



Global trends show young people faring better but many face challenges, says UN Report

(27 April 2004, New York) – Overall, young people today are better off than previous generations, but many are still severely hindered by a lack of education, poverty, health risks, unemployment and the impact of conflict, a new United Nations report on the global situation of youth reveals.

According to the World Youth Report 2003 launched today, young women and men (between the ages of 15 and 24 years) in some regions are better educated and have an unprecedented knowledge of the world around them; yet 133 million youth remain illiterate. Only one in four young people (22 per cent of young women, 26 per cent of young men) is enrolled in secondary school in sub-Saharan African, 40-57 per cent in South Asia, and 62-67 per cent in the Middle East and North Africa.

Recognizing young people as partners in development, the report states that they need to be given the right opportunities in order to be effective agents of social change. "If youth are indeed builders of their societies, then we need to be more concerned about their access to opportunities," says Johan Schölvinn, Director of the Division for Social Policy and Development at the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA), which issued the report.

Worldwide, of the almost 1.1 billion young people between the ages of 15 and 24, nearly 9 out of 10 live in developing countries. In 2000, nearly a quarter (22.5 per cent) survived on less than one dollar a day. As such, the World Youth Report calls for further research on the youth dimensions of poverty. Up to 110 million youth are estimated to be malnourished and up to 7,000 become infected with HIV daily.

Young people represent around 18 per cent of the world's population yet they account for 40 per cent of the unemployed. Between 1995 and 1999, youth unemployment rose by 8 million, and some 70 million young people are currently without work. Compared to adults, the rate of unemployment among youth is usually two to three times higher. "The high level of youth unemployment is a major concern because of the profound impact this has on young people's lives," said Mr. Schölvinn.

The report also finds that armed conflicts have taken a huge toll on young people: 2 million children were killed and 6 million more were left disabled as a result of wars during the last decade. In addition, a total of 12 million were made homeless and more than 1 million were orphaned or separated from their parents; more than 10 million remain psychologically traumatized.

In 1995 the UN General Assembly adopted the World Programme of Action for Youth to the Year 2000 and Beyond. The World Youth Report 2003 focuses on the priority areas identified in that programme of action: education, employment, extreme poverty, health, environment, drugs, juvenile delinquency, leisure-time activities, girls and young women, and participation in decision-making. It also addresses new issues that were later identified as additional priorities for youth, as agreed by the United Nations Economic and Social Council in 2003. These include globalization, information and communications technology (ICT), HIV/AIDS, conflict prevention and intergenerational relations.

The World Youth Report is being launched today, 27 April, at a special event in the Dag Hammarskjöld Library Auditorium of the UN Secretariat building from 1:15 to 2:45 p.m. It will include interpretive performances from young people on some of the themes covered in the publication.

The report is available electronically at: www.un.org/youth or for purchase from UN Publications at publications@un.org or 1-800-253-9646.

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World Youth Report 2003: The Global Situation of Young People (Sales No. 03.IV.7, ISBN 92-1-130228-5) is available for US\$ 60.00 from United Nations Publications, Two UN Plaza, Room DC2-853, Dept. PRES, New York, NY 10017, USA, tel: +1 800 253 9646 or +1 212 963 8302, fax: +1 212 963 3489, e-mail: publications@un.org, or Section des Ventes et Commercialisation, Bureau E-4, Palais des Nations, CH-1211 Geneva 10, Switzerland, tel: +41 22 917 2614, fax: +41 22 917 0027, e-mail: unpubli@unog.ch; Internet: www.un.org/publications.