



**Remarks for H.E. Ms. Lachezara Stoeva,  
President of the United Nations Economic and Social Council  
ECOSOC Youth Forum  
Africa Regional Breakout Session  
26 April 2023, 9:00 am to 10:30 am  
UNHQ, Conference Room 11**

Honorable Ministers,  
Excellencies,  
Distinguished Delegates,  
Youth Representatives,  
and friends connecting online,

It is an honor to be here with you today and to discuss youth empowerment and engagement.

As we all know, Africa is the continent with the youngest population worldwide. As of 2021, around 40 percent of the population of the African continent was aged 15 years and younger, compared to a global average of 26 percent.

In 2020, 19 of the world's 20 countries with the youngest populations were in Africa.

This gives the continent an incredible opportunity for economic growth and development, only if the necessary resources are devoted to education, health and jobs creation as critical investment to empower youth populations.

If these efforts are not realized, the continent could face a significant demographic challenge instead of creating a demographic dividend. This carries a risk of high unemployment, increased poverty and low productivity which in turn could threaten stability and security across Africa.



I was pleased to learn that at this year's Africa Regional Forum on Sustainable Development (ARFSD), African Ministers recommitted to "harness science, innovation and state-of-the-art emerging technologies, ... and the potential of young people ... to achieve the objectives of sustainable development".

The African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) offers the Continent a pathway that will provide expanded opportunities, allowing youth to drive the necessary transformative change.

But to achieve this change, we must invest in three important objectives:

First, we need to invest in STI, particularly mainstreaming STEM across primary, secondary, tertiary education and vocational training, to support youth to develop the skills of tomorrow.

Second, the African Continental Free Trade Area is expected to unlock Africa's productive capacity pulling an additional 50 million people out of extreme poverty. Young people should benefit from this development dividend.

Third, Entrepreneurship, which comes naturally to many young people, should also be recognized as an important contribution to the success of the Free Trade Area. We know that African youth are among the world's most entrepreneurial.

Colleagues and friends,

Investing in a booming young population is good news for the economy and society. Youth, with the kind of creative and innovative spirit that will stimulate rapid growth, can drive economic transformation.

But this is more than an economic issue. Young people's prolonged and sustained frustration undermines social cohesion, increasing the risk of them being instrumentalized for triggering instability and conflict. Addressing this triple priority is therefore also a way to secure lasting peace and sustainable development on the continent.

You can count on our support to convey these recommendations to the HLPF and the SDG Summit and to reflect these regional experiences in the dialogue around policy development at the global level.

I look forward to your productive discussions.