



UN Zambia Statement

Martin Clemensson, Director, International Labour Organization

National Youth Policy Review

4 June 2013, Lusaka

Honourable Minister for Youth and Sport

The Permanent Secretary of Ministry of Youth and Sport

Directors and Senior Government Officials

Members of the diplomatic corps

Media colleagues,

Distinguished guests

Ladies and gentlemen,

I am delighted to be with you today at this important National Youth Policy Review Consultative Meeting.

With 52 per cent of persons below 18 years and 38 per cent between 15-35 years, Zambia is blessed with a youthful population. And in that simple statement lies both extraordinary challenges to be addressed, and extraordinary possibilities for making youth a critical resource for development in the years ahead.

While many countries around the world are aging in their demographic profile and looking outside to find workers, Zambia is endowed with a growing cohort of young people with the energy, the talent and the motivation to build Zambia, a prosperous middle income country by 2030. The potential here is indeed extraordinary.

National youth literacy has improved from 75 per cent in 1990 to 89 per cent in 2010. It has increased faster for girls, by 15 percentage points in the same period, than for boys,

by 12 percentage points. The proportion of young people with comprehensive knowledge of HIV and AIDS has improved from 31 per cent in 2002 to 40 in 2009.

However, it is equally true that in these numbers lie real challenges as well. To what extent will this energy and dynamism be harnessed - or will this opportunity be squandered? Or worse, redirected to push development gains backward?

Three young Zambians, of whom two are girls, continue to get infected with HIV every hour. 42 per cent of girls are married before the age of 18 years; 28 per cent of total pregnancies are among girls aged 13-17 years, leading to high maternal mortality as a result of unsafe abortions among young women.

Zambia's extraordinary economic growth in the past few years has not yet contributed to job creation. High levels of unemployment especially among youth are worrying. Young people of 15–35 years, account for 65 per cent of the working age population and yet, only 28 per cent of the economically active youth (over 1.2 million) were unemployed – almost double the national average of 15 percent in 2008.

We must better understand these issues faced by Zambia's young people, and prepare better and smarter responses to address them.

An excellent engagement of young people in recently concluded Zambia's consultations on the Post-2015 Development Agenda must be recognized as a statement by youth of their willingness to be agents of change to shape the future they want for a rapidly growing Zambia.

As underlined by the young Zambians, quality education with life skills is the most important vehicle for the sustainable development. We must aspire to design our policies to grow a highly educated youth population, which can transform themselves, the country and the world.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Being a 'good citizen' is an acquired skill; it is a process that evolves over a lifetime. Young people must be included at the earliest in this process of citizenship. Young people need sufficient attention by policy makers. A successful nation depends on it.

It is Zambia's youth that will ultimately build a prosperous Zambia. They need to be heard as the blue-prints are developed or reviewed. Their ideas and inputs on how to develop a more just and fairer society are vital. We need to get their advice on how best to formulate policies and programmes meant to address their needs and concerns. They need to tell us when we are coming up short and hopefully pat us on the back when we get it right!

It is highly commendable that the Ministry of Youth and Sport has initiated this very important task of reviewing the 2006 National Youth Policy. The UN in Zambia, including ILO, is confident that this review process will lead to a revision of the Youth Policy, making it more relevant and also in line with emerging international, regional and national trends in youth development. We are hopeful that these consultative meetings in Lusaka as well as in other provinces will provide solid feedback to the process.

I am very pleased to be part of this process, and wish the Ministry of Youth and Sport, and all participants my best wishes to have productive sessions.

Thank You.