

**Madame, Chairperson**

**Excellency, Mr. K.Y. Amowako**

**U.N. Under-Secretary and Executive Secretary of ECA**

**Distinguished Guests,**

**Dear Youth Participants,**

**Ladies and Gentlemen,**

**At the outset, allow me to thank the UNECA for inviting me to take part in this symposium of paramount importance for Africa- the reinstatement of the historic role young men and women of Africa played in the making of Africa in the past.**

**Most of all I was delighted in that this fourth African Development Forum has peaked up an appropriate topic for deliberation because for long perhaps from day one since Africa has established itself as free and independent continent, youth issues were either non existent or of negligible importance in Africa. But paradoxically enough, it is the youth that played a pivotal role in the liberation of Africa from the quagmires of colonialism; it is the youthful visions and aspirations of the sons and daughters of Africa that had become a post- colonial history. And when the worst became worst in Africa, it is the youth, in most cases without their wills and participation, that were cast in to the nightmares of conflict, refugee, and all other ills of Africa. Yet again, surprisingly enough, for decades in Africa, research institutes, GOs and NGOs, among others, had left no time spared, no stone unturned in**

**pleading in the name of the young men and women of Africa. To no avail, except such clamors were only to fit in to phrases like: Africa is a *young* continent; that Africa is the continent of *youth*; that the *youth is a driving force* or *a catalyst*; that the young generation is *the inheritor* of tomorrow's Africa.... and so on and so forth. But in a continent where its youth are marginalized, in the continent where youth are denied the opportunity for leadership, participation and decision making, it is not fair to call upon them to inherit, to drive and to lead what Africa has best offered them so far namely poverty, conflict, ignorance, backwardness, unemployment last but not least HIV/AIDS.**

**It is therefore with great hope and conviction that this fourth African Development Forum would get rid of the hitherto existing pseudo-perceptions of the youth that we know and speak on behalf of our sons and daughters, while they should passively listen and accept us. And consequently, by earnestly transforming that patronizing sense of *Africa*, that parochial sense of *Development* and that pastime sense of *Forum* into a forum in which the futures of Africa shall participate and dialogue in the making of Africa's societal transformation and benefit from their active and innovative participation.**

**I would like in this regard therefore to most welcome the initiatives of UNECA, UNICEF and AU for recognizing the vital role of the youth. Especially at the turn of the new millennium and in line with the initiatives of the MDG and NEPAD, it is appropriate to give the youth of Africa their legitimate place and casting a light on the dark part of our continent - a continent that having disallowed its untapped young**

**human potential remained backward. As we all know, at this very moment of human history that is fast globalizing, it is wrong to alienate this crucial sector of Africa's social strata because a youth less aspiration and hope engender a hopeless youth - hopeless youth that were vastly forced to be scapegoats of ill-fated ambitions in certain corners of our continent. On the other side, providing a space for youth to nurture by themselves, for themselves and to themselves the culture of tolerance, peace and democracy would undoubtedly enable us to see better tomorrow, because a youthful hope creates a hopeful youth.**

**Distinguishes Guests,**

**Ladies and Gentlemen,**

**Dear Youth Participants,**

**Today the world community at large and states in particular are advancing the popular maxim of democracy and good governance. This is tantamount to saying that countries that not only consent with but also allow their citizens especially the grassroots to participate in the all rounded affairs in deciding the fates of their existence as a commonwealth and as a civic society, would end up only to prove themselves isolated and marginalized from the globalizing and integrating world. This sounds loud in an Africa whose bulk of population is below the age of 30. Thus it is self evident that creating favorable conditions with a view to enabling young Africans participate in the democratic and governance processes of the continent is a precondition that needs to be strategized. The absence of strategies and mechanism that cannot foresee**

**the unfolding of assets and talents of our children and youth would fail to realize great initiatives being taken by Africa and the wider world.**

**In deed today a lot has been achieved since the bye-gone era of contentions and conflicts of the cold war, supplanted by the environment of democracy. The latter being far from complete - as it still remains to address issues that matter us most-the young Africans. We are therefore on the crossroads of the second millennium that demands the opening up of a new chapter. This chapter should blend the vibrant history of the African youth from all walks of life of the golden struggle for independence, sovereignty and justice with the challenges and opportunities of democratization, good governance and globalization for progressing Africa.**

### **Ladies and Gentlemen**

**The situation in Ethiopia is not different from that of the youth in other parts of Africa. Like many developing countries, Ethiopia's population is predominantly young. Out of the over 70 million, 17.9 million or 28.2% were youth within the age bracket of 15-29. Among the youth population 17.9% were living in the urban areas where as the great majority, 82.1% were living in rural areas. The current projection further reveals that by the year 2005, the youth population will increase to 21 million.**

**The Ethiopian youth have been playing an active role in safeguarding the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ethiopia. They have also played a vanguard role in the struggle against authoritarian and dictatorial regimes contributing to the unfolding of today's democratic process in Ethiopia.**

**Thus, in order to alleviate the major problems highlighted above, and other constraints of the youth and considering the immense potential of the youth as a vital resource for peace, development and democratization process in Ethiopia, the Government of the Federal Democratization Republic of Ethiopia attached great importance and special attention to the issues of youth and hence took various policy measures by creating relevant institution.**

**The creation of the Ministry on its own could not solve the existing problems. Hence the Ministry of Youth, Sports & Culture has formulated a *National Youth Policy* of Ethiopia with the active participation of the Ethiopian youths. The foundation of our Policy rests on the basic principles enshrined in the Constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia. In this respect the Policy stipulates that the youth should actively participate in the building of democracy and good governance and fairly benefit from the results. In addition to this, the Policy stresses the importance of an integrated and organized movement with a view to respecting their freedom of association, protection of their rights and benefits, on one hand, and the benefits of such an organization for the better mobilization of their energies directed towards bringing a viable democratic system, good governance**

**and accelerated development, on the other. Moreover, the Policy principles underline the necessity for youth capacity building that would enable them to develop their professional competence and skills to consolidate youth empowerment.**

**Accordingly, the Ministry is embarking up on the preparation of strategic plan to address the broad and complex issues that affect this active and productive cohort of the society - the youth. The government is hugely investing in education and training, health and rural development, ICT and small and micro enterprises, all of which have youth at the center of their focus.**

**Excellencies,**

**Ladies and Gentlemen,**

**The National Youth Policy of Ethiopia indicates in its implementation strategy the creation of youth associations, unions and forum at national, continental and international levels. The Policy also encourages the establishment of *Africa Youth Union*. It is believed therefore that these and other mechanisms would undoubtedly contribute towards the consolidation of sub-regional, continental and international solidarity, partnership and the creation of Africa youth movement. A movement which I believe will make a difference in addressing questions that matter most to Africa- food security, poverty, gender, environment, unemployment, HIV/AIDS & SRH, democracy and good governance, among many others.**

**In this regard, continental and international commitments, friendship, partnership and solidarity within and with the rest of the world will contribute a lot in addressing the problems of the youth in particular and the society in general.**

**This Development Forum has greater meaning for the youth of Africa. It is only when African states could be able to mobilize their young men and women in the social, political and economic areas that the Forum would have a lasting and substantial effect. The participation of youth in the Forum is of paramount importance for its sustainability. This participation gives sense only when in the process of African transformation the youth should take the drivers seat. They should shoulder responsibility and play lead role and address issues critical to themselves and their societies. To this end, participants would design course of actions that promote and strengthen partnership and solidarity at national, sub-continental, continental and global levels.**

**In conclusion, while I am refraining to prescribe recommendations to youth participants of this symposium, I have the deepest conviction that they are capable of producing such recommendations for, by and to themselves. I would like to express the commitment of my Ministry to seriously integrate the outcomes of this dialogue into our policies and strategies.**

**Finally, I wish the participants of the Pre-ADF IV Youth Symposium a successful and fruitful deliberation.**

**I thank you!**