

Opening Speech- HLPF 2022

Good morning to everyone. It is a pleasure and an honor for me to stand here today, in person, admiring the sparkle in your eyes and feeling the warmth emitted by our presence in this immense room: a pleasure that we have not had during these last years.

Today I want to greet especially those present from Latin America, my homeland, strong and resilient. And it is in honor of my roots that I deliver today's speech in Spanish, the language with the largest number of native speakers in the world. So, a round of applause, please, for my dear Chile, which yesterday made history by presenting the first Constitution drafted with gender parity and we will approve this September 4th, a round of applause for Latin America and so that these international bodies begin to include, value and position our language.

My name is Valentina Muñoz, I'm 19 years old and that makes me with great pride the youngest Defender of the Sustainable Development Goals so far. In this room, full of people with high political positions, I must surely be the youngest too, and I hope that this will not be a problem for us to be able to connect in this beautiful instance. Because there is one thing we all have in common here: According to current statistics, none of us will live to see a world with gender equality. Not you, not me, not anyone on Earth who is alive today. Because according to 2021 data, the gender gap will take more than 135 years to close. The health crisis delayed the time needed to achieve gender parity by more than a generation, adding 36 years to the account.

Simone de Beauvoir once said: "Never forget that a political, economic or religious crisis will be enough for women's rights to be questioned again. Women's rights are never taken for granted, they must remain vigilant throughout their lives".

The outbreak of a conflict or crisis is followed by the displacement of people, hunger and poverty. Women's rights are often the first casualties: one in five refugee women experience sexual violence in humanitarian emergencies; women and girls bear the brunt of the climate crisis; and in a war context, girls are the first to abandon their education. It seems that crises are a fervent enemy of women's rights, and it is not a recent phenomenon, but systematic throughout history.

Today is the pandemic, tomorrow it will be a world war, or a revolution, or another pandemic (very likely), and then there will be another crisis, and another, and another. It is not about whether or not there is a crisis, because there always is, it is about what we are capable of doing to overcome the crisis. We cannot stop, we cannot postpone our Sustainable Development Goals, because time is ticking and things must be done not tomorrow, not later, not in 135 years, not when our political leaders decide they have the "will" to do it. No, this is a global agreement regarding the actions we will

take, this is no longer a negotiation. That is why the 2030 Agenda is called an *agenda* and not a *wish list*.

We must embrace crises as an opportunity: the pandemic took away loved ones that we will never get back, but the post-COVID world also gave us greater connectivity, an impressive display of initiatives to reduce the digital divide and international alliances to promote scientific research, although we are still in debt.

I ask myself: What do you do when you are late for a meeting? Run, right? Well, this is the time to run: we have dates, time is moving forward and we are behind. And worse still, in many regions we are even going backwards.

With great anger and sorrow, today I stand on this territory, in which my colleagues resist a violent attack on their reproductive rights, an attack that reverberates in public health discussions around the world. And COVID was definitely not the one who signed it. I am referring to the repeal of the constitutional right to abortion, a right that is based on our 2030 Agenda, specifically under SDG 3, in the goal “By 2030, guarantee universal access to sexual and reproductive health services, including those of family planning, information and education, and the integration of reproductive health in national strategies and programs.” But this does not stop there, because as we know, the problems are intersectional and dynamic, so that no SDG can be separated from the others but they interact as a complete organism. The right to abortion also impacts SDGs 1, 5, 8, 13 and 16. With all due respect, it seems that a man with a gun has more rights than a person with a uterus. And that is not the fault of any pandemic.

Crises are, and always will be. But if we continue to excuse ourselves that “the crisis made us go backwards” when we talk about human rights, we will be advancing towards the 1800 Agenda, not the 2030 Agenda. Crises are an inherent part of the development of societies. Therefore, we must stop fearing the crisis, because the crisis, regardless of its nature, does not take away our political responsibility to ensure human rights and work for sustainable development.

I invite you to listen, to observe, to negotiate, and to run... because we have an appointment with this agenda and we are all behind schedule.

Strength and resistance, for women and dissidents who fight throughout the world. Overcome.

Thank you very much.