



Remarks by

H.E. Mr. John W. Ashe

**President of the 68th session of the United Nations
General Assembly**

World Conference on Youth 2014

Mainstreaming Youth in the Post-2015 Development Agenda

Colombo, Sri Lanka

6 May, 2014

Please check against delivery.

H.E. Mahinda Rajapaksa, President of Sri Lanka,
The Honourable Dullas Alahapperuma, Minister of Youth Affairs and Skills Development,
Excellencies,
Mr. Ahmad Alhendawi, Secretary-General's Envoy on Youth,
The International Youth Task Force,
Distinguished Guests and Young Delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am pleased to be a part of this World Youth Conference (WYC) and, more importantly, to address you, the young. Your energy, your enthusiasm, your idealism – your skills with technology – all inspire me.

Young Delegates,

As the father of two young boys, I am acutely aware of the creativity of young people and the need to nurture them in a way that allows them to achieve their full potential. Beginning with the Earth Summit in 1992 when the international community defined the first global development agenda, we have strived to put young people at the core of the effort for sustainability by recognising the need to preserve the planet for future generations and give young people the opportunity to thrive and live in a world that is socially, economically and environmentally just. It is this concept that informs the theme for this World Youth Conference – *“Mainstreaming Youth In The Post-2015 Development Agenda.”*

Almost four years have passed since the last WYC was held in León, Mexico in August 2010, and in the intervening period, there have been many initiatives for and by youth to ensure that the needs of young people are mainstreamed into national policy planning and development strategies so as to secure the best possible living standards and protect the patrimony of future generations.

Now, the international community is about embark on a goal-setting, agenda defining exercise known as the Post-2015 Development Agenda, that I truly hope will ensure that young are prime beneficiaries of these promises. Thousands of youth representatives and young people, from all corners of the world are gathered here in Sri Lanka to make their mark on the world and to share with the world their view of how this agenda should engage and

impact our youth and the young who, across the globe, are majority of the unemployed and underemployed and across the world are significantly impacted by war, conflict, social and economic deprivation and severe environmental degradation.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The Rio+20 Outcome Document *The Future We Want*, emphasises the need for young people to actively participate in decision-making processes. As the member states of the United Nations begin formulating a successor arrangement to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), we need to ensure that this new framework is sufficiently sensitive to the needs of the young. This is critical because at 1.8 billion strong, young people make up one-quarter of the world's population.

You are a very diverse group. You are entrepreneurs, inventors and artists. You are agents of change and development and recently, and as has been the case historically, young people have been at the forefront of social and political movements in regions ranging from the Middle East and Eastern Europe to Latin America and Africa. You have spoken out on many issues and your voices have echoed across the globe in an unprecedented manner, thanks to new technologies and social media. You have adeptly mastered these new tools and hence, transformed the way we receive news, information and education, the way in which communicate, interact, and even the way we date.

Indeed, by harnessing the potential of young people through sharing viral videos to blogging and tweeting, from texting to crowdsourcing, the changing technology landscape continues to provide new avenues for entrepreneurship, social engineering, engagement with peers, but also with decision-makers and policymakers. You have already proven that harnessing the power of these new technologies can foster more transparent and participatory governance models and promote accountability.

Young Delegates,

While some progress has been made in recent decades to promote youth development, many young people, especially girls, are denied the educational and investment opportunities required to realize their full potential. With an estimated 225 million youth, or twenty per

cent (20%) of all youth in the developing world, not in school, or in a steady work or training programme, their potential to sustain an acceptable quality of life through decent work is severely limited. This is borne out by the persistently high levels of youth unemployment and underemployment worldwide. Today, some forty percent (40%) of the world's unemployed are youth. Statistics tell us that the majority of the uneducated or undereducated, unemployed, underpaid, unappreciated are women and the young.

Young people across the world face some common challenges - high unemployment, lack of economic empowerment, high levels of poverty among indigenous and marginalized youth, sexual and reproductive health issues with high prevalence of HIV/AIDS, other threats to their health and wellbeing including high incidences of Non-Communicable Diseases (NCDs) and too much violence and crime.

The post 2015 development agenda must take cognizance of these issues. This must be a priority. Some of you have already been involved in influencing this new agenda by sharing your priorities through the crowdsourcing platform initiative of the UN Special Youth Envoy, Mr. Ahmed Alhendawi, and through the MyWorld Survey, which seeks to capture your voices and is available online. The Major Group on Children and Youth was an active participant in the civil society sessions of the Open Working Group (OWG) on Sustainable Development Goals and I encourage you to continue finding avenues to let your voices be heard.

Many of the issues currently under consideration within the UN for the new agenda match what you are discussing here at the WYC. I have taken note of the seven key foundations and seven thematic areas which are to form the basis of your discussions over the next few days. I commend you for including a broad range of critical issues affecting young people such as inequalities, poverty eradication, gender equality, quality education, employment, good governance, empowerment of marginalized youth and ending violence.

I assure you that I am deeply committed to the empowerment of young people and I have made the contributions of young people, women and civil society in the new agenda, a focal area for specific debate during my term as President of the General Assembly. Consequently, this past March, I convened a high-level event that included the active involvement and participation of youth representatives from Member States and civil society who served as

panelists and discussants. I took note of your concerns and expressed desires – namely about inclusive and quality education; employment opportunities; entrepreneurship and skills development; health, including sexual and reproductive health; and peace and security – and I have shared them and other key messages from the event with UN Member States and the Open Working Group (OWG) on the Sustainable Development Goals for further consideration.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Throughout my tenure as President of the General Assembly I have been able to witness first-hand the determination of many of you to bring about transformative social change, and to bring fresh energy and creativity to try and solve many of the global challenges we face today. I encourage you to stay the course. You are the future and this is the planet you will inherit. You owe to yourselves that its future development path is a sustainable one.

Let me conclude by thanking our gracious host - the Government of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka – for the warm hospitality to which they have treated us all here at this World Youth Conference (WYC).

Thank you.
