

Message from Mr Koïchiro Matsuura, Director-General of UNESCO, on the occasion of International Youth Day, 12 August 2009

In the midst of a series of unprecedented crises affecting the lives of young people all around the world, the theme for this year's International Youth Day "Sustainability: our challenge, our future" could not be more relevant.

Sustainability refers to three facets of life which are all affected by the current turmoil: the environment, society and the economy. We need urgently to reflect on the challenges they pose for youth. If we do not, their opportunities for development, secure livelihoods and social cohesion will be compromised.

Representing more than 18% of the world's population, young people have strong potential for contributing to efforts to address these crises: in addition to being the best educated generation so far, they are ambitious, flexible and able to adapt to changing realities. Yet, more than 200 million of them live on less than US\$1 a day, 88 million are unemployed, 160 million are undernourished, 130 million are illiterate, more than 10 million live with HIV/AIDS, and young women continue to face barriers in many areas of development. Considering this demographic window of opportunity, it is important to work with youth as equal partners in embracing the challenge of sustainability.

In cooperation with governments, youth organizations, research networks, key development partners the media and the private sector, UNESCO seeks to foster an enabling policy environment for youth development and to support youth-led action, by strengthening knowledge acquisition and management on youth issues, fostering relevant evidence-based research and policy development and encouraging youth participation in decision-making. Reaffirming its commitment to youth, UNESCO has institutionalised a Youth Forum as an integral part of the General Conference, the Organization's highest decision-making body. The Forum, which will meet again from 1 to 3 October 2009, will be dedicated to the theme "Investing out of the crisis: what role for young people?" It will allow youth from each Member State to contribute to the development of the Organization's programme and action and provide them with the opportunity to voice their opinion on this highly topical challenge and UNESCO's role in tackling it.

On International Youth Day 2009, I therefore call on governments, civil society and the private sector to intensify their efforts to work with youth in addressing these challenges; and I encourage all young people to channel their energy and creativity into securing peace and sustainability for future generations.