Thank you Göran. And my thanks to the panel members for your work since our last meeting—and to all the participants who have travelled from every corner of the globe to be here. I thank our United Nations and World Bank colleagues for deepening their commitment and collaboration. As you know, this meeting is about strengthening the impact of the Panel’s work on the ground.

As you may have noticed, we have moved to a somewhat bigger room compared to our first meeting two years ago. The Youth Employment Network is expanding, precisely as it should. Hopefully, the meeting will be small enough to have a good discussion, but large enough to bring in many perspectives.

We have around the table a dynamic, articulate and committed group of young leaders from thirteen countries and five continents. Critical to our success is the challenge to engage youth organizations—those represented here today, and—indeed—many more beyond this room.

We have come together to achieve our common goal of decent and productive work for young people. As you all know, this effort was launched by the Secretary General two years ago. In the uncertain and troubled times since then, the importance and relevance of youth employment has only grown.

We just wrapped up our International Labour Conference. I met with virtually every Labour Minister in the world, employers and workers representatives. Again and again, the same issue emerged. Young people—jobs—frustration—opportunities—hope. This is truly a global priority.

I want to thank the panel for identifying the issues and devoting considerable energy to fleshing out your 2001 policy recommendations. You’ve set up working groups to provide more detailed guidelines for national action and your network has undertaken important initiatives you will report on.

We all know that throughout the world, youth joblessness is two to three times higher than the overall rate. This panel has helped others better understand the unique obstacles faced by young people.

For example, entrepreneurship. We know young people who want to set up a small enterprise face greater barriers. It’s not easy to get going when you don’t have a track record or a credit history or are stifled by red tape. You may have a great idea, but not a good business plan. Or you may be creative and innovative but were born on the wrong side of the track. Then, entrepreneurship is about survival. Entrepreneurship also has a wider definition—it is about ideas and seeing things from a different angle. Young people have much to add.

Employability. Youth have a lot going for them, but they lack experience—or the knowledge they have is not formally recognized. That’s often the main difficulty they face in getting and keeping a first job. It’s the old catch-22. You don’t get a job because you lack the experience. And you lack the experience because you don’t have a job. And, of course, when
there is a down-turn in the economy, the most vulnerable groups, often youth, pay the highest price. The “last in—first out” syndrome.

**Equal Opportunities.** Getting an equal start in education is a key to getting an equal start in employment. Gender inequalities are pervasive. Women as well as men require special attention in making the all-important school to work transition. Yet in so many areas, too many young people today face a world of unequal opportunities.

**Employment creation.** Because we know that supply side interventions alone will not work. Even if you invest in the right training and skills for the job market, jobs have to be there in the first place. And there are a number of avenues the ILO and the World Bank, for example, have pursued together, including labour-intensive investment policies.

As we begin the next two days of discussions, there are three key areas for further progress on which I would welcome your views.

First, engagement. We need to find more ways to better involve young people in the Network. The youth around this table are a tremendous resource. These young people are not just leaders for tomorrow, they are partners for today. Engage them. Listen. Build together. Let’s get beyond lip service. After all, we organizations—the UN, World Bank and the ILO—can come up with good technical proposals – but they must be rooted in a buy-in from young people themselves and their organizations. And let us all avoid stigmatizing the victim. Unemployment is the problem. Youth are the solution. What experiences and good practices in policy formulation can be scaled up? How do we factor in the diversity of situations worldwide.

Second, advocacy. This panel has put forward good ideas, constructive approaches and solutions—but the youth employment challenge has not been sufficiently acknowledged and addressed in the world today. We need to do more to drive home the message that without significantly expanding youth employment, the overall international development agenda will fail to eradicate poverty, build a healthy middle class and bring security and stability to families and communities.

Youth employment, as this panel said in your 2001 policy recommendations, is not just a sectoral policy amongst others, but rather the key to unlocking solutions to a host of other issues, such as HIV/AIDS, migration and peace building.

And third, action. We have to find new ways to take the work of the panel to the next level—and explore how we can all work together to bring the solid political and policy foundation which you have laid for the past two years, into a new phase of implementation on the ground.

Young people and political leaders are giving us the same message: UN Resolutions, policy recommendations and working groups are fine – but where are the jobs? Where are the actors? What is the action?

In the end, this Network will be judged by action and results. This is our common challenge. So thank you again for your time and your commitment. I look forward to the dialogue. Let’s get to work.

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