



International Youth Day 2017 commemorated by UN Youth Envoy in Iraq

12 August 2017 – Baghdad, Iraq

International Youth Day, commemorated around the world under the 2017 theme “Youth Building Peace” was celebrated today with a special event in Baghdad, Iraq, hosted by the Ministry of Youth and Sports in the presence of the United Nations Secretary-General’s Envoy on Youth, Ms. Jayathma Wickramanayake. The event marked the first international mission of the new Envoy and the first International Youth Day since UN Secretary-General António Guterres took office with a commitment to placing young people at the centre of his agenda for conflict prevention and sustaining peace.

As one of the most youthful countries in the world with over 60 percent of the population under the age of 25, Iraq – despite the many challenges it faces - is uniquely positioned to harness the potential of its young generation to promote peace and prosperity. Challenges will remain however, and continue to obstruct a path to development and peace if they are not matched by offering young people real opportunities for education, employment and civic participation.

The event, organized in partnership with the UNFPA Country Office in Baghdad, convened over 1,000 young people from all over Iraq and was attended by His Excellency Mr. Abed Al-Hussein Abtan, Minister of Youth and Sports of Iraq, and Ms. Lise Grande, UN Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator and Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General in Iraq.

Speaking at the Iraqi national event to mark International Youth Day, Ms. Wickramanayake said *"Today, thousands of young women and men work tirelessly, often under very dangerous conditions and with very little support or recognition, to build peace and promote security for all. They are the most valuable force we have to shape a better future."* In a message directed to the young people of Iraq, Ms. Wickramanayake said, "The United Nations is with you and I, as your Envoy, will do everything within my power to ensure that your voices are heard."

H.E. Mr. Abtan called on Iraqi youth “to play the true role in contributing to all aspects of life in order to create an advanced Iraq that conveys a positive picture to the world.”

“Reconciliation is—right now and without doubt— the highest priority in Iraq. The key to ensuring that reconciliation is sustainable is ensuring that youth are involved in every reconciliation meeting, every reconciliation initiative and every reconciliation conference,” said Ms. Grande.

On the occasion of International Youth Day, UN Secretary-General António Guterres said in a video statement, “I am committed to the empowerment and inclusion of every young person around the world. Empowered young men and women can play a critical role in preventing conflicts and ensuring sustainable peace.”

Around the world, young people gathered at hundreds of events to commemorate International Youth and recognize the ways in which young people contribute to peacebuilding.

While in Baghdad, Ms. Wickramanayake met with young people from different backgrounds to discuss issues affecting Iraqi youth with a particular focus on young women, internally displaced young people, and young people who are neither in employment, education, or training. In addition, she met with the Officials of the Ministry of Youth and the Heads and Officials of UN Country team and UNAMI and discussed further avenues to strengthen youth focused programs.

Marking the day at UN headquarters in New York, young people joined UN officials in showcasing how young people contribute to peace.

About International Youth Day

International Youth Day is a celebration of the role of young women and men as essential partners in promoting human rights and development. Marked annually on August 12th, the theme of this year's International Youth Day is "*Youth Building Peace*" to celebrate and promote young women and men peacebuilders who work tirelessly to build peace and promote security for all. The theme supports the increasing attention, policy and programming on youth, peace and security, including the landmark Security Council Resolution 2250 on youth, peace and security adopted in December 2015.

About the UN Secretary-General's Envoy on Youth

Ms. Jayathma Wickramanayake was appointed as the UN Secretary-General's Envoy on Youth in June 2017 at the age of 26. In this role, Ms. Wickramanayake works to expand the UN's youth engagement and advocacy efforts across all four pillars of work – sustainable development, human rights, peace and security and humanitarian action – and serves as a representative of and advisor to the Secretary-General. Originally from Sri Lanka, Ms. Wickramanayake has worked extensively on youth development and participation, and has played a key role in transforming the youth development sector in her home country.

For more information on International Youth Day, please visit: <http://www.un.org/en/events/youthday/>

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