



**MESSAGE BY ANNA TIBAIJUKA
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF UN-HABITAT AND
DIRECTOR GENERAL OF UNON
ON THE OCCASION OF
INTERNATIONAL YOUTH DAY
12 AUGUST 2007**

Dear Friends and Colleagues,

I am particularly pleased by the theme of this year's observance of International Youth Day: "Be Seen, Be Heard"

It is a most appropriate theme. With over 200 million youth living in poverty, 130 million illiterate, 88 million unemployed and 10 million living with HIV/AIDS, the case for a renewed commitment to working with youth for attaining the Millennium Development Goals is vital. Young people must be seen as equal partners in achieving these Goals and in realizing the Global Partnership Initiative. As you are all aware, we are at the halfway mark to the target date of 2015 for attaining these goals, and the time has come for accelerated action.

The year 2007 also marks a major turning point in human history. For the first time, half of humanity is living in towns and cities. We are at the beginning of a new urban era, and by 2030 two out of three people will be living in cities. We live at a time of unprecedented, rapid, irreversible urbanization. The cities growing fastest are those of the developing world. It is in these urban areas where we see the highest youth population. UN-HABITAT, as the lead agency for housing and urban development, therefore finds it of utmost importance to deal with youth development.

UN-HABITAT recognizes young people as active participants in shaping the future of human settlements, the UN parlance for towns and cities. Today's younger generation is already coming up with and implementing successful community-building projects in some of the most marginalized regions of the world.

We already know that youth want more equitable development and a better quality of life for all. We already know youth want an end to corruption and violence. We already know youth want to end famine, to fight pollution, and to create the necessary conditions for sustainable development. Youth are committed to action, and UN-HABITAT is there to support them.

Many of our activities, notably the one Stop Youth Resource Centres, Safer Cities, Water and Sanitation, Urban Governance and Gender Programmes advance this agenda. Governments have also fully endorsed the engagement of young people in UN-HABITAT's work, most recently with the GC resolution establishing a youth fund for urban youth development is an example worth noting

We agree fully with the youth when they say: "We don't want our messages changed, censored, diluted, or watered down... We want our time to shine; we want people to know what's on our minds." Your right to be seen and heard is an inalienable one.

In many instances, young people are the driving force for social change: behind innovation in the development and use of new technologies, new cultural expressions, fearless exponents against authoritarian trends world over.

Under the Global Partnership Initiative for Urban Youth Development in Africa, UN-HABITAT has trained a number of young men and women in environmental entrepreneurship in Kenya. We hope to upscale this initiative to other African countries. Our gender programme also focuses on training young women in entrepreneurship.

Experience has shown that investment in youth pays off. It is up to us, Governments and UN agencies to work together to provide mechanisms for youth to be effectively seen and to be effectively heard.

All spheres of Government are encouraged to continuously develop, evaluate and implement integrated youth policies, making linkages between the different priority areas for youth development. There is also a continued need to pay special attention to various disadvantaged groups of young people. These include the special needs of young people with disabilities, young migrants, and indigenous youth, among others.

There is widespread acceptance of the fact that young people themselves are often very capable of educating and delivering messages to their peers and can be trained to take the lead in the design, implementation and evaluation of youth oriented programs.

Our challenge is clear. We must pay more attention to education and the inclusion of youth in the development of policies and programmes at all levels of decision making. They have proven themselves capable and need only our support and mentorship to be successful.

On this International Youth Day, let us seize that opportunity, and redouble our efforts to support young people and free up their enormous potential, for the benefit of us all.

I would like to conclude by quoting our Secretary General Ban Ki Moon in his recent statement: "... let us promote visionary public policies, innovative business models and creative technological solutions that will empower young people and engage them in the global effort to achieve the [Millennium Development Goals](#)."

I thank you for your kind attention.