

Statement - Opening of the Conference

19 October 2023 - 10:00 - 10:20

Excellencies, my name is Mikayel Sargsyan, I'm from Armenia.

We, as young people, are rightfully concerned about a myriad of topics as we face challenging times. Not only in the light of recent conflicts all over the ECE region, but with systemic exclusion within our everyday lives as well.

The youth lacks direct participation in the decision-making processes all over the Region, which results in issues relevant to our generations to, oftentimes, be swept under the rug. Young people are crucially underrepresented in national parliaments, local decision-making bodies and community spaces. Our needs and challenges, hopes and dreams are not taken into account. Youth participation must be considered in politics by developing accessible platforms to bridge the gap between young people and the decisions in respective countries.

Moreover, young people should not only be included, but they must also be listened to. Young people face different challenges compared to other generations, as we struggle to get a quality education, employment and are in the midst of a mental health crisis. Without listening to us, you will not be able to address the issues that impact us the most. Without listening to us, our generation will not be able to grow and develop like the generations before us. We are important members of society, and the society can greatly benefit from our opinions, ideas and perspectives.

My name is Clementine Willow, I am from the Netherlands.

In times of aging population, ravaged by crisis, genocide, and intolerance. We are concerned for the lives of young people affected by the crisis, especially in Palestine, Kurdish regions, Roma, Ukraine and Armenia. The pressure on young people is immense. Intersecting conditions adds onto that. We have many different backgrounds no matter who we are and who we love and how we identify our gender. Unfortunately, we, the youth, often become overlooked. Please allow me to share an example:

I'm an Disabled lesbian woman,
Being disabled is not the end of the world, I'm proud to be disabled.
But in this ableist society I and many fellow disabled people often are not included

Ableism,
Institutionalization, forced sterilization,
The medical model of disability and
non-invasive prenatal testing to prevent some of our births...
Are only a fraction of the problems that we face. We, as disabled people are victims of all the topics
discussed
But our voices are not
heard or understood

We want to develop and reach our full potential as human beings.

We want to be decision makers, not only about our lives, but also about the society at large. We
want to be part of the community we choose.

Our lives, our bodies, minds and our ambitions, are ours
Not of them who don't understand our reality but are making the policies

That
Prevent us from being born, and then even entering most spaces, understanding the language
And engaging

In order to secure a future for all

Please,

Let us live and lead,

Nothing about us without us!

-