

In Iraq, UN Youth Envoy says young people are 'most valuable force we have to shape a better future'

12 August 2017 – As [International Youth Day](#) events kicked off worldwide today, at a special event in Iraq, the United Nations Secretary-General's Envoy on Youth, Jayathma Wickramanayake, pledged to do everything in her power to ensure the voices of youths, including those working to build peace, are heard.

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, Ms. Wickramanayake, told the event, which was hosted by the Ministry of Youth and Sports of Iraq.

The event, in Baghdad, is part of the [newly-appointed](#) Envoy's first international mission. Her activities have touched on the theme of the 2017 edition of the Day, 'Youth Building Peace,' dedicated to celebrating young people's contributions to conflict prevention and transformation as well as inclusion, social justice, and sustainable 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.

[Young people] are the most valuable force we have to shape a better future, Ms. Wickramanayake said, and added, in a [message](#) directed to the young people of Iraq: The United Nations is with you and I, as your Envoy, will do everything within my power to ensure that your voices are heard.

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

Reconciliation is right now and without doubt– the highest priority in Iraq, said Ms. Grande and 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.

For his part, 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.”

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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 the UN assistance Mission for Iraq ([UNAMI](#)) and discussed further avenues to strengthen youth focused programmes.