

At Youth's Crossroads

Nathalie Mbala's speech

Young people in Cameroon are seeking a dynamic and even somewhat patriotic identity, while striving to be loyal to institutions and actively involving themselves in humanitarian causes.

Because of conditions of extreme poverty though, an equal chance is far from being guaranteed to all youth.

Youth are confronted with the recurrent issue of unemployment. But sometimes in spite of all of their skills and know-how, many young adults are not able to get a job when they have finished their studies. Sometimes they have no other choice but to do menial jobs for years on end, such as selling cold water.

Many of those who finally find a job only get it not because they are qualified but because someone that they knew pulled some strings for them. That's how we can find doctors who studied fine arts. "We are someone behind someone", but we're no longer someone compared with our skills and know-how or our qualities.

In our families, extreme poverty becomes so difficult to live with that many people lose their dignity and are forced to beg.

When the biggest problem is having access to health care, many children and young people do not even have the opportunity to grow up and make the most out of their life.

Life has become so expensive that many families can no longer afford to send their children to school. And sometimes young people who want to go to school compete with each other to get jobs in farming to be able to pay their tuition. Professors, when they ask their students for something and they answer that they don't have it, often say "Poor people don't go to school."

Because of massive unemployment and difficult living conditions, many young people are exposed to drugs, prostitution and other deviant practices that tend to weaken even more their chances of escaping from this world.

The AIDS pandemic situation is today one of those sprawling curses that is smothering our youth.

Because of the unemployment rate, a father who loses his job is often overwhelmed by the responsibility of being the family's breadwinner. That can become a conflict in the family and lead him to shirk his responsibilities, to start a new life with a woman who has a job, hoping to survive like this. That leads to families being split apart from their children, each family member fighting for his own survival, even at the price of his life.

Young people today feel that they are forced to adopt negative values and think that this is a way of survival and making their voice heard. But that actually makes the situation much worse, and they become people who society refuses to deal with, except to punish their bad behaviour.

These young people however are merely the result of social injustices.