

KEYNOTE STATEMENT: THE VOICES OF YOUTH

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Constituency**

**Mr. Jevanic Henry, Member of the UN Secretary-General
Youth Advisory Group on Climate Change
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Asma

*Your excellency madam President of the Economic and Social Council,
Your excellency President of the General Assembly,
Your excellency Secretary-General of the United Nations,
Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,
Our fellow youth around the world,*

Assalamu Alaikum, peace be upon you .

Today, on behalf of children and youth, as a young person of age and a child at heart, I want to talk to the child in all of us and to share the key messages we expressed as young people at the ECOSOC Youth Forum.

Children do not choose where they are born, but we all aspire to live a life of dignity, security, joy, prosperity, opportunity and fresh air. Many crises in this world can lead to people being displaced from their birthplace. These may be conflicts, climate change, natural disasters, pandemics or simply the search for a better life, but that doesn't mean they shouldn't be treated equally and have their human rights respected.

*Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,*

More than ever **our agenda should focus on our humanity, our recovery, our resilience, our preparedness and our unity, because we will continue to face many global challenges, but we will only be able to face them and rebuild TOGETHER with an eye on our younger and future generations!**

As a girl from a small town on the Tunisian-Algerian border, I dreamed, like many other children around the world, of becoming a doctor to save people's lives. During the cold, snowy winters, my hands were bleeding, but I persisted in studying hard and overcoming those difficult conditions, believing in a better future.

Even though my sisters don't like it when I mention I'm from a rural area and they make fun of me, I'm proud, because that's what encouraged me to do more, work harder and have a greater purpose in life. And voice that girls like me born in rural areas, in refugee camps, in conflict zones or anywhere and in any condition have great potential and that **we should invest in their**

education, their safety, their well-being and their potential and encourage them to believe in themselves and develop their skills.

My vision today, as a youth who didn't become a doctor but became a young advocate, is to initiate solution-oriented approaches to solving many of the problems facing my community and the world, helping to save people from poverty and hunger while advocating for peace and equal opportunity.

*Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,*

We, the youth, want a peaceful world, and for leaders to understand our identity as human beings and our humanity. We need to be selfless, to use our minds for good causes, for peace and shared prosperity, and for all forms of discrimination and racism to disappear.

Although many young people around the world are forgotten and marginalized, they are doing their best, despite limited access to resources, to help their communities and find innovative solutions. Youth are also on the front line in crisis situations, supporting the field and risking their lives. Be it the Covid19 pandemic, the explosion in Lebanon, the floods in Pakistan, the earthquake in Syria and Turkey and other crises.

Excellencies,

Youth are ready to give their time, energy and dedication, they want to contribute, they want to lead. But as young people, we need to be recognized, heard, valued, equipped, empowered, consulted, involved in the policies and given the space we need to make an impact.

My inner child wants to live in a green, safe, tolerant and just world!

Jevanic

*Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,*

The question now is where do we go from here. What is required from us as young people, the global community in ensuring we are on track to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals?

There comes a time when collectively we need to reflect, assess and chart a different way forward. Young people across the world are indicating to you, the global community, that moment is now!

The COVID19 pandemic provided that window for us all to take stock of where we have fallen short and clearly highlighted **the need for urgent course correction in the development agenda towards ensuring we leave no one behind.**

Excellencies,

2015 was the time for talking, in 2023 we are slowly walking but towards failure, post 2023 we need to start running towards delivery of the SDG agenda. **Let this year be an oasis from which accelerated SDG implementation efforts springs forth across the globe!**

Young people like myself from a small island developing state and other developing countries are bearing the continuous burden or threat of a loss of development gains, due to multiple crises.

With limited fiscal space being a common trend in many of our economies, recovering from the covid19 pandemic is not aided by the compounding impacts of climate change, including the urgent need for addressing climate induced loss and damage, regional conflicts and **a current global finance architecture which does not effectively take into account the vulnerability of states.**

This jeopardizes the provision of adequate financial and technical support for youth led innovation and enterprise, which can truly catalyze this sustainable development agenda.

Excellencies,

Now I do not need to remind you that it is simply unjust for us to be paying the costs for the slow or inactions of others. However, we are not here to fight, as in line with SDG17, these current unprecedented times require revitalized partnerships in pursuit of the SDGs.

No more should **youth be seen in isolation, or merely a sprinkled topping in the development agenda; but rather part of the core group** – together with you the government, you the private sector, you the development partners. Let us unify our efforts on this urgent journey.

This inclusive approach will help foster more effective investments and capacity building for youth led solutions in the Water sector, drive sustainable industrialization, resilient infrastructure and enhance governance systems towards building sustainable cities and communities.

Equally as young people we should never take our inclusion lightly or for granted, but rather always strive to be meaningful contributors and not just bench warmers in shaping the development agenda.

Excellencies,

We will:

- i) Remain Relentless in our calls for meaningful participation
- ii) Remain Steadfast in calling for accountability by all in delivering on their commitments
- iii) Stand ready to work in partnerships with all to drive accelerated progress

En route to the SDG Summit and beyond, as a global community let us ask ourselves what do we want this year to be remembered as. **A year which triggered hope or that of failure for the world.**

Excellencies,

As we approach 2030, our world is gasping for air, so let us deliver the ambitious transformative action required nationally and globally to keep it alive **taking into account the needs of this and future generations.**

Let us not let down our children and youth! (Asma)

Leaving one behind is not an option! (Jevanic)

Thank you all **(Asma and Jevanic)**