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AFRICAN YOUTH CONVEY THEIR MESSAGE AT THE 17TH AU SUMMIT



Malabo , 1st July 2011 -

Young men and women alongside African Union Heads of States during the official opening of the 17th Summit of the African Union (AU) in Malabo, Equatorial Guinea, June 30, 2011, engaged in an unprecedented exercise, a frank and open discussion on the theme: "Accelerating Youth Empowerment for Sustainable Development." The 17th AU Summit shall remain therefore a landmark in fostering the development of youth in the continent.



In the hemicycle of the Sipopo Conference Centre, youth from five regions of the continent, the Pan African Youth Union and AU Volunteer Youth Corps shoved aside protocol and attracted the strong attention of the Assembly on the threats posed by youth unemployment, lower levels of education and inaccessible labour markets.

Moderated by Assane Diop, a journalist trained in African issues, the three series of the discussion were introduced by Mr. Meles Zenawi, Prime Minister of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, President Amadou Toumani Toure of Mali and by President Armando Emilio Guebuza of Mozambique.

Mr. Zenawi acknowledged that the youth of the continent have limited access to the labour market and are victims of social, political and economic alienation plaguing Africa



generally. For a lasting solution to the concerns of youth, it is necessary, above all, he said, to find a solution to the societal malaise. That could be done by investing in education, reversing the trend of de-industrialization, investing in agriculture and in the green economy. He also called for increased popular participation in the decision-making process and urged Africa to go beyond strategies and pay more attention to action, as was the case in the past.

The presentation of President Toure was, focused on training and integration of young people. This was the opportunity to share with the Assembly and with the Youth, the "youth-employment" experiment undertaken by Mali since 2002. This program provides learning opportunities for young people, promotes entrepreneurship as well as rural employment and integration of the physically challenged. The President, however, deeply regretted the brain drain that illegal immigration inflicts on Africa by depriving it of able-bodied, trained and competent people.

President Armando Emilio Guebuza who spoke on the integration of the Youth in economic life, also paid tribute to African Youth, "the other name for the future." It is no longer a question of taking stock of what ought to be done, but to know how to better support the youth, he said. However, it was necessary above all to ensure that education was more competitive in order to provide the Youth with vocational training courses needed in the labour market. This would be an "incubator of development," he said.

The discussion that followed each of these addresses allowed respondents including the Youth to present their grievances to the Heads of State and Government, to propose recommendations to improve their integration into the economic, political and social life, as well as to express their support in meeting the challenges of development. More specifically, they asked the States which have not yet ratified the African Youth Charter, to create national youth councils, to establish the culture of volunteerism and learning, and

systematically include youth in national delegations to main meetings of the AU. They also requested the creation of a United Nations agency for youth and a budget for the Pan African Youth.

The debate also enabled the Heads of State and Government to present the actions undertaken in their respective countries for youth empowerment and to report on the challenges they face. The Presidents were receptive to the proposals and expressed willingness to meet the needs of the Youth.

In the meanwhile, Professor Jean-Pierre Ezin, AU Commissioner for Human Resources, Science and Technology presented a broad outline of AU Youth policy. In July 2006, the Assembly adopted the African Youth Charter. Its entry into force after three years, in August 2009, "marked the beginning of an era for the dynamic participation of youth in dialogue, formulation of policies and development initiatives to ensure that their views are taken into account". In this regard, the celebration of the Year of the African Youth (2008), the institutionalization of the African Youth Day, the proclamation of the Decade for Youth Development (2009-2018) and its Action Plan are some of the substantial evidence of the desire to place youth at the heart of the priorities of the AU. To overcome the high rate of youth unemployment, Professor Ezin reiterated the need to "create in all Member States an environment conducive to job creation" and to invest heavily in education to better prepare them for the future.

For more information, please visit the Summit of the African Union at <http://www.au.int/en/summit/17thsummit>