



**Remarks by Ms. Kiki Gbeho, UNDP Resident  
Representative**

**Opening Ceremony for the National Youth  
Week**

**27<sup>th</sup> April 2016**

Honourable Katrina Hanse-Himarwa, Minister of Education,  
Arts and Culture,

Honourable Agnes Tjongerero, Deputy Minister of Youth,  
Sports and National Service,

Executive Chairperson of the National Youth Council, Mr.  
Mandela Kapere,

Distinguished Guests,

Members of the media,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

A very good morning to all of you!

Allow me to start by thanking the National Youth Council of  
Namibia for inviting me to speak at the opening of the

National Youth Week; and the opportunity this provides to engage with young people about our common future.

## **Young People,**

World Leaders have just signed the 17 Sustainable Development Goals committing themselves to eradicate poverty and hunger and to save the planet over the next 15 years.

This 2030 Development Agenda recognises that we can be the first generation to succeed in ending poverty; just as we may be the last to have a chance at saving the planet.

SDGs can assist in setting the path to a world where balance and equity can be found and where no one is left behind. These goals are for you and can only be achieved with you.

## Young People,

Today's generation of youth is the largest the world has ever known. One in every three people today is under the age of 30. Three in every five Commonwealth citizens is under the age of the 30. 66% percent of the Namibian population is 30 or younger.

My question to the world's majority is how can we, together, ensure the future you want?

Global evidence points to a better world; a world where there is less conflict, with people who are healthier and where poverty is on the decline, (literacy rates among youth from 15-24 have increased globally from 83 percent to 91 percent and more than 71 of births were assisted by skilled health personnel globally; up from 59 %).

Namibia also has good stories to tell and Government must be commended. The country has succeeded in halving poverty. The number of poor people has been reduced from seven to three out of every ten people.<sup>1</sup> Primary education enrolment, currently stands at over 99%. 84% of the population has access to safe drinking water. Progress has also been made in the fight against Malaria and TB, and HIV infections have also reduced by 50% since 2001.

Yet despite this progress, at home and abroad, significant pockets of vulnerability continue to exist.

Today conflict (10 conflicts currently ongoing in Africa), violent extremism (e.g. Somalia, N. Nigeria, Mali), humanitarian crises (over 58 m people displaced globally of which 15 million are spread across 19 countries in Africa) climate change and transnational crime are just a few examples of the vulnerabilities to our common future.

Globally, almost one in every seven youth are looking for work (ILO: 2013), two thirds of youth in developing

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<sup>1</sup> 28.7 per cent of the population of Namibia lives below the national poverty line (Namibia MDG Interim Report 2013)

economies are without work, not studying, or engaged in irregular/informal employment (UNDP: 2014), less than 6% of youth report having borrowed money from a formal financial institution.(UNCDF: 2014)

On the home front, Namibia has one of the highest levels of income inequality in the World (with a Gini coefficient of 0.59). The highest rates of poverty can be observed among youth and women, particularly those living in rural areas. Thirty four percent (34%) of children in Namibia live in poverty compared to 29% of the general population (2012 Child Poverty Report).

Dropout rates in grade 10 and 12 are of serious concern as is how we prepare young people for the job market and to secure sustainable livelihoods.

To tackle this, H.E. the President has declared a war against poverty and launched the Harambee Prosperity Plan.

How will you as young people engage and contribute to finding solutions to these challenges?

At the UN our messages to policy makers and leaders is clear: young people need to be empowered, educated and employed. If we invest in our young people today, we will harness the rewards tomorrow. However if we do not capitalise on our youth dividend now, there will be consequences to be paid tomorrow.

Young People, my favourite African proverb says 'if you think you are too small to make a difference, you have not spent a night with a mosquito'.

Therefore and in contribution to your discussions over the next week, allow me to contribute with three more messages to ponder:

1. **Take space:** The greatest innovations start with an idea that is acted upon. So how will you seek and seize opportunities, in order that you always have a 'seat at the table' on significant issues? We saw youth participate actively in the drafting of the SDGs, how will you ensure 'more of the same' in order to influence the agenda?
2. **Be prepared:** You never know when opportunity will come knocking. So how will you ensure that when you have that seat at the table, you have just the right message or idea? It takes dedication and hard work to succeed, no matter what field you operate in.
3. And last but definitely not least **dare to be different:** change is never achieved without challenging yourself or the status quo. Believe your voice is valuable and that one determined person can make a difference.

So allow me to end by paraphrasing Bono: 'this is the time for bold measures. You are just the right person, from just the right generation to make a difference!'

Thank you.