



PRESS RELEASE

Japan pledges renewed support to reintegrate criminal and at-risk Somali youth back into communities

Nairobi, 30 August 2012 – Empowering Somali youth by providing opportunities for work and education was identified as a Government of Japan priority when it announced the renewal of its support to a UN-led programme steering “at-risk” youth away from violent or criminal activities today.

Japan announced today it will contribute ¥476,780,000 (USD 6 million) to the Youth for Change programme in addition to the 6 million USD it has already contributed in 2011/2012. The funds will go towards supporting the extension and expansion of the programme in Somaliland, Puntland and south central Somalia, and improving the programmatic interventions to include support for the criminal justice systems.

“Our (Japan’s) assistance anywhere is targeted at enhancing human security through empowerment. We want to give the vulnerable Somali youth a chance to rethink and get useful training. The results of this programme to date have been encouraging. We want the re-born youth to be change agents and spread positive attitudes among the wider youths (in Somalia),” said Japanese ambassador, Toshihisa Takata, during the signing ceremony for the contribution of funds.

The Youth for Change Programme is a joint initiative between the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) and the International Labour Organization (ILO) which seeks to contain and prevent violent conflict by engaging youth at risk through the creation of employment and livelihoods and educational opportunities at the district level. The programme currently has ongoing activities in Somaliland, Puntland and Mogadishu.

Since it began in 2011, a total of 1,668 youth aged 10 to 35 have been identified by community members, enrolled in the six- nine month programmes in the above three regions. Through specialized basic education, skills training and psychosocial support, the programme is designed to bring about a change in mindset, behaviour, attitude, opportunities, and interaction with the community in individuals who are currently engaged with criminal and violent activities; for many, participation is a part of an individual’s parole conditions or alternative sentencing for petty crimes.

“Supporting education and employment means youth have more choices and are more empowered to make the ‘right’ decisions. Programmes like this one are about providing more opportunities to at-risk youth, to give them alternatives to pursuing a life of crime. The strong community support for this programme is also crucial as these young men and women enter back into society and seek jobs,” UNDP Resident Representative Mark Bowden said at the ceremony.

The above 18 caseload is managed by UNDP, while under-18s are managed by UNICEF. Youth are enrolled in ‘peace and social transformation curriculum’ which includes: social skills, peace-building, rule of law,

governance and human rights. These are complemented by sports for peace, Islamic religion teaching, art/drama, community volunteer activities and health education. The under 18 curriculum consists of life skills-based education. Apart from skills training and education, adolescents are counseled and mentored on a regular basis to help build their resilience and systematically reintegrated back into the community.

The economic reintegration component of the programme is led by ILO. The beneficiaries gain skills for self or wage employment offering participants opportunities for entrepreneurship, cooperative and vocational skills, with supported in-kind start up grants and employment intensive work, which provides short-term employment for 3 days in a week for each beneficiary.

The programme is widely supported by the communities in which it is active (Buraq in Somaliland, Bosaso and Galkayo in Puntland and Mogadishu), largely due to its community-led nature. District Safety Committees, elders and local courts are involved from participant selection and then throughout the process, providing mentorship for the youth throughout the programme supporting the case management and assist in coordination of all stakeholders.

One of the highlights of the program has been the complete turnaround of a significant number of youth from the engagement in violent activities. Says Salman (17), “I want to continue my life with a pen and not a gun”.

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ABOUT ILO: ILO, through the employment for peace and development programme, in Somalia contributes to stability, peace and economic development by supporting the creation of decent work opportunities and developing community, public and private sector capacities to sustain equitable employment and livelihood opportunities. ILO programme approach enables an immediate and positive development process addressing the prevailing infrastructure, livelihoods and employment crisis to be set in motion unlocking the economic recovery process. For more information about ILO and its work visit: www.ilo.org.