

Youth Delegates for Germany

to the UN General Assembly 2008



Speech before the UN General Assembly, 6th October 2008
Third Committee on Social, Humanitarian and Cultural Affairs

Madam Chair, distinguished Delegates, fellow Youth Delegates,

“Building international relations in a way that allows every person and every people to feel like they can make a difference” is what Pope Benedict XVI envisioned during his speech before the General Assembly on April 18th of this year. The young people of Germany, Madam Chair, share this wish, but a majority of them feel left out of the decision-making processes.

As Youth Delegates we travelled 30 000 km throughout our country to talk to the young people. We talked to youth organizations; we visited schools; we attended conferences, youth events and public debates in order to understand their hopes, concerns and visions and to discuss with them the issues of the World Programme of Action for Youth to the Year 2000 and beyond.

The thousands of young people we met refused to tire of the belief in multilateralism as the future pathway to address the world’s most pressing problems. However, they ask questions, Madam Chair, because they do not understand nor do they want to accept the present situation: How many resources are wasted with youth unemployment at twice the average rate? How long will we still be able to afford to leave behind a considerable portion of children in our education systems or to leave them powerless in illiteracy? How accurately would international agreements on sustainable development be implemented, if our governments had an age average of 25 years?

YOUNG PEOPLE REQUEST GOVERNMENTS TO MULTIPLY INVESTMENTS IN EDUCATION. They believe in education as the decisive force in breaking out of poverty.

Education is a human right, acknowledged in the UNESCO Education for All Agenda, the MDGs and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. However, if efforts are not dramatically increased, 52 of 83 countries are likely to fail the MDG of universal primary education and only 18 of 113 countries will reach gender equality in primary and secondary education. Still on the verge to adulthood every fifth young person is illiterate; two thirds of them are young women! And still MDG 2 to reach universal primary education and MDG 5 to reach gender equality are the two MDGs where least of the progress is achieved.

THE ABILITY TO EDUCATE OUR YOUTH WILL DETERMINE OUR ABILITY TO JOIN THE GLOBAL COMMUNITY.

Every Euro invested in early education has a societal return on investment of 120%. The European youth population will shrink by 25% by 2050. This smaller group will need to cope with demographic aging whilst in Africa young people have the task to lead their countries out of conflict, poverty and hunger. Not only in Germany, but in all parts of the world, education can mobilize its youth and through that unlock one of its most powerful resources.

YOUNG PEOPLE ALSO WANT US TO WORK TOWARDS RECOGNITION OF NON-FORMAL EDUCATION. Non-formal education, as defined by the UNESCO, an organized and learner-centered process outside the formal education system, in many developing countries provides the only access to education. Yet, benefiting from non-formal education requires its learning outcomes to be recognized.

Moreover, recognition implies the support of those who are in charge of non-formal education. Youth organizations as main providers of non-formal education make their members grow into more responsible and socially aware young leaders. In Europe, a tendency to rationalize and to modularize our education and training systems is about to stifle the enthusiasm of our young volunteers. However, no country can afford to restrain its volunteers! Young people want to be able to combine their voluntary activities with their everyday lives, especially their educational pathways.

Yes, we are the most educated generation ever, but we must focus on relative rather than absolute numbers. Only educated minds benefit from globalization. Any form of sustainable globalization requires a narrowing of the gap between the most highly educated and the most disadvantaged.

Madam Chair,

YOUNG PEOPLE WANT TO BE INCLUDED IN POLITICAL DECISION MAKING. It is their desire not only to be subject to political decisions, but to be key agents of implementation. Half the world's population is younger than 25. Logically also half of all programmatic responses should be targeted at young people.

THE STATUS OF THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE MDGS IS OF GREAT CONCERN TO YOUNG PEOPLE. Seeing the MDGs as a mere statement of good will is one of the biggest mistakes that governments around the world can make. Young people prefer legally binding obligations to statements of good will. Young people, youth councils and their equivalent bodies call upon all governments to take part in the implementation of the MDGs.

Including youth at an early stage in their lives, and in a manner which is appropriate to their age will nurture a feeling of ownership and identification with the political system they live in. In the long term it fosters the legitimacy of political institutions. With unprecedented possibilities to network via the internet and greater mobility than ever we are ready to take responsibility and want to make a difference in our society today, rather than tomorrow.

AROUND THE WORLD YOUNG VOLUNTEERS AND YOUTH-LED ORGANIZATIONS ALREADY CONTRIBUTE GREATLY TO SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT. Young volunteers organize international student exchanges, young volunteers work on peer to peer education programmes, young volunteers tackle problems of juvenile delinquency, drug abuse, racism, sexual health, discrimination, and I could go on like this forever. Therefore, youth organisations must be equipped with visas, greater administrative and financial support.

On our tour through Germany we experienced firsthand that to young people taking active part in society means much more than just volunteering. It means being fully able to

shape the future of their communities. The benefits of youth participation, however, will only be fully realized, if youth participation is effective and fulfils certain criteria:

1st Young people must be informed, and fully aware of their rights and tools to participate.

2nd Mechanisms of participation must be attractive to young people: topics and methods need to be chosen in accordance with their level of maturity.

3rd The mechanisms of participation, the way in which they feed into policy making and their results must be transparent to young people.

If we want to build a society in which people participate, we have to promote associations where young people are able to become fully involved on a voluntary basis.

THEREFORE, WE CALL UPON ALL MEMBER STATES:

- to recognize the value of non-formal education by supporting youth organisations and their members.
- to ratify the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its optional protocols without reservations.
- to promote youth participation by supporting and including participatory youth organisations in the planning, evaluation and implementation of decisions that affect young people.
- and finally to support youth participation at the United Nations by including Youth Delegates in all countries' delegations.

We thank you all for your attention.