

The Global Youth is Making its Voices Heard – Reflections on the UN75 Youth Townhall Meeting

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On May 13th, 2020, at 9 a.m. EDT (3 p.m. CEST), the first virtual UN Global Youth Townhall Meeting took place. Young people from around the world followed the invitation of Jayathma Wickramanayake, the Secretary-General's Envoy on Youth, who hosted and moderated the event. It aimed to gather the global youth's input for the UN75 declaration that will be adopted in September 2020 on the occasion of the United Nation's 75th Anniversary. This declaration is not only meant to describe where the UN stands today and what has been achieved but more than anything about the future and which issues we need to focus on going forward. The digital format of the Townhall made it easier than ever before for young people from around the world to come together and share and discuss ideas, which made the event even more inclusive.

After a welcoming introduction by Jayathma Wickramanayake, Lucy Fagan from the UN Major Group for Children and Youth (UN MGCY) presented results from a survey carried out before the Townhall Meeting to give the youth the chance to express their thoughts on the draft of the UN75 declaration. Five hundred people from 110 countries took part in the study, with 80 % being under 30 years of age. The three most important issues in the participants' view were 1) The recovery from COVID-19, including building more resilient systems and societies, 2) Global peace and security, solving ongoing conflicts, non-proliferation, disarmament, and preventive diplomacy, and 3) Tackling climate change, taking care of the oceans, and fostering sustainable

consumption. The majority of young people participating in the study felt that the UN is addressing the youth's priorities well, but that there could be even more intergenerational cooperation in tackling the challenges of our time.

These thoughts and suggestions were openly received by the two co-facilitators of the UN75 declaration, Ambassador Anna Karin Eneström, the Permanent UN Representative of Sweden, and Ambassador Sheikha Alya Ahmed bin Saif Al Thani, the Permanent UN Representative of Qatar. They emphasized the importance of the global youth in shaping a better future and assured the young people in attendance that their input will find its way in the UN75 declaration, which was an encouraging message.

A diverse group of youth speakers from several countries and organizations provided their views on priorities in the way forward for the UN. They highlighted that the current pandemic is not only a health crisis but also a social crisis, which should be a wakeup call to think about how we want to build the future. This should include strengthening global solidarity and reimagining the global economy. The inclusion of the youth into power was seen as necessary by all speakers, as well as building future systems in a more sustainable way and with equal opportunities for all, regardless of gender, sexuality, ethnicity, religion, or disabilities. We have to ensure accessibility and inclusiveness. The speakers emphasized multilateralism as crucial for overcoming our current and future challenges.

Jayathma Wickramanayake summarized the event by saying that the way forward is not about going back to what we consider as normal but about building a new and better normal. The global

youth is ready to co-lead this process together with and within the UN and governments.

It was inspiring to see how dedicated and enthusiastic young people from all around the world are participating in shaping the future of the UN and our planet as a whole and that their voices are being heard by officials like the two co-facilitators of the UN75 declaration.



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