



New York, 12 August 2010 - Secretary-General's remarks on the International Day of Youth

I would like first of all to thank The Bonde for their inspiring performance.

I am sorry to say that I will be speaking, rather than singing or dancing, my own message. But perhaps you should be grateful for that.

We are here today not only to mark the International Day of Youth, but also to launch the International Year of Youth.

This was proclaimed by the General Assembly to promote peace, human rights, solidarity, progress and development. The highlight will be a Youth Conference one year from now; I am confident that we will have plenty of achievements to celebrate.

Wherever I travel around the world, I try to spend some time with young people. The General Assembly of the United Nations often discusses about how we can give a better future, better opportunities, to our young people, the leaders of our future.

Last week I was in Japan to mark the 65th anniversary of the nuclear bombings on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. It was very sad, moving, but also extremely inspiring.

In Hiroshima, I met high school students. They are taking the terrible events that took place in their city and helping to transform them into the legacy of a world free of nuclear weapons.

They spoke with such passion and commitment. Hiroshima's place is not solely in its past -- they told me -- but in its future.

And so they host students from around the world. They travel the world. They share the stories of what happened in their city 65 years ago to help make sure that it never happens again to anyone, anywhere.

I realised, yet again, that adults have much to learn from children and young people. The future belongs to them and they have a clear vision of the world we need to build together: peace, the preservation of our beautiful planet, the opportunity to make a better life.

Young people will inherit all our work – our successes, and our failures.

I want to make sure that the torch we pass is a torch of peace and a torch of hope, not a torch of burden for them to carry. That is our responsibility, political and moral responsibility.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Almost nine out of ten people between the ages of 15 and 24 live in developing countries.

Many of these young people are bearing the brunt of the global economic crisis. Of course, they did nothing to cause this crisis.

They have been forced out of school because their families cannot afford tuition. Many have lost their jobs; others are struggling in badly-paid work.

As economies slowly begin to stabilize, we must focus on the needs of these young people.

This is the right thing to do. It is also the smart thing to do.

The energy of youth can spark economies.

Young entrepreneurs can reach new markets.

Young communicators can reach new audiences.

The idealism and creativity of youth are some of the most important resources any country has.

Young people are already leaders, combating poverty and hunger in their communities, practising green and healthy lifestyles, encouraging respect and tolerance through music and culture.

The United Nations celebrates and supports all these efforts.

The theme of this year's International Youth Day is "Dialogue and Mutual Understanding."

Throughout the year, the United Nations and its youth organization partners will promote exchange and understanding across generations, cultures and religions.

I urge young people everywhere to look beyond the borders of your own country. Engage with the world, and be a global citizen.

Exchange visits and communication across cultures are all building blocks of world peace and mutual understanding.

Please help to raise public awareness of the International Year of Youth.

Plan events in your communities.

Spread the word. Talk to leaders and opinion-makers.

Promote new ways to involve young people.

And please support and encourage young people to participate in all the decisions that will affect their own future.

I pledge my full commitment. We are the leaders of today, but you are the leaders of tomorrow.

Together, let us build a world of peace and prosperity for all of us.

Thank you very much.