

## **Youth Representative Andrew Lesa's Speech: Climate and Land**

**CSO Open Dialogue, Plenary Hall, UNCCD COP13**

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Imagine a world where consulting youth was not limited to just academics or young professionals. Where it extended to young farmers, migrant and seasonal workers, indigenous groups, digital nomads and startup owners, the disability sector, etc.

Ours is a vision of diversity because this is the surest way to ensure transformative dialogue in order to move beyond token consultation efforts that change little.

Nearly half of all young people are currently unemployed. This pending crisis represents an opportunity for the green revolution. Green jobs and green technology speak directly to young people.

Climate change is our defining moment. As a generation, it falls upon us to ensure that we leave behind a better planet. We are the largest cohort of young people at any one time on earth in the history of mankind. This is no coincidence. Let's rise to the challenge and defeat the odds. It is simply not enough for civil society to support youth involvement on their own. Government, business, academia and other partners should underscore the value of having young people at the centre of the equation. As those who inherit the future, it is imperative that we are prepared and that we thrive today. It is equally crucial that we are given the tools to preserve traditional wisdom and heritage so that we don't lose these precious treasures in the haste to modernise.

Ruralisation is desperately needed to combat the harmful effects of urbanisation. Incentives to bring young job seekers back to rural communities will help inspire the revival of rural society as higher living costs in urban areas deter us. This can only happen with quality skills training, knowledge sharing, capacity building and giving young people direct access to policy and decisions.

But ultimately, none of this is possible without the commitment of all stakeholders. This might be the first youth forum at the UN convention to combat desertification, but it certainly won't be the last. We are determined to build on the success of this maiden journey and to go forward together in all of our passion. Ours is a generation with fewer barriers of separation than ever before. This is where our strength lies. We are making history in this room today.

I wish to thank those who helped make this possible. The Government of China, UNCCD, and other parties.

But most of all, I wish to acknowledge my fellow youth participants for sharing your enthusiasm and experience.

Thank you very much.