



UN Major Group for **Children and Youth** the space for children and youth in the United Nations

26th May 2015

Thank you Mr. Moderator, ladies and gentlemen, honorable major group fellows. I have the honor to address this respective house especially on this IGN Session.

To the past, to the future, to an interconnected world working towards achieving common goals with a common agenda. To 15 years of planning and to another upcoming 15 years of shaping our planet's future, to you!

From the era where everyone's voice counts, the era where youth empowerment is the key answer, the era of the SDGs and the Post 2015. At a time when nations have no other option but to be united!

From the United Nations Headquarters, Good Afternoon!

I speak as a member of the Major Group for Children and Youth, the official platform to facilitate the voices of children and youth in this and other policy processes.

We are gathered here yet again to discuss our future and the future of those yet to be born. Whereas we have been given a space to voice our opinions, our meaningful engagement does not stop here. What we ask for has to be reflected in the actual outcome.

We know we will have to continue to work hard to ensure young people and children, in all their diversity, are represented in all aspects of the agenda and its implementation.

Moving forward, we would like to reiterate that we have a long way ahead. In addition, it is critical to keep in mind that young people's rights are not just about education and employment, and neither are the planet's resources infinite.

As many governments and colleagues have already said: this is not the time to regress. A bold and forward-looking agenda must build on existing human rights commitments, with robust and innovative indicators that integrate the three dimensions of sustainable development.

Keeping the delicate political balance in mind, the endeavor of technical proofing is indeed brave. We can only support this undertaking if it increases the ambition of the agenda. It is also important to preserve the gains made on some of the gender-related targets. It should be made clear that the agenda recognizes sexual and reproductive health and rights for all.

We see these as human rights and dismiss any opposition on any grounds. It is simply unacceptable that our human rights, our autonomy, our mental and physical health and our sexuality are questioned, traded, and violated.

Any attempt to use this proofing to move away from the universality and comprehensiveness of the agenda, or reducing the level of commitment or number of goals and targets is unacceptable.

We have also noticed inconsistencies in the type of reasoning for altering the targets and politicising the indicators process. This is a dangerous precedent and any regression is not acceptable.

The proofing on Goal 4 on education has indeed increased the ambition level and we are happy about this. But are disappointed about the continued omission and controversial perception of comprehensive sexuality education, informal and non formal education, and indigenous knowledge, while elaborating the targets and indicators of this goal.

The change of timeline from five years to fifteen years for some targets along with the revisions in the biodiversity targets in Goal 15 on account of states not having met commitments is setting us back.

In Goals 8, 9 and 11 where 'sustainable' is used to qualify 'growth,' 'industrialisation' and 'urbanisation,' the indicators will have to operationalize and explicitly measure the progress on keeping ourselves within planetary boundaries by measuring ecological footprint.

In the first place, we are unhappy with the term 'growth' and the current proposed indicators do not account for any environmental variables. As suggested in the proposed indicators simply measuring GDP and GNI does NOT account for a new paradigm of 'sustainable development'.

We need to resist sticking to a development paradigm that obsesses over growth and ignores our planetary boundaries, a false paradigm that prevents our human development in a truly holistic way. The destruction of our natural environment, our diversity, and our indigenous cultures, the commodification of women and girls in the name of mass consumption, fueled by neoliberal oppression, is not "progress."

In terms of Goal 12 on sustainable consumption and production, we find it illogical to remove the line "within carrying capacity of the earth." The indicators here should not shy away from imposing caps on the extraction of resources.

In the context of Goal 10 on inequality, the targets will only be impactful if we use the indicators to place caps on maximum incomes and specific ratios between the top and bottom quintiles.

In addition, we want to raise concerns about not having a target in the health goal on antibiotic resistance. This matter has been recognised in a World Health Organization report

in 2014 that reviewed data from 114 countries. In addition, the recently concluded 68th World Health Assembly discussed a draft global action plan to combat antibiotic resistance.

It is extremely disturbing that Goal 6 on water and sanitation was not amended to include the term “human right to water and sanitation” even after technical proofing and in spite of it being agreed in General Assembly resolution 64/292. We demand an explanation as to why this was not done! This amounts to a systemic violation of our human rights and a contravention of language agreed in this very room.

We understand and recognize that these are complex issues, burdened with red lines and instructions from capital. But It is unacceptable that our fundamental rights are left off the table because representatives deem them “too controversial” or because they supposedly harm a country’s “business environment.” This is simply non-negotiable for us.

We need to do better, much better, in order to deliver on the greatest challenges of our time and to secure a safe world for present and future generations. The time has come for countries and *generations* to work together.

If we do not take the appropriate action here, the fight for achieving a sustainable world is useless.

We stand at a time of exceptional possibilities: goals that long ago seemed unreachable, and paradigms once dismissed as mere imagination, are within our reach. It is also a moment when dangers of unprecedented magnitude threaten the future of humankind. But at the same time, we can in our collective abilities solve these threats. We are here to show that young people are not just victims, but part of the solution.

We have to make sure you realize you are not just negotiating targets and indicators, but lives and futures. We have to go beyond speeches and remember that those indicators about to be negotiated make an impact in real life, we are talking about people who have no food to eat, who have no respect from their own kin, who are neglected; we are talking about our one planet that has already crossed its critical boundaries, we are talking about genders ignored for who they are. We may not have a future ahead.

As a young African leader, I have participated in the African Youth first ever edition forum in Cote D’ivoire two days ago during which I have learnt after 3 days of multi-stakeholder discussions that if you want to go quickly then you should go on your own but if you want to go far then we should go together.

We will work with you, encourage you and support you. We will critique you, and above all, we will hold you accountable. Nothing about us, without us. Because we are here, and here to stay.