

Message to entrants to 2018 intermediate school age essay competition

In my years at the United Nations Development Programme, I was very involved with the development of the new global agenda for sustainable development. It seeks to maintain and advance human progress within the boundaries set by nature. This means doing business unusual, as “development” as we have known it has placed ecosystems on which life depends in jeopardy.

“The 2030 Agenda is aspirational and future-oriented. Young people would not only be the beneficiaries of its successful implementation; they must be drivers of it. That means understanding its potential to advance the three strands of sustainable development – the economic, social, and environmental – simultaneously, and determining to be part of the solution to the problems which stand in the way of achieving the Sustainable Development Goals.

“Chief among those obstacles are the intractable conflicts and human rights violations which have led to the forced displacement of 68.5 million people in our world today – that is close to one in every 110 people in the world. Countless hundreds of millions of others are threatened by climate change from more severe storms and droughts and rising sea levels. Those phenomena too will cause more displacement, and the most vulnerable are most impacted by such events.

As well, close to 800 million people continue to live in extreme poverty, and a similar number go to bed hungry every night. The growth in global employment opportunities continues to fall short of the numbers of people entering the workforce each year. Youth are the most impacted by the global job and opportunity shortfall. In too many countries there are too few positive opportunities for youth. Yet societies and economies can only benefit if youth have full access to education and training, health services, and decent work and incomes.

My challenge to each of you entering the essay competition is to look at the interlinked global challenges our world faces and identify where you think a major change of course is required. What needs to be done to build peaceful and inclusive societies? What are the top priorities for climate action? What will the world of work look like with the spread of artificial intelligence and robotics? How can we guarantee decent lives and opportunity for all? My hope is that in thinking about the answers to these challenges, each of you will be motivated to play your part in building a better world.



Rt Hon Helen Clark.