

**Speech of Mr. LI Young at the G77 Plenary Discussion Forum on  
Mainstreaming of Youth in the Post-2015 Development Agenda and  
Youth Entrepreneurship for Industrial Development**

10:00 am on Friday, 4 April 2014 at the VIC

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Your Excellency, Honorable Minister Alahapperuma

Excellences, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am pleased to be with you today as we come together at this critical juncture, at a time when the international community is poised to formulate a new global development framework.

I am grateful to His Excellency, Mr. Alahapperuma, Minister of Youth Affairs of Sri Lanka, for the kind invitation to join him in the opening session of this important G77 Plenary Discussion on Mainstreaming Youth in the Post-2015 Development Agenda and promoting Youth Entrepreneurship for Industrial Development.

I would like to thank the Government of Sri Lanka for organizing this forum today and taking the lead in creating a valuable and inclusive platform for an intergenerational dialogue through the forthcoming World Conference on Youth, which will take place on 6-10 May 2014 in Colombo.

And I particularly welcome the vigorous interest expressed by Sri Lanka in UNIDO's new vision of Inclusive and Sustainable Industrial Development, or ISID.

Before starting, I would like to say that I am truly delighted that this event focuses on empowering young people and ensuring their inclusive participation in the decision-making processes and implementation of the post-2015 development agenda.

Last month, I had the great pleasure of attending the Annual Meeting of the Inter-Agency Network on Youth Development, which UNIDO hosted this year in Vienna. Most importantly, this occasion allowed us to reaffirm once again our strong commitment for continuing the dialogue on youth employment and inclusive and sustainable development, particularly towards the achievement of ISID.

This year marks a significant step forward for UNIDO in its engagement with youth issues, not only as the incoming co-chair of the Inter-Agency Network but also as a leading entity in the sub-working group on youth employment and entrepreneurship.

Youth are a transformative resource, a creative and passionate agent of transformational change.

It is no exaggeration to say that young people are our hope for the future. However, it is also clear that we are not doing enough to enable them to realize their full potential.

We must welcome initiatives that foster a better integration of youth issues into global and national development priorities, especially during this critical time when youth unemployment remains very high.

Close to 73 million young people are estimated to have been unemployed in 2013, around 40 per cent of the world's unemployed.

The vast majority of these unemployed youth live in developing countries.

We face high population growth rates, especially in the Middle East, North Africa and Sub-Saharan Africa. This has considerably increased the number of young people entering the labour markets every year. Moreover, as both developed and developing economies continue to suffer sluggish economic growth, their capacity to absorb such an influx of new job-seekers and offer decent employment opportunities is significantly reduced.

In addition, inadequate levels of education and training, particularly in poor and post-conflict countries, continue to endanger our potential of achieving a more prosperous future for all.

Youth unemployment affects developed and developing countries alike. As awareness of the global impact of youth unemployment is rising, it is more urgent than ever for global decision-makers to take comprehensive and coordinated actions to establish youth employment and empowerment as national priorities.

Excellences,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me continue our conversation today by talking about why the views of young people, their concerns, their energies, and their courage are so critical to the post-2015 development agenda process.

The world we live in now is very different from the one that policy makers were faced with in 2000, when the global community adopted the Millennium Development Goals. Current policy makers may no longer be present when the full effects of climate change or changing population dynamics make themselves felt. The world is a much more complex place now in 2014 than it was fifteen years ago.

There are 3.5 billion people on the planet who are under the age of 25. This is the generation that is the most impacted by poverty, and the generation that will hold the responsibility for the implementation and evaluation of any future development goals.

The youth employment challenge has its own dimensions and confronts countries worldwide regardless of their stage of socio-economic development.

The creation of long-term, decent and productive work for youth has grown in prominence in national development agendas. However, in many countries young women and men continue to face significant obstacles in engaging in productive activities.

Large and growing youth unemployment threatens sustainable development and social stability.

Moreover, the economic and social costs of unemployment, discouragement and the increasingly widespread dependence of young people on low-quality jobs directly undermine the growth potential of economies.

Perhaps the most frightening is the current generation's distrust in the socio-economic and political systems, as their priorities and concerns have not been fully addressed. Some of this distrust has been expressed in political protests around the globe.

The international community must listen and work to expand the opportunities available to young women and men and answer their legitimate aspirations for dignity and decent work.

It will require smart policies, prudent investments and a willingness to change some traditional habits.

Collective efforts and an enhanced global partnership are imperative for promoting a culture of dialogue and mutual understanding that places development and the wellbeing of people at its core.

We all need to work on this together –national governments, the private sector, civil society and the United Nations. The post-2015 development agenda has the potential to be a turning point for achieving this aspirational transformative change if we all fully commit to an agenda for meaningful transformation on structural, institutional and policy levels.

Luckily, we are not starting from scratch. Many efforts have already been made at different levels and at different times that can help to provide answers to these pressing challenges.

Excellences,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

UNIDO celebrates the call issued last year by the G77 for the structural transformation of the economies of developing countries – through the process of industrialization that generates value addition and economic diversification to create employment and decent work for all.

We in UNIDO are committed to support developing countries in this ambitious endeavor towards a "people-centred development agenda" – an agenda that builds new and more inclusive development pathways with the aim of providing equal employment opportunities for all people, and especially women and youth.

In UNIDO, we work towards Inclusive and Sustainable Industrial Development that promotes economic empowerment and the creation of decent jobs for youth in industry and industry-related services.

Our primary focus in this area is on the provision of knowledge, skills, technologies and an entrepreneurial approach to enable young people to seize economic opportunities, gain control of their lives and exert influence in society.

Even though devising solutions for youth unemployment starts with a good primary education, it also requires a sound and comprehensive approach that leads to more competitive and stable economies, with rising productivity and increased trade flows.

The promotion of entrepreneurship and inclusive and sustainable industrial development can make a unique contribution in addressing these issues. They provide the foundation for the economic growth, structural change and innovation that creates the jobs which ultimately improve the livelihoods of young people.

Indeed, I am pleased to inform you that UNIDO is actively engaged in a number of projects throughout the world that are specifically designed to promote employment and income opportunities for young people, and to provide young people with the skills and competencies they require to be able to take advantage of these opportunities. I could refer you to our projects in Africa, where we have been supporting youth entrepreneurship development in Angola, Cabo Verde and Mozambique, and the Governments of these countries have integrated these programmes into their national education strategies. Similar programmes are also being implemented in the countries of the Mano River Union – Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone – and the Gambia, while a regional youth employment strategy focusing on youth enterprise creation and development is being developed with the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa, COMESA.

Outside Africa we are working on youth employment and entrepreneurship development projects in countries as diverse as Afghanistan, Armenia, Cambodia, Iraq, Pakistan and Tunisia. In fact, Excellency, I could even mention an important project in Sri Lanka to support the recovery of sustainable livelihoods in the North and East Regions through improved agricultural productivity and community-based entrepreneurship development. This project assists youth, women-headed households and other vulnerable groups to rebuild their livelihoods, with particular emphasis on skills development, the promotion of agro-based production and small business development. More than 3000 households have benefitted from this project.

Excellences,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Failing to invest in our youth will inevitably have long-term repercussions.

Conversely, investing in young people will not only yield positive multiplier effects for households and communities, but also contribute to greater social cohesion.

Based on our vision of Inclusive and Sustainable Industrial Development, UNIDO will continue to bring policy recommendations and proven solutions to the attention of governments, the private sector and civil society. In this way we believe that we will be able to help countries move millions of skilled youth into jobs by generating new employment through an expansion of industries, the creation of businesses and the emergence of opportunities for self-employment.

Excellences,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Only by working together towards common goals we can effectively meet our challenges.

Young people are willing and able to take ownership of their own future and of the shared principles we treasure.

I truly believe that keeping young people engaged and well represented throughout the process of reframing the development agenda of the future will help ensure that we can achieve the world we want in 2030 and beyond.

The Post-2015 development agenda is about the future. And youth is our future.

Thank you very much.