International Youth Day Statement - Lynn Hastings

The theme of this year's International Youth Day - *Transforming Food Systems: Youth Innovation for Human and Planetary Health* - is of crucial relevance to Palestine. Young Palestinians share a strong bond with the land, not only as it concerns food production and livelihoods, but also as a source of national identity and belonging.

Anas Rabaa, a fresh graduate from Al-Quds University, set up the first nursery in the West Bank to commercially produce and sell seedlings of the akkoub, a plant used in traditional Palestinian cuisine, using modern production and irrigation technologies. Anas has not only generated income for himself but also opened a new value chain of commercial production of the traditional crop.

The UN Agencies in Palestine support young people as innovators and leaders to develop systems of food production, enhance sustainable agriculture and cultivate innovative solutions such as hydroponics and aquaponics agriculture. Particularly in the context of occupation, the land and its resources are essential for young Palestinians navigating their way to a secure and independent future.

While directly supporting Sustainable Development Goal 2 - Zero Hunger, progress related to food systems underpins achievements in poverty reduction and health, and is fundamental to the creation of decent jobs and sustainable economic growth. In that context, we partner with universities and the private sector to enhance employability in agribusinesses and to stimulate investments to create green jobs that empower young people as agents of change.

We mark International Youth Day at a challenging time for Palestine and for the world. COVID-19 is placing unprecedented strain on our food systems, disrupting markets and supply chains for small-scale farmers around the world, and threatening peace and stability, particularly among the most vulnerable and marginalized populations.

UN agencies will be celebrating this day with various initiatives online and offline, which I encourage you to follow.

Let us use today as a reminder that we depend on food systems for human and planetary health and well-being and we cannot achieve it without our youth.