



Statement by H.E. Bob Rae (Canada)

President of the Economic and Social Council

Opening Segment of the 2025 ECOSOC Youth Forum

15 April 2025

Good morning, everyone.

I am very pleased to welcome all of you to the 2025 Youth Forum of the Economic and Social Council. I want to thank you all for coming from far away, with many challenges for many to be able to get here on time. This is the largest gathering of young people at the United Nations, and we are very delighted to have all of you here for this discussion.

To all of you who will be actively engaging on social media, you can add your voice to our discussions by using the hashtag #ECOSOCYouth.

I am very delighted to welcome all of you who are joining and connecting online to this 2025 ECOSOC Youth Forum. This year's forum is being held under the theme: *"Youth at the Forefront: Leveraging Science and Social Inclusion for Sustainable Development."* The thematic focus of the Forum, which is on health, gender equality, decent work, life below water and partnerships for the goals, is as critical as ever.

We all know that the world now stands at the crossroads of multiple crises, from ongoing conflicts and the escalating effects of climate



change to widespread poverty, inequalities and hunger. The urgency of shaping a more sustainable, inclusive and just future for all has never been clearer. I say to all of you who are young: you are not only leaders of tomorrow – you are leaders of today. We cannot wait for tomorrow. We need you to start participating and taking charge today.

The world's most pressing problems are not abstract or distant. They are within reach, and they rely on the creative and innovative ideas that intergenerational dialogue can bring forward every single day. It is not about the passing of the torch from one generation to the next, but rather a conversation between all generations in which we need young people to be at the table.

We all know that we have a challenge to face. In the United Nations family, we speak often of the SDGs and are sometimes asked by those outside these halls of their meaning. My response to that question is that the Sustainable Development Goals are neither abstract or distant, and they are not theoretical. They are simply an expression of the common decency of humanity: food and water, peace and equality, respect and dignity to everyone, regardless of race, religion or nationality. We must recognize that we are still not meeting the targets that we need to meet.

Let me say a little bit about technology. You can lead the conversation on technology because you use it, are growing up in it, and know far more about it than older generations. It is so important for you to express your concerns and share your views and knowledge about what



the technology of the present represents for all of us. From artificial intelligence to space technologies, you are at the frontlines, harnessing the power of these tools to create solutions that address climate change, that improve health care, foster inclusive economies, and much more. Technology is transforming the world, and young people are at the very heart of this transformation.

However, it is essential that we acknowledge the challenges that remain. Many young people, particularly in low-income countries and marginalized communities, do not have the access to the technology and the digital infrastructure that could help them unlock their full potential. While 80% of young people have access to the Internet, we need to understand that means that 1 in 5 do not have that access. That is a huge amount of people with no access to the Internet and who in the future will have no access to artificial intelligence. We must deal with this problem, looking at the situation facing people in the developing world and all throughout the world, and address it to overcome the digital divide that still separates those who have access to technology and those that do not. Access to technology means access to work, to jobs, to advancement, to education. That is why it is so important.

The discussions we will have will put the spotlight on the purpose of development. Development must be equitable and always be associated with facts, science and the reality we live in. We cannot assume that reality is in myths, that it lies in disinformation and misinformation - these assumptions create problems for all those who depend on technology for their education and their sense of reality.



We must create spaces where young people are heard, valued, and integrated into decision-making processes. For example, in my role as Ambassador, I am pleased that the Permanent Mission of Canada has recently established a Youth Advisory Board to meaningfully consult young people on our work at the UN. I encourage my colleagues to do the same.

For 14 years, we have had this Forum. This is the biggest one to date, and it will be very successful. The next three days will have intense activity, where you will be present in all the discussions. You will be roaming through the building, talking to each other, and will have an opportunity to share many ideas and views. This year, we also have a record number of Ministers, and I congratulate governments for sending this number of representatives to this discussion. It is tremendous to have you with us. Thank you so much.

The Youth Forum is a vital introduction to a busy time in the calendar of ECOSOC, leading up to the end of July. Critical meetings are coming up, including the Fourth International Conference on Financing for Development and the Second World Summit for Social Development. It is important for you to know that the ideas and the concepts that you bring to discussions this week must be taken forward in those future conversations.

Finally, as much as we will spend these three days talking, I would like to suggest that listening is also a good idea. Spending time listening to



your colleagues, learning from their experiences and engaging with them – that is what makes these forums so interesting and exciting.

Let us move beyond talk. Let us get to action, and make sure that you are holding us accountable for the work that we do. It is very important.

Thank you all very much. Merci beaucoup.