

### **Statement by the Secretary General Thomas E. Garrett on International Youth Day**

International Youth Day, observed on August 12, highlights the immense potential of youth to give to our world but also reminds us of the challenges this largest global demographic faces.

Multiple challenges include unemployment and underemployment, violence, poverty and lack of access to resources. The youth I meet in every region tell me of these challenges but also of their hope, inspiration and energy to drive positive changes. During my recent visit to The Gambia – where 60% of the population is under the age of 35, I was inspired by the optimism and democratic spirit in the youth organizations I met with and the stories of how these young people are making a real difference in their communities.

For young talent to flourish, we need to create more #SafeSpaces4Youth, as emphasized by the theme of this year's International Youth Day. Marginalization of young women and men does not solely rest on socio-economic factors: it fundamentally lies in lack of inclusion and recognition of young people's diverse roles and contributions they can make to the society as a whole. Youth empowerment and political participation are also important for preventing violent extremism– a key finding in the Community of Democracies' Democracy and Security report.

To quote Nelson Mandela: *'Young people are capable, when aroused, of bringing down the towers of oppression and raising the banners of freedom.'* Speaking with young leaders from many parts of the world, I am impressed by their understanding of the complex global challenges to democracy and their desire to be involved in the decision-making process concerning their countries. The youth want to and should be involved, and the role of the governments is to provide them with adequate space and opportunities to advance their civic engagement and political participation at both local and national level.

Investment in young people's rights and empowerment is the investment in a better future of the countries and societies we live in. We need to build peaceful and inclusive societies not *for* the young people but *with* the young people.