



EUROPEAN UNION
DELEGATION TO THE REPUBLIC OF UGANDA

**Speech by Ambassador Attilio PACIFICI
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to the Republic of Uganda**

**International Youth Day 2018
Design Hub, Bugolobi, Kampala, 10 August 2018**

Ladies and Gentlemen, dear all,

All protocol observed

Thank you for being here today!

We are here to celebrate the International Youth Day 2018. This year's theme is **'Safe Spaces for Youth'**.

The chosen theme reflects the commitment of the UN and its Member States to investing in youth worldwide

regardless of their ethnicity, gender, age, and personal beliefs. This commitment is also reflected in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, especially through **Goal 11**, which emphasizes the need for the provision of space towards **inclusive and sustainable urbanization**.

'**Safe spaces**' can be interpreted in many different ways. It can be understood as freedom of speech, democracy, having a political voice, expressing one's identity, promoting tolerance and peace, accommodating business creation and providing incubators for small and medium enterprises.

To the European Union, '**Safe Spaces for Youth**' covers a variety of themes which will guide the two Creative Talks sessions of today.

'Safe Spaces for Youth' means to us:

1. Access to **cooperation spaces**, where knowledge, resources and experiences can be shared to enable more and more young people across the country to

create and sustain jobs. In these spaces young entrepreneurs may seek guidance from each other on how to start a business, how to develop a business or how to conduct sound financial management

2. It also means access to **culture and art spaces** where young people can freely express their identity, needs and ambitions. This especially applies to women and other vulnerable groups who will have a chance to make their voices heard
3. It means access to **technology hubs** where young people can access information and network without being restricted by physical location or socio-economic background
4. And, very importantly, it also means having access to **digital and civic spaces**, in which young people can get guidance on their legal and civic rights as well as knowledge and the tools to participate in and report on issues relating to governance, democracy and human rights

Today I will not bother anyone talking about the long relationship between Uganda and the EU, the fact that the EU was there when Uganda most needed help or about the accomplishments of our cooperation. Yet I must recognise that in spite of the good intentions and many achievements, the joint efforts of Uganda and the EU will need in the future to be directed and focussed better.

In particular we must ensure that young people have access to safe spaces – **physically and symbolically** – in which they can express their needs, take part in shaping development initiatives and benefit from them.

Uganda has one of the world's **youngest populations** but unfortunately also one of the **highest youth unemployment** rates. While efforts and political readiness to act are reflected in the efforts by Government¹, civil society and development partners, these efforts still fail to bring the intended benefits to the youths.

¹ In Uganda, through various initiatives including the National Development Plan II, the National Youth Policy, the National Employment Policy for Uganda, the Skilling Uganda Strategic Plan 2012-2022, National Youth Council),

Most employed youths work in low quality, informal sectors, lack access to training and information, and are under-employed, meaning that even with a full-time job, they cannot properly provide for themselves and their families. Often the lack of success is not a question of lack of will or perseverance but rather lack of guidance and knowledge on how to successfully create and sustain jobs.

Very worrying, many initiatives, **like the Youth Fund**, have difficulties in extending access to finance beyond the area around Kampala², which is a striking contradiction with the reality of **80% youths in Uganda living in rural areas**³.

As EU Delegation, we try to engage with youths throughout the country in an effort to promote peace, social cohesion, vocational training, and access to financial assistance to start up or develop businesses.

However, there are so many aspects that we are not addressing well enough. For instance, we should do better

² NIP MTR (2014-2020)

³ https://uganda.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/YoungPeople_FactSheet%20%2811%29_0.pdf

and more in promoting the setting up of supportive networks to help youths after they graduate from formal and non-formal education, as well as when they invest time, money and ambitions to become entrepreneurs.

These are major challenges that the EU is ready to contribute to address. My key message is that the main stakeholders need to create a **nation-wide environment** in which youths can thrive like you. Ugandan youth is a powerful force of 32 million people, spread across the country, with unparalleled potential to constructively drive and achieve social and economic changes.

This is why we are here today: to **start a conversation on how we can ensure that development initiatives reach not just youths in Kampala**, not just those in the formal sector, **but all youths in Uganda**.

We are here to listen, to seek views and to understand in particular about “**safe spaces**” such as this one in Bugolobi.

- How useful is this space to you?

- Should it be improved to respond better to your needs?
- What do you need more?
- How can young people in less advanced and fortunate areas of Uganda be sensitised to available opportunities and supported to profit of them?
- Can this Bugolobi space model be exported and replicated elsewhere in the country?

As a final message, I must recall that at the **EU-AU Summit in Abidjan last year**, leaders consulted and engaged with youths from Africa and Europe. The core conclusion was that Europe and Africa both need to invest much more in youths.

The recommendations of the Summit - recalled behind me - were broad and ambitious. They were the result, as I said earlier, for the first time of an innovative way of engaging among European and African partners no longer

limited to (relatively) aging leaders but also including young people!

Uganda was represented by one of today's panellists, **Brian Mutebi**, who helped identify the priority areas that youths brought to the attention of European and African leaders to focus their cooperation on: education and skills, governance, peace and resilience, environmental sustainability, culture and arts, and job creation.

It is important to continue participating to this process and prepare yourselves to lead it. Learning about opportunities and exchanging information with one another, working together, sensitising other youths living in areas less well connected to the global world, applying for higher education scholarships such as the EU ERASMUS program, are ways to do so.

This brings me back again to the **safe spaces** for you to come together, engage and prosper and ultimately to help you to prepare to be the leaders of tomorrow. The

importance of this space in Bugolobi should not be underestimated and we should reflect on how youths elsewhere in Uganda could be given access to similar spaces.

Please take active part in the discussions and make your voice heard.

Thank you

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