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THE PRESIDENT**



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**Speech by President of the European Council
Herman Van Rompuy
at the 3rd EU-Africa Youth Leaders' Summit**

It is a great pleasure for me to start this week dedicated to EU-Africa cooperation by addressing a group of young leaders like yourselves, who represent the future of our partnership. Your constant engagement helps make the relationship between our continents truly people-centered. In the long-term, this is possibly the best investment we can make.

I can not imagine a better start of our Summit meetings than coming here and speak to young people. I am a great believer in the difference young people can make to the fate of their country.

In Europe and in Africa, demographics matter hugely – though with different situations of course. On the African continent, around 65% of the total population is under the age of 35. Undeniably, this is human wealth of unrivalled potential; but it also comes with its own sets of challenges – especially when it comes to ensuring that there are enough opportunities out there for all those talents and all that energy and to ensure their basic needs: food, housing, health care,... Of course, living standards are different but we are facing huge young unemployment in a lot of our Member States as well as growing poverty risks and inequalities.

In demographic terms, in Europe the "youth" group is in fact becoming smaller. Which makes it all the more important to foster opportunities for our young people. But recent years of recession have hit young people across European countries hard; keeping too many talented, motivated, energetic young people out of a first decent job.

P R E S S

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The economy is now doing better, but creating more work opportunities for young people, and one of Europe's highest priorities. Growth will not be sufficient. That's why we take measures with direct impact, for instance ensuring that young people that remain unemployed four months after leaving school have access to further training, education or a job offer. Because a job means so much in life and for society as a whole. And the most creative period in your life is before your thirties. Innovation needs creativity – and therefore innovation means young people too.

Which is why it is so important to encourage entrepreneurial skills – at all stages in life, but above all in education. Because students who have experienced an innovative learning environment are much more likely to use this innovation capital in their future endeavors. This is one of the reasons why promoting entrepreneurship in young people will be high on the agenda in our upcoming discussions at the EU-Africa summit later this week.

We will speak about how to unlock the entrepreneurial and professional potential of people all across our countries, in particular young people, men and women, through education and training – be it through measures to help the next generation to start-up businesses or with ways to further foster mobility within and between continents.

Over the next two days, what European and African leaders will be looking at together, is how to make our continents more prosperous and peaceful for their citizens. We will talk about how to stimulate growth that is sustainable, inclusive and that creates jobs. We will also address many other issues that are of great concern for people, especially young people like you: good governance, democracy, rule of law and the respect of human rights – without which there can be no truly fair or truly lasting economic growth and democratic life and no decent life at all. We need a youth without fear, a free youth, a youth of hope.

Peace and security will figure very high among the themes of the Summit. And also on this theme, beyond the existing institutional and operational cooperation between Europe and Africa in addressing crisis situations, input from civil society will also be key. Especially for conflict prevention and crisis relief, where the views of the people, and of the youngest generation in particular, can drastically help avoid and solve security crisis.

The youngsters are the main victims of conflicts and war. They become fighters instead of students. They suffer from diseases and hunger. They are targeted by extremists that manipulate and indoctrinate them.

There will be many other themes on our agenda, including climate change and the preservation of natural resources, the role of agriculture in Africa's future, global governance, the fight against diseases, the development of infrastructures and technology that link up our continents. All issues of direct concern to our youth in Africa and in Europe.

Especially, on climate change, Europe and Africa can be close allies. We remain ambitious on greenhouse gas reductions. We stand ready to support financially less developed countries. Africa is gravely hit by climate change. How can we have a common future if we can't overcome the climate crisis?

You share the vision of a future free from war, violence and injustice; where people can speak their minds online and offline, and be treated with dignity and respect by their peers and authorities; where the rule of law, good governance and human rights are the norm and not the exception. You wish to have the possibility to start a business, study and work anywhere, and exploit your creativity to the maximum. This should not remain a dream. We have to work hard to work together to realise these projects. A lot has been achieved economically in Africa during the last two decades but the way ahead is long. War and conflicts should not hinder this renaissance!

And it is important that you are heard. In this sense, inter-generational dialogue is at least as vital as inter-continental exchanges. So we look forward to the conclusions and recommendations that will be developed by this Africa-Europe Youth Summit. They will undoubtedly be very helpful to feed the discussions of the EU Africa Summit this week.

Both Africa and Europe have a lot to learn from each other, much experience and much expertise to share and that can inspire. We are a living example that relations can change in the course of history, even recent history. There is a new Africa and a new Europe.

We count on you to maintain your spirit, engagement and commitment also in the years to come, when many of you might be directly responsible for the future development of our continents and their partnership. I wish you a successful two days.
