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STATEMENT

BY

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ON

AGENDA ITEM 27 (a), (b) & (c)

ON

"SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT"

DURING

THE

68TH SESSION OF THE UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY

Monday, October 7, 2013
Thank you Ambassador,

Mr. Chairman,

Distinguished Delegates,

I am greatly humbled, on behalf of the Kenyan youth, to address the distinguished delegates of the 3rd committee and to share the Kenyan Youth Agenda. At the outset, I express sincere gratitude to friends of Kenya and particularly the youth from all over the world who have continued to express their sympathies and condolences following the horrendous terrorist attack at the Westgate mall in Nairobi. It is regrettable that most of the innocent lives that were lost as well as the injured were the youth. As you know, the fight against terrorism will not be won by one country but will require the collective solidarity and support of the international community.

Mr. Chairman,

Youth comprise the strength, wealth and drivers of innovation in Kenya. Over 78% of our population is under the age of 34 years. As my president would put it “The success and the enterprise of Kenya lie on its youth” this means that the majority of people who generate wealth and bake the national cake to stimulate economic development are young people. The youth constitutes a generation that will offer the greatest social, political, intellectual, scientific and technological transformation in modern history. However, a mismatch exists between the aspirations of young people and the opportunities available to them. More than half of this population is unemployed. There is a demographic bulge of young people; need for improved macroeconomic performance, insufficient labor market opportunities, an education system that is still evolving in terms of quality and relevance, and a society that only reluctantly accepts the self-expression of young people. Therefore, many young people are unable to translate their aspirations into a productive and fulfilling future. High expectations, lack of decent employment and life prospects, and marginalization among young people fuel frustration and desperation. In response, some of them turn to criminal behavior, violence, substance abuse, and sexual exploitation.

Mr. Chairman,

According to the UN Habitat’s report 2007, Over 60% of Nairobi’s population lives in informal settlements. Most of them live on less than a dollar a day
facing challenges including lack of employment opportunities, lack of provision of basic services, breakdown of community and societal controls, lack of infrastructure and security of tenure as well as poverty, insecurity and urban crime. These informal settlements constitute only 5% of Nairobi’s geographical area. It is saddening to note that the rest of the 95% of the geographical area houses only less than 40% of the population.

Is it really prudent; Mr Chairman to say that there is lack of resources while it is very clear from these findings that there is social-economic exclusion and unequal distribution of resources? The young people that have found themselves so excluded constitute a social group that faces particular problems and uncertainties regarding the future, problems that have to do in part with limited opportunities. Youth have for a long time been clustered as one of the vulnerable groups that are socially excluded by policy. Social exclusion is linked to the current social and economic development patterns. Young people, particularly from low-income neighborhoods, find themselves searching for an identity, and resort to all sorts of violence and anti-social and unlawful behavior – better referred to as ‘youth delinquency’

Mr Chairman,

The youth are frustrated! 92% of the youth in Kenya have acquired formal education. However, many young people graduate from Colleges and Universities only to face the reality of unemployment and underemployment. Is it because there are no job opportunities? Or is it because the youth are deprived of these opportunities? Why is it that greater recognition is given to white collar jobs at the expense of jobs borne of creativity like being a DJ or a graffiti artist? Why it is that qualifications for decent jobs are set so high with so many years of experience required? The youth should be given the opportunity to gain this experience! An individual’s worth should be assessed not on the number of years of experience but how well one can deliver in a job. There is need to tap into the energy, creativity and innovation of young people and give them an opportunity to be assets of development and turn the current underutilised productive capacity into a positive force for development, thus making use of the youth resource as drivers of economic development.

In order to benefit from young people’s capabilities, governments must create opportunities for the youth to be engaged in development processes. Otherwise, the exclusion and marginalization of youth will deprive
communities of their energy, dynamism and innovativeness. Young people must be given a chance to shape their own identity, lives and futures.

Mr. Chairman,

Youth with disability suffer double jeopardy. In addition to undergoing the challenges that face the youth generally, society views them as limited in ability and therefore further marginalizing them. This is a most unfortunate and unfair perception towards the youth with disability. Opportunities must be created and youth with disability empowered to take them up. This will enable them to together with all young people reach their full potential in all spheres of life. Youth with disability do not see themselves as being limited in life by their circumstances, so neither should anyone.

Mr. Chairman,

The youth of Kenya are grateful to the Government, which has already fulfilled its pledge to commit 2.5% of the national revenue collected annually towards a Youth Enterprise Fund. The Government has also enhanced youth affirmative action and directed that 30% of all Government procurement contracts be allocated to the youth. This is in a bid to encourage the establishment of youth-run enterprises to ensure that government- which is the largest single procurer of goods and services nationally, contributes directly to youth enterprise development, facilitates the youth to be gainfully employed, as well as enables them to participate in development. The Kenyan Government has also launched the ‘Uwezo Fund’ whereby it set aside Kshs 6 Billion (approximately 69 million US dollars) for youth and women to incubate enterprise, catalyze innovation, promote industry, employ the youth and grow the economy of Kenya. The youth will be able to borrow money interest and collateral free. This will, among others, enable the youth to leverage on the 30% Government procurement preference for the youth. Those that apply for this fund will undergo training on entrepreneurial skills and measures for ensuring accountability for funds disbursed to them.

Young people would like to tap into entrepreneurship opportunities and use their skills and talents to earn a living and to create jobs. Engagement in art, sports and culture is a youth-friendly vehicle for literacy and general education; it encourages discipline and helps the youth to turn social and material limitations into non-violent experiments in creativity. In essence, the effective use of art, sports and culture such as dance, music, theatre, photography, skating, martial arts, poetry etc can turn creative talents into
opportunities for enhancing positive roles and relationships of youth and ultimately productive livelihoods at the neighborhood level.

Governments should promote youth volunteerism and engage youth in social innovations through art, sports and culture by enhancing and providing public spaces and amenities such as social halls, sports grounds, and school spaces for youth expression. Governments should also engage with their youth and include them in decision-making about their future. The relationship between the government, the police and the youth should be strengthened. Can you imagine how cool it would be for police stations to be turned into hubs of music and art during the weekends or Head of States dancing to hip hop or house music during the International Youth Day to celebrate the youth? It would bring the youth and their Governments closer for national transformation.

It is our view, governments must strengthen interventions targeting vulnerable groups, while mainstreaming socio-economic and political integration into national youth policies and strategies. Enhanced efforts should be made to address the root causes of poverty, inequality and social exclusion, rather than their social-economic consequences in order to progress towards inclusive and sustainable development.

Mr. Chairman,

We are holding this session at a very critical time when discussions on the post 2015 development agenda are going on. We know that one of the reasons why the MDG’s targets have not been fully achieved is due to the exclusive formulation and implementation. We want to emphasize that the Post 2015 Agenda should address the specific needs of the youth. It is the youth who have suffered most due to the lack of progress in meeting the MDG’s. It is the youth that have severely been affected by extreme poverty. It is the youth that have been the victim of lack of maternal health and child mortality; it is the youth that have been affected by the impact of HIV/AIDS. It is the youth that have been severely affected by environmental unsustainably. The youth must therefore be actively engaged in the formulation of Post 2015 development agenda that should define a global blueprint that will be trusted and relied on for the future and inclusive socio-economic development of mankind. We must be reminded that a government that does not take care of its youth does not have a future and it does not deserve one!

I thank you.