

Young people and our future



The June 2012 United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (UNCSD, Rio+20) will constitute a milestone in the international agenda. The decisions that will be taken there with respect to the green economy, eradication of poverty and governance of sustainable development will continue to commit all the stakeholders (states, local communities, businesses, NGOs, individuals, etc.) to following a path that leads towards progress that is more respectful of the great balances between environmental, economic and social factors.

The globalisation movement is unprecedented and has coincided with a similarly unmatched phenomenon of urbanisation. As of today, half of the world's people live in towns and cities. Planetary urbanization presents new challenges to the environment, while offering at the same time a promising source of solutions. The issue is to identify the conditions in which the world's population, primarily urban dwellers, can pursue their material development while respecting human dignity and the generations to come.

Twenty years after the first Rio Conference, which gathered more than 100 Heads of State and was the origin of conventions on climate change and biodiversity, Rio+20 is the occasion to restate the importance of these issues, to make known the state of global awareness and to reaffirm the need for a universal commitment.

Young people aged between 16 and 29 make up almost a quarter of the world's population. They are the youth of the planet and as such are a vital part of humankind. What distinguishes the new generation is its acute sense of belonging to a planetary community that shares the same fate. More than a billion people, mostly young, use social media and make a major contribution to ensuring that every crisis, whether social, economic or environmental, becomes a topic of worldwide discussion.

With the opening of Rio+20 it is therefore essential to shed fresh light on the expectations of the world's youth with respect of sustainable development. For this purpose, Nomadéis and Fondapol joined forces to create ScenaRio 2012 to carry out the first worldwide survey making it possible to listen to the voice of young people with regard to sustainable development.

We were delighted to be sponsored by the United Nations and a range of partners, institutions, corporations and foundations. The survey was conducted on an unprecedented scale. We collected the views of 30,000 young people aged between 16 and 29 from 30 different countries on five continents.

At the same time we asked 100 prominent people with an intellectual or professional commitment at the global level to let us share their vision of the issues linking the environment, development and governance with a view to preparing the ground together for the Rio+20 Conference.

Young people have a full understanding of today's world; they know how to identify what promises and opportunities it holds. They advocate for an ideal world but they do not live outside present day realities: access to education, housing, jobs, water and energy services, etc. Aware that tensions over the environment are often the product of a clash between



the ideal world and reality, they express their wish for increased protection of natural resources while supporting a vision of human reality that places greater emphasis on quality and rejects the idea that progress is simply a matter of economic growth or technological innovation.

The world's youth wish to experience the benefits of development in its multiple forms. This implies taking into account territorial, political and cultural specificities.

This publication, to be presented at the Rio+20 Conference on the occasion of a number of official events organised with our United Nations partners¹,

suggests a number of paths to be explored. It seeks in particular to initiate a dialogue between generations, highlighting the views expressed by young people and backing them up with quotations from interviews conducted with 100 prominent people who have rallied around our cause and actively participated in our initiative. This study is published in five languages and demonstrates our determination to promote thought and discussion not only at a global level but also in the setting of the new world. It will be expanded in a more developed publication that we will produce before the end of the year.

Young people and sustainable development? It's hard to imagine a more fundamental issue. ■

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¹ June 11th: "Youth Blast", the official youth conference for Rio+20 organised by the UNCSD Major Group for Children and Youth (MGCY); June 19th: Reception in presence of H.S.H. Prince Albert II of Monaco, patron of the ScenaRio 2012 Project; June 20th: official meeting organised at the RioCentro convention centre in partnership with the United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR).