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Address to YMCA World Urban Network CEO+ Conference ('Our leadership: navigating from crisis to strategic renewal')

YMCA Blue Ridge, North Carolina, Black Mountain, USA

### *YMCA Vision 2030 - 'our time, our moment'*

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Dear friends, you have invited me to speak to you about YMCA Vision 2030 as our shared strategy and plan, and our 'North Star'. It's the star that we all see when we look up to the night sky, wherever we are in the world.



My message to you today is on the slide: This is 'our time, our moment' ....

It's our time, our moment, our opportunity and our imperative to make a collective YMCA impact on our world, to a level that we haven't reached since the Second World War.

And that impact doesn't mean one YMCA doing a good thing, and another doing a good thing there. No - it's the cumulative, combined and multiplied impact of an entire global Movement, pulling together.

Why? Because the world needs to change, and the YMCA also needs to change if it's going to make a meaningful contribution to shaping the better world that we all seek.

A world in which the UN Sustainable Development Goals are met.

A world which - in the words that we all chose together in Vision 2030 - is, I quote, 'just, sustainable, equitable and inclusive'.

On Planet YMCA, at least from where I experience it after Covid, Vision 2030 is the thing on everybody's lips, and I think and hope it's the thing in everybody's heads and everybody's hearts.

How far we have come ....

Think back just 10 months - to July 2022 and the 20<sup>th</sup> YMCA World Council in Aarhus.



Something extraordinary happened - it was a first in my more-than-30 years of service in the YMCA.

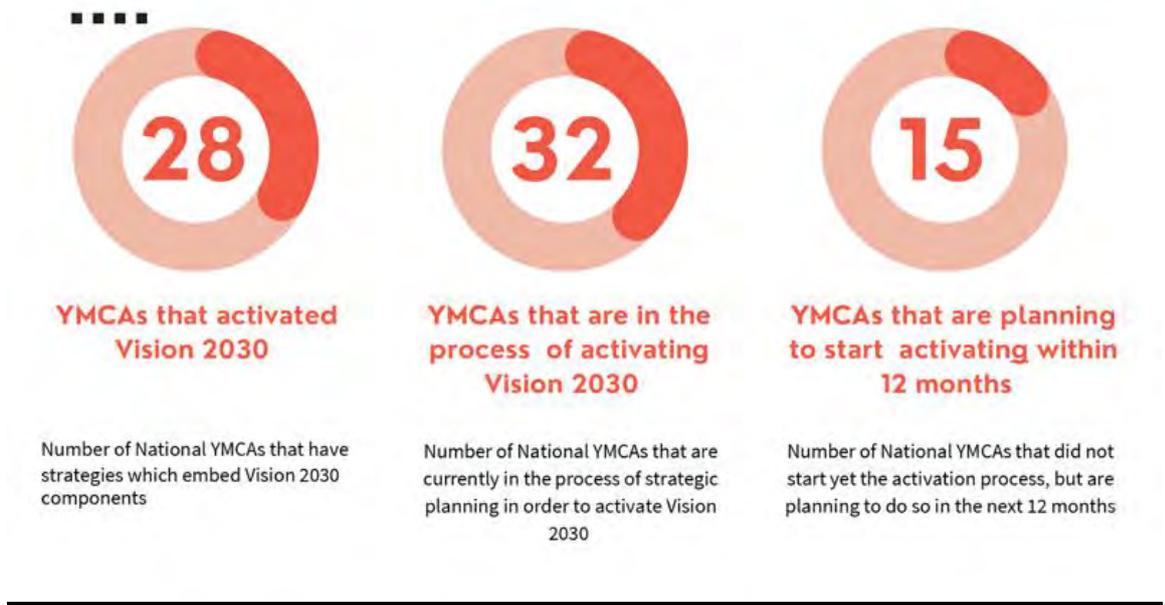
The worldwide YMCA Movement unanimously agreed and adopted a worldwide strategy and plan: Vision 2030.

It was a historic moment. Most of you were there.

And since then, we have mobilised at all levels both to adopt and to implement our collective Vision.

All around the Movement, YMCAs are seriously asking how they can align their existing or their new plans with our shared global vision.

And there is quantifiable evidence that they are doing so.



In a research survey we carried out in February, 75 National Movements told us they had activated, were activating or would activate it.

And not only is that happening at the national level, but it’s happening in as many as half of local associations as well.

6 weeks ago, when National General Secretaries met in Estes Park, I was taken aback when YMCA of the Rockies presented its strategy and we all saw how closely aligned it was to Vision 2030.

## A GLOBAL NETWORK, A LOCAL NETWORK



**YMCA OF THE ROCKIES ELIMINATES PLASTIC: VISION 2030 PILLAR 3 (SUSTAINABLE PLANET)**

**Local YMCAs Vision 2030 Activation**  
Number of National YMCAs for each category

Category	Number of National YMCAs
All / Most	19
>50%	15
<50%	24
None	17

This local application of Vision 2030 is happening all over the Movement. I have seen it San Francisco here in the US, in Victoria in Australia, and more.

I wonder: How many of you have activated Vision 2030 yourselves?

Dear friends, we have made remarkable progress in a very short a time.

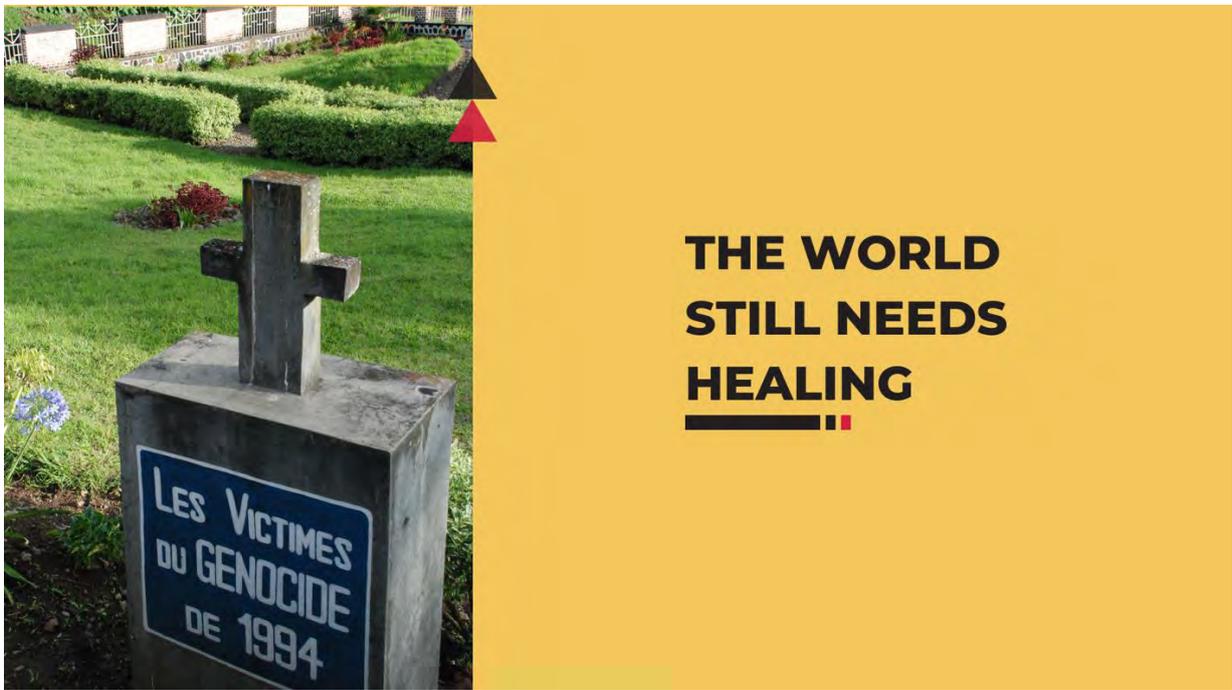
But does that mean that all is well - and that we know exactly what we're all doing together and why?

Of course not.

Sometimes I am asked if I think Vision 2030 is gaining momentum. Lots of evidence shows that it is, but I don't have a simple answer. Time will tell, and it's too early to draw conclusions.

But I hope today that I can at least articulate the reasons why it simply must happen.

Let me just insert a story I heard recently in UN circles. Some of you may already heard it.



It happened in Rwanda after the Genocide of 1994. Remember? There were at the very least half-a-million deaths.

In the aftermath, a group of UN officials were in Rwanda trying to provide some sort of emotional (or 'psycho social' support) to a people in trauma.

They arrived in Kigali with fanfare, and announced a great meeting - the venue was booked, everything was ready.

People turned up on the first day, but not the second or the third. To begin with, they made excuses, until some Rwandans were brave enough to tell the UN that this was not how they went about the process of healing. They said that we Rwandans

need to come together in our own way, and talk through our own dramas. To cry, to laugh, to beat drums - whatever it takes.

To their credit, the UN officials tried to listen and respond. It got me thinking: let's not imagine that we have the answers from outside. The answers come from inside.

And that's the value of Vision 2030 - the answers took account of what was going on outside ... but they actually came from inside.

Vision 2030 has been a kind of healing for us. It has been a space which has got us to a place where we can grow.

Dear friends, our world needs healing, and we all need healing.

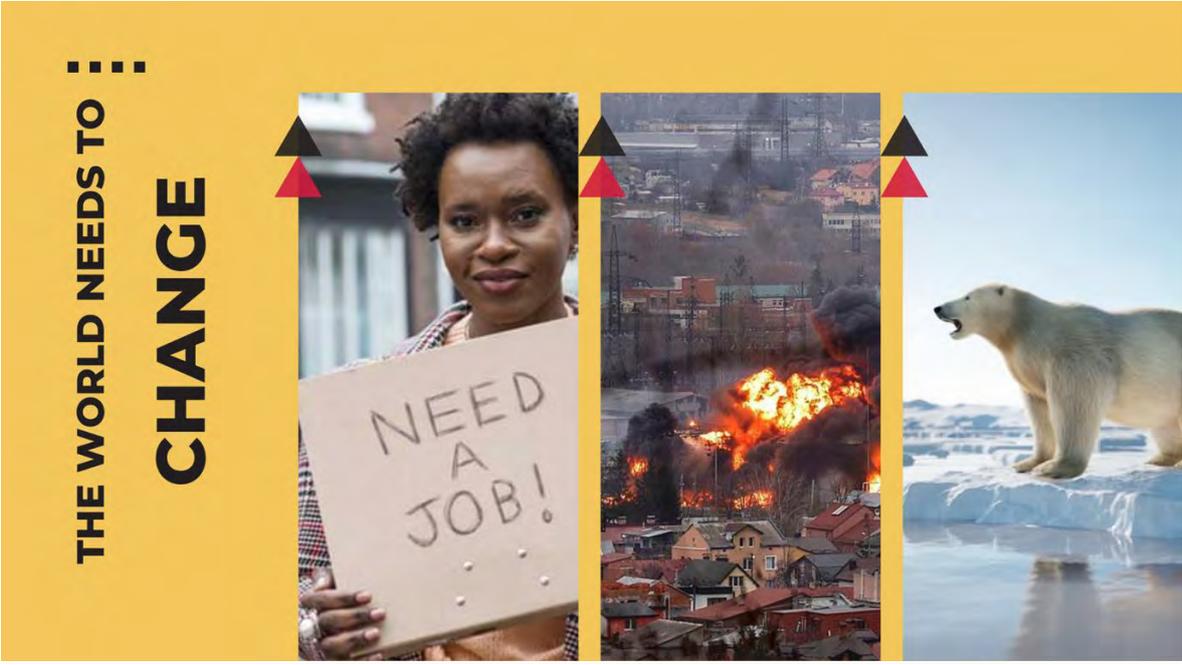
The change that we all want in the world starts with a healing process that enables us and our communities to live in harmony.

Harmony 'with self, with society, and with creation'.

Those are the very words of 'the vision' of YMCA Vision 2030.

But - as in the Rwanda story - the healing needs to be rooted in our own context, and it needs to be authentic.

I hope that Vision 2030 can provide us with the framework to bring about healing.



Of course, there has been healing already, and progress already.

We should never take them for granted: eradicating polio, reducing maternal and infant mortality, and more.

Some battles are won, and some are not. The battles against injustice, vulnerability and discrimination are still raging.



You know these challenges already: I am preaching to the converted.

But please just glance at those figures while I speak. They all look at the challenges of the world today through the lens of its 1.2 billion young people aged 15-24.

Those figures are only going in one direction - 'Up'. And (apart from the climate figure) they have all been massively accelerated by Covid.

One reason is that of course the world's population goes up and up, especially in the so-called Global South.

Let me just add one more figure that's important to me. 11 million Africans reach the age of 18 every year, while the continent only creates about 4 million jobs a year.

The demographic dividend; the demographic timebomb.

## VOX POP – A CRISIS OF DEMOCRACY AND TRUST



There's a democratic timebomb, too.

Again, I know I am preaching to the choir when I say that we are seeing an erosion - of old securities, of old institutions, and of communal trust.

We see the rise of authoritarian regimes - of populism - of the walls (often literal walls) which divide us.

Since February last year, we have seen a brutal war in the south-east of Europe which has shaken any sense we may ever have had that we are living in better times.

It is one of a number of horrible, protracted conflicts around the world, which now tend to unfold within rather than across borders.

We see crises even in the more liberal democracies, which are ever more polarised.

And most importantly, we see young people who no longer trust the institutions which govern and manage their lives.

Trust is integral to the functioning of society, and there is a vast body of research showing young people deserting public institutions in droves.

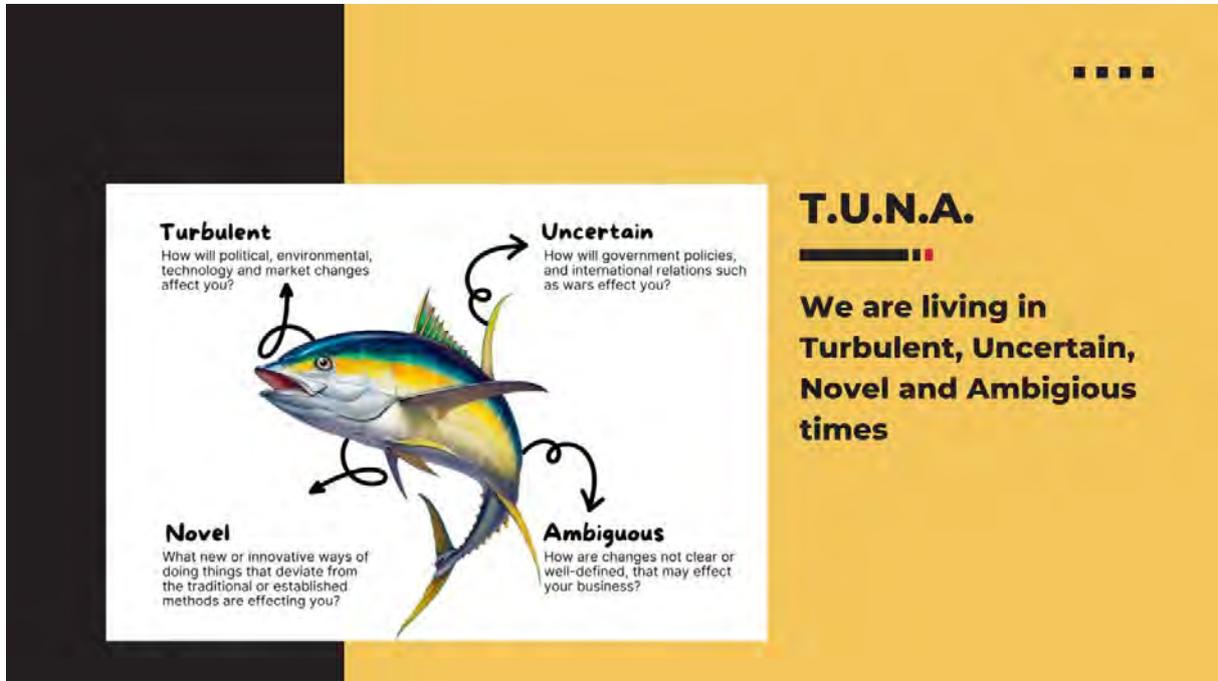
Just one fact: 75% of young people thought the US government could be trusted in 1958, and 25% in 2021.

Where do young people 'go' when they lose trust - in their government, in their church, in their schooling, their healthcare or even their family?

Some surround themselves by the walls of loud and empty sound on social media. Some retreat into themselves.

And some, as we will see, seek the places where they don't just feel safe, but they grow...

Like the YMCA. A place that is no longer afraid to talk about social justice; and which listens to who young people are, and what they want.



This seems a strange time to bring seafood and sandwich filling into the debate ....

... but we live in TUNA times. Turbulent. Uncertain. Novel. Ambiguous.

Whether you agree with me or not, whether you are directly confronted with these realities or not, you and I wake up every day with a mission.

We all know the scale of the challenge and we all know that the only solutions are shared solutions.

So how do we navigate these TUNA times?

To answer that, let me take one word from the TUNA slide: 'Novel'. Young people want to see something profoundly novel.

■ ■ ■ ■

A true revolution of values will soon cause us to question the fairness and justice of many of our past and present policies. On the one hand, we are called to play the Good Samaritan on life's roadside, but that will be only an initial act. One day we must come to see that THE WHOLE JERICHO ROAD MUST BE TRANSFORMED, so that men and women will not be constantly beaten and robbed as they make their journey on life's highway. *True compassion is more than flinging a coin to a beggar.* It comes to see that an edifice which produces beggars needs restructuring.

**Martin Luther King Jr., 4 April 1967**



**WE SEEK 'SYSTEM CHANGE'**

Please, read this remarkable quote from a hero of mine and of many millions.

It helped me explain to myself and to others why we want change.

Albert Einstein defined insanity as doing the same thing over and over, and expecting different results.

No, we need to do new things.

We need to bring about 'system change'.

Before I saw this slide, I had been talking of 'system change' for months - but I confess I was getting blank looks. People thought it was another empty management or development theory.

'System change' means changing the way the world works by addressing the root causes of what is wrong. It also means changing the way we in the YMCA work.

As simple and as complex as that. That is our dual goal - changing the world, changing ourselves.

And I say it is our goal, because we can only do it together - across the YMCA, and with our many partners in civil society, in business, in government.

And so, the YMCA is indeed changing.





As I said, I won't give you a full presentation on Vision 2030, which you see here on this slide.

On the surface ... Vision 2030 is one shared vision, one shared mission, four shared priorities in what we call the Pillars of Impact, and three goals for each of those Pillars.

One an internal YMCA goal; one a goal for the communities we serve; and one a global advocacy goal as we seek the raise the voice of young people worldwide.

But beneath the surface ... what is Vision 2030?

It's a first-ever truly common purpose designed to align a Movement for greater impact, greater coherence, greater clarity - as much to ourselves within our Movement, as to the people and especially the partners and donors outside it, with whom we work.

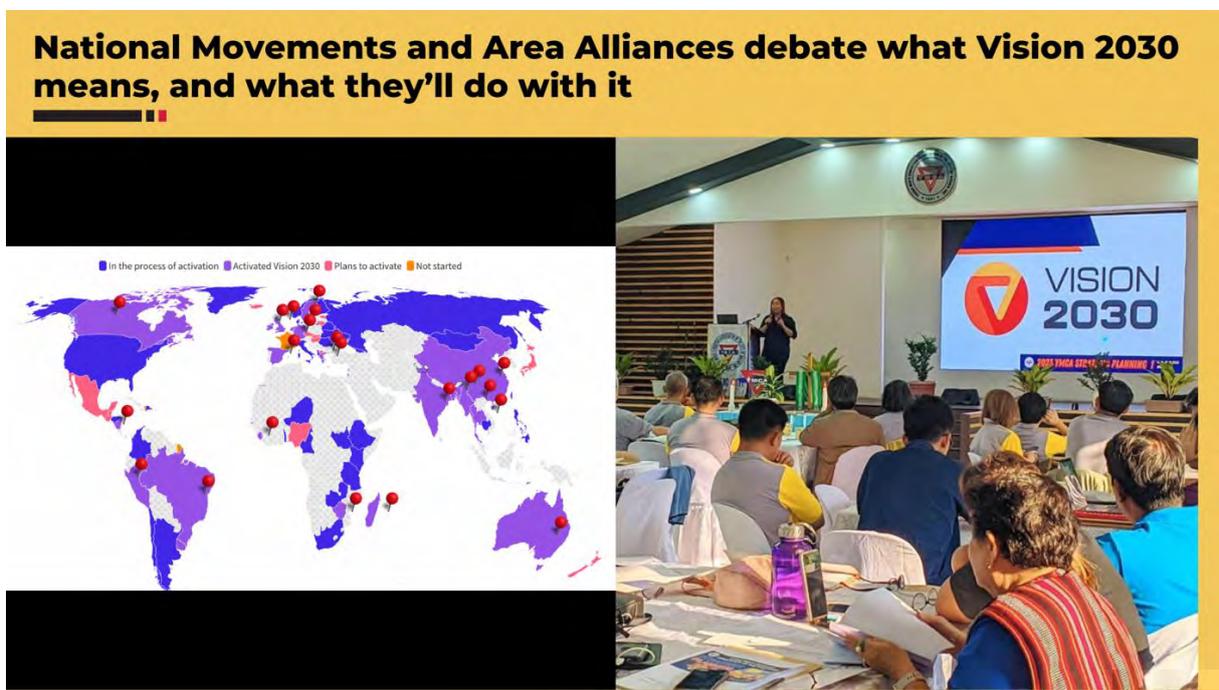
It's 'system change' again - changing the way we do things, and trying to change the world. We are transforming the Jericho Road.

Vision 2030 can elevate us to a different league - the league where we must be playing.



And we have brought forward our horizons from 2044 to 2030, when the UN Sustainable Development Goals have to be achieved.

Our agenda is - and must be! - totally aligned with the global agenda.



And as I said, it's clear *'Vision 2030 is happening. It's exciting. Be on board.'* We have done so much since Aarhus.

I mentioned how I or my colleagues have taken part in strategy and planning debates on Vision 2030 - live or online - in ....

... the US, in Canada, in England and Wales, in Scotland, in Ireland, in Germany, in France, in Belgium, in Norway, in Kenya, in South Africa, in India, in Philippines (pictured here), in Hong Kong.

The list is growing.

Strategy and planning are one thing - but action on the ground is quite another. Almost all of our national Movements are in fact already in action on some or all of the four Pillars of Vision 2030.

Each of us can choose different samples. I rather liked the ones chosen by Y USA in a recent funding brochure.

The diversity is always so striking.

**VISION 2030 PILLARS**

**COMMUNITY WELL-BEING**  
Supporting the health and well-being of all people.  
**Mexico YMCA**  
Since 1991, the Mexico YMCA, with support from U.S. and Canadian YMCAs, has operated a network of YMCA Homes for Migrant Youth that provide safe shelter, food, psychological support, legal aid, and family reunification services to migrant youth deported from the U.S.

**MEANINGFUL WORK**  
Providing meaningful work and education opportunities.  
**Philippines YMCA**  
The Albay YMCA in the Philippines is responding to the unemployment crisis through the Business Improvement Training Initiative. This initiative provides teens and young adults with financial education opportunities and gives them access to seed funding for small business development. As a result, thousands of young people have developed healthy financial habits and explored entrepreneurship.

**SUSTAINABLE PLANET**  
Taking action to sustain and protect our planet.  
**Liberia YMCA**  
Mangrove trees, which provide valuable protection from severe weather events caused by climate change, have suffered from vast destruction in Liberia, leading to biodiversity loss and damaging floods. In response, the Liberia YMCA partnered with local environmental protection agencies to activate a youth-led mangrove tree preservation initiative. Together, they are educating community members on the importance of mangroves and empowering more young people to get involved.

**A JUST WORLD**  
Addressing inequities and racism to create a more just world for all.  
**Ukraine YMCA**  
In response to the war that broke out in Ukraine, the YMCA stepped in to meet the needs of all people affected by this terrible conflict. YMCAs across Europe—including YMCA Ukraine—and in the U.S., worked together to support thousands of internally displaced and refugee youths and families. Response efforts included providing food, shelter, housing, transportation, psychological counseling and more.

Under the ‘Community Wellbeing’ Pillar, we had Mexico YMCA operating a network of YMCA Homes for Migrant Youth that provide safe shelter, food, psychological support, legal aid, and family reunification services to migrant youth deported from the U.S.

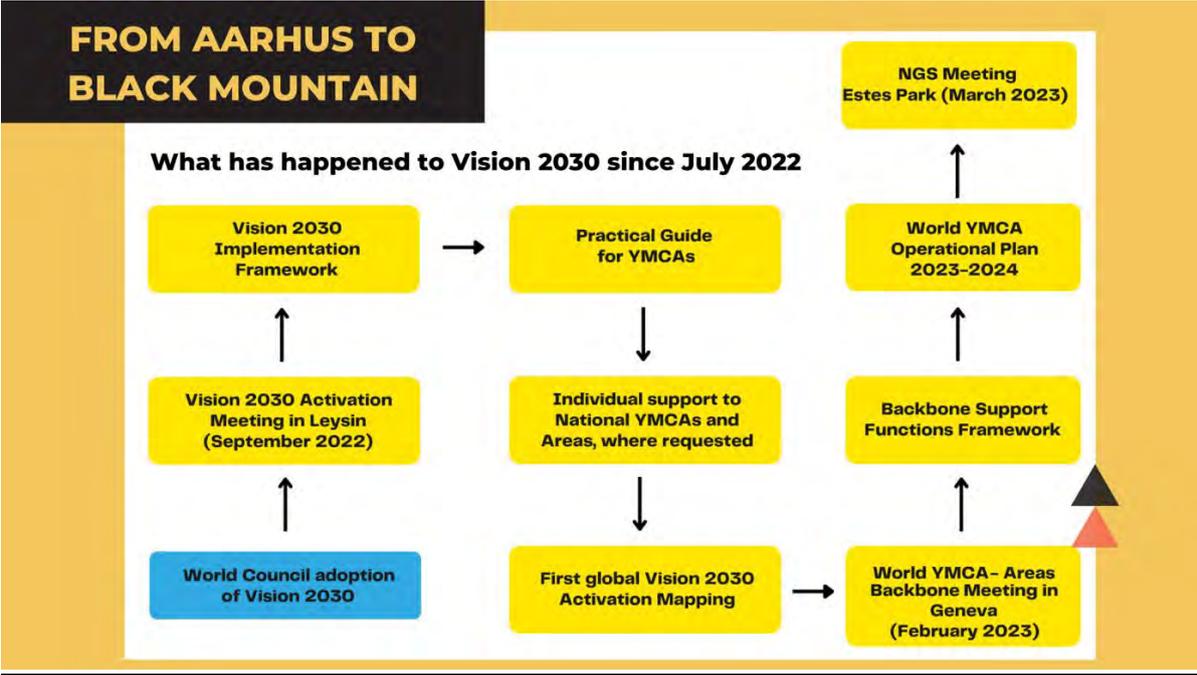
Under the ‘Meaningful Work’ Pillar, we had the Albay YMCA in the Philippines is responding to the country’s unemployment crisis through a Business Improvement Training Initiative, which provides teens and young adults with financial education opportunities and gives them access to seed funding for small business development.

Under the ‘Sustainable Planet’ Pillar, the young people of Liberia YMCA have been planting mangrove trees, which provide valuable protection from severe weather events caused by climate change.

And under the 'Just World' Pillar, the example came from Ukraine where - in the wake of the war - YMCAs across Europe and in the US worked together to support thousands of internally displaced and refugee youth and families.

These are just four stories of many, and we encourage and ask you to share your stories with us, so that we can build the weight and the impact of our evidence. We have links to all these stories and more on the Vision 2030 pages of our website.

And meanwhile, back on the global, Movement-wide stage, we have come so far since Aarhus - in meetings and online ....



We're developing the specific strategies and frameworks to deliver the vision.

We're restructuring our 'infrastructure' so that the World YMCA and the Area Alliances - as well as selected National Movements who will be 'champions' of each of the Vision 2030 pillars - are providing support for the whole Movement.

We're mobilising internal and external financial resources : both funding for programmes and 'in-kind' support.

And there is a potential game-changer under development, in the form of the first ever global 'youth futures' Impact Fund, as a way of funding and bringing to scale our worldwide efforts to support Meaningful Work. More of that later.



We have a long way to go yet.

A long way before we can properly measure our work.

A long way before we can aggregate our impact.

A long way before we can be genuine and effective advocates for systemic change.

In the coming weeks and months we will put in place two sets of people who will support the implementation of Vision 2030:

Four Movement Support teams in Strategic Coordination, Learning and Innovation, Advocacy and Influence, and Resource Mobilization...

And four Pillar Teams coordinating our work in Community Wellbeing, Meaningful Work, Sustainable Planet and Just World.

All the while, we will also set indicators to advance measurement; we'll continue to communicate to advance our shared momentum our progress; and we'll meet again as a Movement towards the end of 2024 to see where we are.



And where will this lead us? Quite simply it will make us the best that we can be - for ourselves, for the young people we serve, and for those we work with.

We are already a proud and active member of the 'Big Six', on the left of this slide.

And see the right-hand side of this slide for some of our World YWCA partnerships of the last 12 months, which really do establish us as the world's partner of choice as a youth empowerment organisation.

Check out some of those names. The UN's Generation Unlimited. The fact that HP and Accenture are working with us on a digital equity programme: they have the tools, and we have the access to simply millions of young people.

These are very exciting times.



Friends, we are uniquely placed to make a difference. We have more local presence than almost any international organisation - we are in 12,000 local communities and counting.

Our task is to leverage our vast network for much greater influence around the world.

Friends, our YMCA Movement motto - or scripture - is the call to unity in John chapter 17, verse 21: 'That all may be one'.

It's not just that 'all are one' - it's also that 'all are called'. This beloved YMCA Movement of ours, 179 years old in 3 weeks' time, is on a shared journey.

There are many coins to be thrown to many beggars. And it takes many, many people to rebuild the Jericho Road.

Thank you.