

STATEMENT ON INTERNATIONAL YOUTH DAY, 12th August, 2020
At the Launch of the Young People's Expo

by
The UNFPA Representative
Mr. Niyi Ojuolape

- All protocols observed

Today is the 20th International Youth Day! It has been 20 years since the first commemoration of this day which is aimed at celebrating youth achievements and drawing global, regional and national attention to issues affecting young people, their engagement and development. 20 years down the line, young people are still showing in a myriad of ways their dynamism and resilience in the face of an unprecedented crisis in this century- a global pandemic.

I am happy to be called upon to deliver these remarks at the second edition of the Young People's Expo being organised by the Ulti-Leaf Foundation with support from UNESCO. This Expo is a unique opportunity for young people to showcase their innovation and creativity in youth-focused action in their various communities. It aligns with this year's International Youth Day theme "*Youth Engagement for Global Action*" and Ghana's adaption: "*Youth Engagement in Mitigating the Impact of COVID-19; the need for Innovation and Creativity*".

The COVID-19 pandemic has affected societies and economies world-wide. Health systems are struggling under the weight of the pandemic with financial and human resources being diverted from key health service provision like reproductive health, which is critical to the well-being of young people. In Ghana, the largely informal work force and even some portions of the formal work sector have been gravely impacted by the pandemic as a result of the social distancing protocols that are required to curb the spread of the virus. As you know, majority

of this work force are young people like you, many of whom have lost jobs and livelihoods in the months that the pandemic has been with us. Sexual and gender-based violence- which affects many young women and girls- as you know, has been on the increase as a result of many victims spending more time with their abusers. Education has also been disrupted for many in-school young people at all levels; with the now glaring digital divide keeping many students from accessing quality education.

Indeed, the pandemic seems to be undoing gains made towards the achievement of the global sustainable development goals. The challenges faced by the youth have been aggravated by the socio-economic realities that the pandemic has presented to us. Nonetheless, in all of these, I have observed that young people have girded up their loins and refused to give up in the face of these difficulties. This Expo is a clear indication of youthful resourcefulness; where through visual arts, music, creative writing, drama and culture, young people are showcasing community action to advocate and address issues affecting them.

This year has been particularly challenging for all of us. However, in some ways, I dare say, that it has also been a good year. It has been a year of unlearning and relearning, where we are rediscovering ourselves and adapting to new approaches to problem solving. This is largely because of the exuberance of our young people. So today, I say kudos to all of you. May we keep working hard to rise above our challenges, for the good of Ghana and Ghana's young people.