

**7th Ethiopian Youth Forum  
Youth and Unemployment  
Friday 4 March 2005  
Africa Hall, UNECA**

**Statement by Mr. Robert Okello,  
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United Nations Economic Commission for Africa**

Mr. Chairman,  
Colleagues from the United Nations system,  
Distinguished guests,  
Ladies and Gentlemen.

On behalf of the Executive Secretary of the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), Mr. K.Y. Amoako, I wish to take this opportunity to welcome you all to this important gathering. This gathering serves as another wake-up call to all of us in our obligations to give consideration to the youth development agenda of African countries, both at the national and regional levels.

It is my personal pleasure, as the Director of the ECA Division working on youth related issues, to note that today's Forum is taking place right at the time when ECA is developing strategies for fulfilling the promise we made last October to devote the next African Development Forum (ADF) to youth issues, under the theme "Youth for Leadership in the 21st Century".

I am also happy to note that the Ethiopian Teenagers Forum has transformed to become the Ethiopian Youth Forum and the theme for the 7th forum is aimed at articulating and reflecting on "Youth and Unemployment" issues in Ethiopia. As you might be aware, ADF V on Youth is aimed at providing a multi-stakeholder platform to debate, discuss and initiate concrete and innovative strategies for endowing and motivating the youth of Africa. We are planning to use the platform to strengthen youth skills and intergenerational synergies among Africans on economic empowerment, especially in areas of employment and education.

Mr. Chairman, distinguished participants,  
There is no area in Africa's development agenda that is not affecting the youth. One of the most dynamic determinants of the path of economic growth and development is the age structure of the population and the quality of the labour force. Children and youth constitute

more than 50 percent of the population of Africa, and this proportion is increasing very fast, especially when we consider the early mortality of the adult population due to the HIV/AIDS scourge.

A youthful population offers many economic advantages-in terms of a dynamic aggregate supply of labour, with all its implications for macroeconomic management, opportunities for mass production and hence development-enhancing economies of scale in production, and a buffer for social security and pension systems.

Despite this youthful population, Africa is the only continent where there are no coherent policies for the development of youth, as an integral part of national and regional development. This situation must change: we must change from seeing youth as a liability or constraint rather an asset to be nurtured and utilized for the common good.

How can the continent move forward when the youth population of 250 million are ignored; and left simply to adorn street corners and social corners; vulnerable to the machinations of rebel leaders and false political and ethnic redeemers?

How can the continent move forward when the cream of her youth, finding no genuineness nor meaning in their national or African citizenship, are herding as sheep without a Shepard to other lands looking for greener pastures?

How can the youth of Ethiopia and the rest of Africa stand in a competitive, knowledge and technology intensive world, where their own skills are left un-nurtured and under-utilised and their counterparts in other parts of the world have all the facilities and all it takes to succeed?

Mr. Chairman, distinguished participants

It is gratifying to know that there are growing interests and opportunities in youth employment. These interests stem from changes in the situation of youth and the reviews in employment policy in some African countries. While, the number of youth servicing and youth organizations, with specific interests in employment issues is growing at the civil society level, some African governments are either revising or have revised their youth policies, to demonstrate more commitment to the youth development.

Ethiopia is one of these countries. In the Ethiopia National Youth Policy, 2004, the government has strengthened her emphasis on youth capacity building through the enrichment of knowledge and training schemes. This has become imperative because of the Government's need to develop youth skills for decent employment, as well as to consolidate the empowerment of youth programmes.

At ECA, we are working with other concerned stakeholders in youth development in Africa to galvanise increasing regional support for a more pragmatic youth development. Our policy advocacies have been yielding positive results, as exemplified by the increasing number of African countries in the list of the UN Youth Employment Network (YEN) lead countries. I am pleased to inform this gathering that 6 African countries (Nigeria, Egypt, Senegal, Mali, Rwanda and Namibia) have volunteered to be among the 11 UN YEN lead countries, from around the world.

Personally, I believe the youth of Africa need awareness of the situation around them, in order for them to be prepared for the future. By awareness, I would like to stress on the need for relevant information, so as to help them get inspired. Inspiration is necessary to generate knowledge, which can then be transformed into productive utilization. Only then, can we empower youth for decent and productive employment.

At this juncture Mr. Chairman, distinguished participants, I believe I have demonstrated to all of you that the aim of ADF 5, as I have stated, corresponds to the theme of this forum. I therefore, have confidence that today's forum will be able to not only come out with recommendations, but also suggest pragmatic approaches, in terms of identifying genuine and replicable youth projects on employment and capacity building, to address youth unemployment.

We at ECA would like to encourage all the young people gathered here to consider themselves as "unofficial ambassadors" for ADF 5. As "unofficial Ambassadors", we would like you to help in creating awareness on the ADF 5; identifying and encouraging possible partners and potential participants, as well as actively contributing to the discussion on ADF 5.

Mr. Chairman, colleagues from the UN systems, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen, I wish you fruitful deliberations and look forward to receiving the report of this forum.

Thank you for your attention.