

## **Youth Vision in Europe**

### **Ahmad Alhendawi- UNSG's Envoy on Youth**

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Mr. Chairperson,

Distinguished delegates,

Colleagues and friends,

Good morning,

It's a great pleasure to be with you today at this important conference. We live in exciting times. Today, we have the largest generation of young people the world has ever known.

The call for respect for human rights and economic and social justice from young people across the world has never been stronger.

The combination of these forces, demands from all to listen to young people's ambitions, and take bold and concrete actions to deliver a world of equality, opportunity and human rights for all.

As young people are speaking in city squares throughout the world, we have to make our institutions more friendly to them.

Young people are no longer accepting to be consulted only every 4 years when they vote. They demand more responsive governments that can listen to them and engage them in decision making at all levels and in all issues concerning their lives.

When we talk about young people, we have to acknowledge that we are talking of a diverse community of voices. But what's clear is how those diverse communities share common concerns and passions on core global issues, in particular access to a quality education, economic empowerment and effective and affordable healthcare. These are all cornerstones of the ICPD Agenda.

Underlying these, young people always prioritize issues of inequity and human dignity, which are necessary pillars to the rights and development agenda the United Nations promotes.

Ensuring progress for all means making comprehensive education accessible to all young people, in particular to girls and vulnerable and marginalised groups who have most to gain.

It's time for the debate about education to go beyond primary education. A relevant education must integrate life skills, vocational training, comprehensive sexual education, peace-building, sustainable development, and promote global citizenship. A comprehensive, rights-based and gender sensitive education is an essential step to individual empowerment, decent employment and economic development.

Mr. Chairperson,

Distinguished delegates,

With 73.4 million young people currently looking for work and many others giving up their job search, addressing this issue is not only universally relevant/ it is also critical to the eradication of extreme poverty/ to the fight against inequalities, to the achievement of social justice, AND the creation of sustainable inclusive communities.

Young people's access to health must go beyond prevention and treatment of diseases, to focus on the conditions and enabling environments necessary for young people to lead healthy lives free from coercion, discrimination, violence and stigma.

Young people, particularly adolescent girls, urgently need universal access to affordable and quality health care as well as youth-friendly health services, including sexual and reproductive health.

Countries must aim to ensure that all adolescents enter adulthood with the highest attainable standard of health, without unintended pregnancies, unsafe abortions, unsafe deliveries, sexually transmitted infections including HIV, and with a healthy weight and free of substance abuse.

Young people expect a sustainable development agenda which integrates education, human rights and youth participation to tackle the effects of inequalities.

Young people should be treated equally, regardless of socio-economic status, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and with special attention to youth with disabilities, youth in conflict zones, youth with HIV/AIDS and youth at risk.

As the Secretary-General's Youth Envoy, I have a mandate to take the voices of young people to the United Nations and also to advance the United Nations' work with and for the 1.8 billion young people in the world today.

The contrast between the growing global youth population and the imbalance of representation and participation of young people in national, regional, and international decision-making structures is something I am committed to reverse.

This is why in my first year as the Envoy on Youth, I am working with the Economic and Social Council and the Regional Commissions, to establish regional UN Youth Forums. These forums would represent a structured mechanism for youth engagement with the United Nations. They are also an important route to move our global community from consultation with young people, to action defined by young people.

In the days ahead, I urge you to be bold and concrete in your conversations and recommendations. The outcome of this Regional Conference will be an important contribution to the ICPD review process. You have the opportunity to highlight the issues from this region that will contribute to a more equal and just world.

In this process, young people have spoken throughout the ICPD review process, in the Global Survey, the Bali Global Youth Forum virtual platform, and in regional consultations like the one held last month in Istanbul. The European Youth Call to Action which will be presented to us today has clear demands from over 40 organizations in the region, I personally WELCOME and SUPPORT this call for action.

I commend you for including young people as key participants. Those of us privileged enough to be here have the responsibility to ensure that the result of this meeting advances the rights and aspirations of all European Youth.

I stand ready to work with all of you and with young people especially to ensure that the future is shaped through the creativity, meaningful participation and leadership of young people.

Thank you.