
 - i. The big 7, the political internationals, the student movement and rural youth,
 - ii. The regional platforms of young people and
 - iii. On a case-by-case basis relative to particular issues, representatives of local networks and non-profit community-based youth organizations.

In order to ensure the effective exchange of information and joint work, such a standing committee should meet on an annual basis.

- e. It is clear that all these elements and tasks require enormous effort. The youth organisations are prepared to undertake their part of the work. We also recommend the establishment of a Youth Coordinator within the YEN secretariat. The tasks of the coordinator would include:
 - i. Ensuring effective liaison with the youth organisations;
 - ii. Compiling a list of youth organisations in every country that are focusing their work on NAPs;

- iii. Ensuring that these organisations are informed about their right to be involved and consulted. They would regularly receive press kits and materials in a format easily understandable for youth at the grassroots level.
 - iv. Sharing lists of youth organisations with the national authorities so that they can invite these organisations to round table discussions on youth employment and NAPs;
 - v. Collecting and disseminating reports from the national organisations on their involvement.
- f. Young people should take an active role in the regional panels that are to be organised and in any other future follow-up sub-structures of the YEN.

In conclusion, our joint goal as youth organizations and institutions is and should remain that of an enhanced collaborative voice in creating employment for young people world-wide.