

**STATEMENT BY DR BULTI GUTEMA , HEAD OF THE CHILDREN, YOUTH AND FAMILY  
WELFARE DEPARTMENT OF THE MINISTRY OF LABOUR AND SOCIAL AFFAIRS**

**Dear Participants,**

**Ladies and Gentlemen,**

It is indeed a pleasure for me to be among you today to say a few words about the situation of Ethiopian youth on behalf of the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs and on my own behalf.

The problems of Ethiopian youth are many, complex and inter-related. Because of their limited access to training and educational opportunities and the acute shortage of recreation and sport centers, they fall victims to drug and alcohol abuse, delinquency and criminal activities. Employment opportunities for this age group are hard to come by.

Although youth face many and diverse problems they are the pillar for a country's economic development. They are active social agents if they are given the opportunity to do so. It is crucial that these young people realize their rights to access information, life skills, education, and opportunities to participate in community life. Those who fail to find such support may turn to dangerous patterns of behavior, such as unsafe sex or the use of tobacco, alcohol and face their lifelong consequences.

**Dear Participants!**

Children and youth who do not receive proper physical and emotional care because they are orphans, unaccompanied, displaced, lacking family support, traumatized or delinquent, are more and more visible on the streets of cities and towns. If this phenomenon of streetism is continued unchecked, it will highly affect the country's development by exacerbating urban poverty and leaving the active section of the society more vulnerable. It should be realized that the lives and welfare of any section of society can be affected by many factors. Solutions to their problems therefore have different dimensions. The welfare of children and youth is the concern and responsibility of all. It is necessary to work together with all social actors in order to achieve the common goals of children and youth -- that is survival and development in a consistent and coordinated manner.

In this respect I would like to cite the national programme of street children and mothers, which is being financed by UNICEF. It is of the first collaborative efforts between the government and NGOs in the country. We are using a multi-sectoral approach to protect children, youth and their mothers who are living on the streets. We hope this project can be an example for addressing vulnerable children and youth all over the country

As I mentioned earlier, although youth face different problems, they can bring about significant changes in economic development, and in social, political and cultural changes in the country. In view of this, the contribution of Ethiopian youth in all spheres of life is enormous and historical.

Recognizing the pivotal role of the youth in national development, the government of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia has put in place policy instruments to empower and mobilize our young people. In light of this, the agricultural led industrialization policy, investment policy and the different national policies pertaining to social issues and various strategies, which are directly beneficial to Ethiopian youth have been introduced and are currently being implemented.

In general, the Ethiopian government is exerting much effort to tackle the educational, health, employment, and recreational problems facing Ethiopian youth by charting out appropriate strategies, action-oriented programs that enable youth to make positive contributions to the socio-economic, political, cultural, environmental and technological transformation of the Ethiopian society.

In this regard, I hope the socio-economic and political changes that have taken place in the country undoubtedly enhances participation of every citizen, especially youth, in development efforts.

Finally, I congratulate UNICEF for organizing this forum and giving attention to street children, which is a major problem especially in major cities of the country and express the commitment of the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs. I would here by declare the forum is officially opened.

Thank you.

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