REMARKS ON INTERNATIONAL YOUTH DAY
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UN RESIDENT COORDINATOR IN UGANDA
12 August 2020

Your Excellency, the President of the Republic of Uganda
The First Lady
Honourable Ministers
Development Partners, UN Colleagues
Ladies and Gentlemen
The Youth

On behalf of the United Nations system in Uganda I am pleased to join you today at the national commemoration of international Youth Day. This year’s Youth Day occurs as the lives and aspirations of young people and their families continue to be upended by the COVID-19 pandemic. The UN in Uganda has carried out a socio-economic impact analysis of COVID-19 which revealed that up to 60 percent of informal enterprises have stopped their operations or moved below the poverty level, denying earnings to between 5 and 6 million informal workers most of whom are young men and women. Yet, we have hope, that if we work together we can manage this new threat and find solutions that are sustainable, inclusive and culturally relevant. Late President Samora Machel once said “International solidarity is not an act of charity: It is an act of unity between allies fighting on different terrains toward the same objective. The foremost of these objectives is to aid the development of humanity to the highest levels possible.” A close reflection can identify these words as the precursor to the current Agenda 2030 and its 17 Sustainable Development Goals which aim to achieve shared prosperity for all people while protecting the planet, promoting prosperity and sustaining transformational partnerships.

Your Excellency,

Permit me to highlight some of the UN initiatives supporting the youth in Uganda. First is, the Innovation Programme for Young People taking charge of social change by the UN Population Fund (UNFPA). Under this programme seven Social Entrepreneur Startups were launched in 2019 including Babykit, which is a team using affordable and locally made materials to develop infant warmers to help mothers in refugee settlements that have given birth to premature or at-risk babies. I also want to highlight the Infopic company which created an interactive voice response system that helps women of childbearing age easily access family planning services. The UN Children’s Fund (UNICEF) has
trained young people across the country in communication, digital storytelling, photography, videography and simple graphic design. The aim is to enable young people to use these skills to voice their concerns. UNICEF is also working with young people to co-create content because they understand the issues affecting them and their community much better.

Under the Strengthening Social Cohesion and Stability project the UN Migration Agency, IOM and its partners have provided vocational training to 1,000 youths, provided small business startup capital for 644 youths, as well as training and logistical support for the Uganda Police Force to improve community policing which includes youth. They have also conducted messaging campaigns to discourage violence. Some of the youth in slums who reached out to IOM are producing face masks to help fight COVID-19 (like the one I am wearing) and we are supporting their access to partners.

To ensure stronger synergies and complementarities amongst the various UN Youth initiatives, I am happy to mention that the youth whose ideas will be selected under the One Million SDG Solutions Innovation Challenge can benefit from the facilities being made available by UNDP, UNCDF and UNWOMEN, all of which are members of the UN Country Team. The Uganda Women entrepreneurship Programme by UNWOMEN skills, coaches and mentors young women in business to ensure that they run businesses in a profitable and sustainable way while the SDG Fund for Digital Innovation Challenge by the UN Capital Development Fund (UNCDF) provides seed capital and grants for top innovations by youth.

In addition, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and Stanbic Uganda Holdings Limited (SUHL) have developed the Youth4Business Innovation and Entrepreneurship Facility (Y4BF), to enable youth and businesses pilot innovative enterprise ideas or new ways of delivering products and services. This facility also seeks to provide a flexible funding mechanism that will stimulate faster recovery of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) that have borne the brunt of the impact of COVID-19 and support the creation of at least 20,000 new decent jobs for youth; while skilling 50,000 youth to increase their entrepreneurial success rate. We expect this to have a multiplier effect and influence the creation of over 100,000 indirect jobs. The Facility has made available an initial $10 million grant and up to $200 million for concessional loans below market rates for the youth. I encourage youth to visit www.undp.org and apply for these opportunities. I wish to thank you Your Excellency for recognizing this contributing initiative from the UN family today and by doing so acknowledging our contribution to sustainable development and job creation for the youth.

Your Excellency, Ladies and Gentlemen:

Last week, I had the honour and privilege to lead a delegation to South Western Uganda. The first objective of the mission was to visit UN frontline staff and partners implementing critical humanitarian and development programmes in conformity with COVID-19 preventive and response measures. Local government representatives, youth, parents, teachers, refugees all conveyed their appreciation for the successful implementation of programs dealing with the impact of COVID-19. I would like to take this opportunity to convey our appreciation to the Government for your leadership in the COVID-19 response and for keeping us safe. I want to thank all health workers and frontline UN staff who remain committed to saving lives and supporting livelihoods during these challenging times away from their families.
The delegation also visited youth initiatives promoting the attainment of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and encouraged youth to take part in the One Million SDG Solutions Innovation Challenge as part of the UN@75 anniversary and the SDG Decade of Action. This Innovation challenge aims to identify youth with viable solutions to address poverty, environment protection, value addition and unemployment so that they can be supported by private sector, development partners and the UN among others. During the visit to Mbarara and Isingiro, we met youth engaged in agri-business, bamboo production for wetlands conservation, production of cleaning detergents, shoe making and teaching, etc. We witnessed the launch of the Mbarara Innovation and Skilling centre at Ankole garden mall and listened to youth determined to work to achieve the future we need. They are actively thinking of how to create a better world today for the next generations. This younger generation, which makes up more than 70% of the population of this country, are contributing to national development.

It is an honour to note that at this moment, hundreds of youth have already registered their interest in the One Million SDG Solutions Innovation Challenge by submitting their ideas through our website: www.ugandayouthsolutions.com. We continue to work with partners to join the panel of judges who will identify youth who can benefit from skilling, training or financial support. The 1 Million SDG Youth Solutions Innovation Challenge will provide a database of youth ready to join the work force as entrepreneurs, innovators or professionals across the country. It is our hope that some of the winners will be able to benefit from Government programmes and we will be able to witness you launch this initiative soon.

As I conclude, please join me in recognizing this generation of youth who are resilient, resourceful and engaged. I have met them in Moroto, Arua, Mbale, Isingiro, Kisoro, Gulu, Mbarara and even Kampala, to mention a few locations. Uganda’s youth are truly torchbearers of the Sustainable Development Goals. This year’s Youth Day focuses on “Youth Engagement for Global Action” and comes at a time when we are commemorating the 75th Anniversary of the United Nations and Uganda celebrates 58 years of independence and membership of the UN. The UN Charter invites every nation to pursue its development journey informed by universal values of respect-dignity-non-discrimination; the 2030 Agenda invites Member States to pursue an inclusive approach to sustaining peace and development through 17 Goals.

On behalf of the United Nations system I would like to reiterate our commitment to support the Government and people of Uganda on your development journey. Our new UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework 2021-2025 outlines how we will support implementation of the National Development Plan III and your vision to attain prosperity for all. We look forward to having you launch it soon.

Allow me to conclude with a quote from Julius Nyerere, “Everybody wants development, but not everybody understands and accepts the basic requirements for development. The biggest requirement is hard work.” I am confident that if given the chance, Uganda’s youth will put in the hard work and contribute to achieving the modern and stable Uganda you want.

Thank you for your attention.