

# Togo – 2005

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Mr. Atsou

## UN Youth Delegate Programme

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**Mr. Atsou** (Togo) (*spoke in French*): It is an honour for me to speak on behalf of roughly half of the five million inhabitants of Togo, who are young people, in order to convey to the General Assembly the efforts Togo has made to implement the World Programme of Action for Youth.

Allow me to welcome the presence among us of other delegations, as well as the ongoing efforts they are making to ensure that young people are able to participate in society. [\*25\*]

Following summit-level conferences organized by the United Nations, humankind has become aware of the need to address the issue of development comprehensively. Greater consideration of the matter has made it possible for us to understand the role and invaluable contribution of young people in the process of building a global economy that meets the needs of all, as well as their capacity and willingness to contribute to the lives of their societies. The world as a whole has also become aware of the risks to which young people are exposed.

The Millennium Declaration and the World Programme of Action for Youth, which was adopted by Member States 10 years ago, are the results of that awareness. Those tools were conceived with the goal of ameliorating the difficult problems that rob young people of any chance for development, namely, hunger, poverty, unemployment, juvenile delinquency, drug addiction, HIV/AIDS, gender-based discrimination, conflict and marginalization. Those obstacles, among others, have impeded us from attaining the desired results. With regard to Togo, there are two main reasons for the lack of progress in implementing the commitments of the World Programme of Action for Youth.

On the one hand, despite the Government's good will and that of young people's groups and other actors, the lack of financial resources # a characteristic of most developing States # has been the major limitation to every policy aimed at improving the living standards of young people. Moreover, Togo has suffered for more than 13 years # and continues to suffer today # from the breakdown in assistance from its main development partners.

On the other hand, in the context of an unfavourable economic environment, the structural adjustment measures recommended by the Bretton Woods institutions have contributed to a suspension of recruitment in the public sector. Adding to that the low rate at which the private sector is able to absorb young people seeking work

and the political crisis in the country, it is easy to understand why Togo's young people are facing the problems of unemployment, poverty and the other scourges I have mentioned. Nevertheless, Togo's young people are today pleased to see that all indicators point to a promising new future.

President Faure Essozimna Gnassingbé has placed the problems of young people at the centre of his programme to structure society on the basis of 20 commitments. Providing decent employment for young people, extending credit to young entrepreneurs, giving universities the logistical and human resources needed to provide good training for young people, and full and effective participation by youth in the political, economic and social life of the country, are among the main policies of the programme established by Togo's President.

The Government's meaningful policy of according close attention to the problems of young people has led to the establishment of the first-ever State secretariat devoted solely to improving conditions for young people. This is a tool that henceforth will make it possible for us to be the leading actors in the transformation of society. In addition, the programme of action put forth by the National Union Government, which was made public on 4 July 2005, sends a strong signal testifying to the resolute determination of the Government of Togo to place the improvement of the living conditions of its young people at the centre of its concerns.

Less than 100 days since the establishment of the National Union Government, the hopes aroused by that event have already been justified vis-à-vis the 10 priority areas targeted by the World Programme of Action for Youth. In the interests of time, I shall limit myself to pointing out only some of the efforts undertaken in a few areas.

With regard to education, the section in the Government of Togo's programme of action devoted to social development includes significant steps that should guarantee a quality education for all of Togo's young people. Special emphasis has been placed on the situation of teachers, who are mostly young people themselves. The Government has committed itself to ensure quality education, not only by giving teachers appropriate quality training, but also by providing them working conditions conducive to giving young pupils sound instruction and providing free primary education in order to reach the goal of ensuring schooling for all by 2015. For their part, students will be encouraged to excel by the granting of prizes.

In the areas of employment, poverty and hunger, the Government of Togo has taken several steps by which young people will become the most important stakeholders in the building of the Togolese economy. In that connection, the Prime Minister stated that Togo [\*26\*] would do everything necessary with regard to employment in order to ensure that the greatest number of young people possible will be able to benefit from employment as soon as possible. They will be the first beneficiaries of the employment and self-employment programme to be established by the Government. They will also be active participants in the reconstruction and consolidation work we are going to undertake.

Putting the Government's words into action, only some 45 days following the unveiling of its programme, a first wave of 1,700 young teachers were recruited into the civil service. That will be followed by a second wave in the weeks to come.

The provision of grants to young people, which was also announced in the programme, will allow us to promote self-employment through the establishment of small- and medium-sized business. That will make it possible to reduce considerably the number of the unemployed, thereby also addressing the complicated issue of poverty. For their part, young people's groups and non-governmental organizations (NGO) working in Togo will also contribute to the extent they are able.

In that connection, I would like to commend the efforts of NGOs to halt the social crisis. Despite that, however, their efforts to improve the living conditions of young people through sustainable development have been very limited for many years.

We would therefore like to use the forum provided by the General Assembly to launch, on behalf of Togo's young people, a resounding and solemn appeal aimed at all organizations, associations and other development partners to trust our country and to extend their assistance to our young people, as well as to our Government and our NGOs, in order that we may overcome the challenges of poverty and hunger and the other scourges that particularly afflict young people.

