

OPENING REMARKS

BY

**H.E. MR. COLLEN V. KELAPILE
PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED NATIONS ECONOMIC
AND SOCIAL COUNCIL (ECOSOC)**

AT THE

ECOSOC YOUTH FORUM

UNDER THEME OF

***“COVID-19 RECOVERY: YOUTH TAKING ACTION FOR A
SUSTAINABLE FUTURE”***

**19 APRIL 2022
09:00 – 11:00 HOURS**

VIRTUAL MEETING

Please check against delivery

- **Madam Deputy Secretary-General of the United Nations, Ms. Amina J. Mohammed;**
- **Your Excellency, Dr. Mokgweetsi Eric Keabetswe Masisi, President of the Republic of Botswana;**
- **Ms. Jayathma Wickramanayake, UN Secretary-General's Envoy on Youth;**
- **Honourable Ministers, Excellencies;**
- **Youth Representatives, and the Global Youth;**
- **Distinguished Delegates;**
- **Ladies and Gentlemen;**

1. It is a great honor for me to warmly welcome you all to the **2022 Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) Youth Forum**, which is being held under the theme of: "***COVID-19 Recovery: Youth Taking Action for a Sustainable Future.***"
2. This theme is very timely as it offers the youth a unique opportunity to contribute to the ongoing discussions on sustainable, inclusive and resilient recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic.

3. The ECOSOC Youth Forum is a significant platform, that promotes the equal participation and engagement of the global youth in the work of the United Nations.
4. Given its significance, the outcomes of the Youth Forum feed into the **High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF)**, which reviews and monitors the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Excellencies, Youth Representatives, Ladies and Gentlemen,

5. Once again, we are convening this Forum when the world is still grappling with the COVID-19 pandemic. As you may recall, we celebrated the historic 10th Anniversary of the Forum last year when the world was just beginning to emerge from a period of uncertainty and fear.
6. It was also at a time when COVID-19 vaccines and treatments were developed and being rolled out. We were all hopeful then, as we remain so today.

7. But while cooperation in achieving scientific progress yielded a lightning speed development of COVID-19 vaccines, the virus remains to be fully conquered. We continue to face the threat of new variants -- and yet we know, through science, what to do.
8. The most immediate and urgent task now is to address the inequities across the globe, that have been vividly exposed by this pandemic -- which has also disproportionately affected the youth, through unprecedented disruptions in education and the labour market.

Excellencies, Youth Representatives, Ladies and Gentlemen,

9. In line with this year's theme, I strongly encourage the youth to look at the future with hope and identify concrete actions that are forward-looking to address their challenges and fast track implementation of the 2030 Agenda -- especially youth-related Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

10. Above all, the youth should consider and contribute to the five (5) SDGs that will be reviewed in-depth at the **2022 HLPF** in July, namely **SDG 4**, on Quality Education; **SDG 5**, on Gender Equality; **SDG 14**, on Life Below Water; **SDG 15**, on Life on Land; and **SDG 17**, on Partnerships for the Goals.

11. As President of ECOSOC, I consider the following six (6) actions as critical for COVID-19 recovery:

- **First, as an immediate step, vaccines against COVID-19 must be made available to everyone, everywhere** as a global public good, without any discrimination. The low vaccination rates in developing countries, particularly in Africa, remains a matter of grave concern.
- **Second, we need stronger health and social protection systems, as well as infrastructure** to defeat the pandemic and build necessary resilience to prevent and be able to respond much better to similar or even worse future pandemics.

- **Third, we need to address rising food insecurity and higher energy prices.** Along with the pandemic, the worsening food insecurity is pushing more people deeper into hunger and poverty, thus exacerbating social and political instability around the world.
- **Fourth, we need greater investments in technology** so that young people, particularly the poorest and most vulnerable, can take advantage of opportunities offered by digitalization. This requires proper investment in education and other critical services, such as health. The **Transforming Education Summit**, which will take place in September, provides an ideal opportunity to discuss this challenge. Mobilizing actions for the future of education is crucial in post-COVID-19 recovery.
- **Fifth, we need to foster peaceful, just and inclusive societies which are free from fear and violence.** Conflict and war have the most destructive impacts in the future of young people.

- **Lastly, we need sound and transformative policies and strategies** that will accelerate the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the achievement of the SDGs, to ensure a sustainable and inclusive recovery.
- Observations that emerged from the Second Global VNRs Webinar held last week in Gaborone, Botswana, show that the recovery policies and strategies implemented by many countries are contributing to the achievement of the SDGs.

Dear Youth Representatives,

12. Your continued advocacy and activism have helped to keep us focused on the Sustainable Development Goals, and to simultaneously pay equal attention to the climate change crisis and COVID-19 pandemic.
13. You have been -- and continue to be -- at the forefront of the global movement, for more decisive action on climate change. I am counting on your continued support, to build a truly global coalition committed to achieving net zero emissions by 2050.

14. This is the year to walk the talk, and the **UN Climate Change Conference (COP27)** in November 2022 in Egypt needs to be a key milestone in delivering impactful outcomes for our planet and people.
15. We, at ECOSOC, remain resolute to offer guidance to all Member States and their leaders to assist in designing sound and evidence-based policies that provide for decent work and green jobs for the youth.

Excellencies, Dear Friends,

16. As the world continues to grapple with the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic and other global challenges, I strongly believe that the Sustainable Development Goals offer a roadmap to build sustainable, inclusive and thriving societies and reinvigorate global solidarity for the 21st Century.
17. Now, more than ever, a sustainable future can only be built through youth empowerment and meaningful engagement with them. You legitimately deserve to have a seat at the table, when decisions about your future are being made.

18. This is why we meet during these two days of the Youth Forum, convened under the auspices of the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC).
19. I, therefore, look forward to hearing your bold and innovative ideas and proposals, on how to take on COVID-19 recovery, empowerment of women and girls, transforming education, protecting our oceans, safeguarding our natural ecosystems and financing your own future, to the next level.
20. As I conclude, it is particularly pleasing to note your participation in such high numbers at this year's ECOSOC Youth Forum. I am encouraged that the numbers keep rising at each Forum, compared also with the last count in 2021 which was **19,000** participants.
21. This demonstrates the value you attach to this important Forum.

I thank you for your kind attention.