

Statement of the Director of Women, Gender and Youth in Celebration of the International Youth Day

Happy International Youth Day! It is a great honor to once again address you on this special occasion of International Youth Day. For over two decades, International Youth Day has served as a powerful reminder to take stock of the progress we've made through our youth development ecosystem, reassess the challenges and opportunities that lie ahead, and today, we continue that tradition with renewed strength and a focused vision.

As I have said before, the backbone of Africa's development is its youthful population. An inspired, enlightened, and empowered young people will have a lasting effect on the continent's growth.

This year's theme for International Youth Day, ***"From Clicks to Progress: Youth Digital Pathways for Sustainable Development,"*** calls to mind, the accelerating and transformative power of digitalization towards achieving the objectives of the AU's Agenda 2063. It highlights the crucial role that young people play in this digital revolution and further reinforces the many opportunities available for young people in the digital ecosystem. The theme tasks us to be intentional about investing in technology to drive innovation, foster connectivity, and lead solutions towards a sustainable future.

The African Union Commission recognizes the immense potential of our youth and the pivotal role they play in the continent's development. Our flagship youth program, the 1 Million Next Level, is a testament to our commitment to accelerating youth development and engagement strategies. This initiative aims to transform and strengthen the foundations of youth development programming and ecosystems in African countries, ensuring that young people have the resources, support, and opportunities they need to thrive and lead. I am excited that through this initiative and with the support of our strategic partners, we have been able to launch programs that expose our young people to opportunities within the digital ecosystem and supports their initiatives.

Allow me to spotlight some of these initiatives:

The AU Civic Tech Fund: This groundbreaking 12-month initiative aims to catalyze innovative civic tech solutions that harness the power of technology to drive citizen-led transformative action in Africa. Following the successful inaugural edition that supported 14 organizations from various countries on the continent, we recently launched the second edition, which is a testament to African Union Commission's commitment to supporting youth-led initiatives and projects that strengthen digital inclusion and leverage technology to solve societal issues.

African Union Digital and Innovation Fellowship Programme: Building on the success of the first cohort, we launched the second cohort of the Fellowship Programme, an initiative that seeks to spearhead innovation within the African Union. The first edition saw the deployment of 13 highly skilled fellows who immersed themselves within AU departments and organs, identified technology challenges, and co-created 12 tailor-made solutions to enhance processes, build long-term capacity, and advance the African Union's mandate within the context of Agenda 2063. This year, 17 fellows are being deployed on this transformative journey.

AU Innovation Lab: This pivotal component of the 1 Million Next Level Initiative has been established to serve as a hub for Africa-centric innovation and strategic partnerships aimed at accelerating the development and empowerment of Africa's youth. This initiative aligns with Aspiration 6 of Agenda 2063, which emphasizes the importance of youth and women in driving the continent's development. As we speak, we are preparing to inaugurate the AU Innovation lab

These initiatives, and many more, not only empower young people to take ownership of their development but also create opportunities for intergenerational collaboration and dialogue, which are essential for building a more inclusive and sustainable future for Africa.

As we celebrate International Youth Day, I encourage everyone to take part in conversations taking place around you and online on the theme and shedding light on innovative ways to support young people driving change in the digital sector.

Today, as we celebrate International Youth Day, let us also reflect on other emerging challenges that confront young people, including access to quality education, healthcare, and job opportunities. We must collectively work to address these issues, ensuring that no young person is left behind. We must provide young people with the necessary tools, resources, and support to empower them to overcome these challenges and achieve their full potential.

As I conclude, let us remember that the future is not predetermined; it is ours to shape and define. We must own our growth and development by leveraging on these opportunities to make our voices heard, working together in solidarity to build the Africa We Want. To the young people here today and across the continent, I want to say this: own your growth and take advantage of the numerous opportunities that the African Union continues to create and that abound in the digital space. You are the beacon of hope for our continent. Your creativity, resilience, and determination are the glimmers of a brighter future for Africa. Embrace the digital age with nerves of steel and use it as a platform to amplify your voices, share ideas, and make a lasting impact.

I wish you all happy International Youth Day!

For further information please contact:

Joshua Kweikuma Quaye | Youth Engagement Lead, Women, Gender and Youth Directorate | African Union Commission | E-mail: QuayeJ@africa-union.org

Daniel Adugna| Officer-In-Charge, Youth Division, Women, Gender and Youth Directorate | African Union Commission | E-mail: AdugnaD@africa-union.org

Information and Communication Directorate, African Union Commission | **E-mail:** DIC@africa-union.org
Web: au.int | Addis Ababa, Ethiopia | **Follow Us:** [Facebook](#) | [Twitter](#) | [Instagram](#) | [YouTube](#)