

STATEMENT BY YOUTH SPEAKERS

HLPF 2020

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Keynote Statement starts with Ms. Farai Mubaiwa, Co-Founder of Afrika Matters Initiative (AMI) and Lead at Youth Employment Service, South Africa

On the 30th January 2020, the word pandemic re-entered the global vocabulary with urgency and panic as the World Health Organisation (WHO) declared the novel coronavirus a Public Health Emergency of International Concern.

Your excellencies, distinguished guests, humans of the world, COVID19 is not the only pandemic we face at present. Femicide is yet another pandemic that ravages women and girls across member states. Global studies, prove that the COVID19 pandemic has exacerbated rates of femicide ([UK AID](#)). The resurgence of the [#BlackLivesMatter](#) movement highlights that it is no longer constrained to a movement in the US, but is a pandemic. From the Netherlands, to Indonesia, to the United Kingdom, Brazil and even in South Africa, widespread protests have highlighted the quest for justice and equality - the plight of black bodies globally. Another pandemic which we continue to grapple with is climate change. global lockdowns have exposed how humans have ruined the environment with results such as decreased carbon dioxide emissions and the visibility of the Himalayas from India and Nepal. We need swift action on climate change.

My name is Farai Mubaiwa. I am a proud African hybrid of South Africa and Zimbabwe. A young and vibrant Africa which harnesses the potential of young people.

The Voices from ECOSOC Youth Forum to the HLPF 2020 Paper is an illustration of the power of young people to transform their communities, represent constituencies on the ground and engage on an international level through bringing community voices to the forefront. Some key points youth highlight:

On Digitization, the youth voices emphasize that inclusivity must be at the forefront, and that technology justice must be people and planet centered. Let no one be left behind. On peace and security, youth voices call for a much-needed change of the peace and security apparatus within the UN including reform of the Security Council and declaring ecocide the fifth crime against peace.

On Gender Equity and the femicide pandemic, we call for increasing the accessibility to educational, healthcare and economic platforms for young girls and intentionally prioritising women, young girls, non-binary individuals in healthcare, educational and economic interventions.

As we celebrate the UN's 75th anniversary, may we recognise that we as a global community need to do better. We need to just do better.

And as the ECOSOC and the HLPF continue the review process of the UNSDGs, may we bring yet another matter to your attention. Young people are not the leaders of tomorrow, we are the leaders of today. We demonstrate this leadership through the contributions we make in our society whether politically like

Namibia's Deputy Minister of Information, Communication and Technology Emma Theofelus, or through civil society like Reanne Olivier of the Africa Matters Initiative, young people are actively changing their communities for the better. We need you to trust in us, to believe in us. As it stands, youth inclusion is no longer a debate, it is a necessity.

Keynote Statement continues with Ms. Tina Hocevar, Vice-President of the European Youth Forum

And we, young people, are committed to building back better. We do not want a "recovery" that aims to go back to "normal" because "normal" was never working for the majority of us, nor for our planet.

I'm Tina Hocevar, passionate advocate for youth rights and I applaud to youth-led organisations and young people championing accelerated action for sustainable development across the globe.

If there is one thing that the Coronavirus shows us, it is that poverty and destitution is something that can happen to most of humanity, who are one economic shock away from disaster. Only the very richest are unaffected. The pandemic is like a spring tide, laying bare the failures of our economic system that have started long before the crisis.

But this crisis, like every crisis, is an opportunity for change. My advice, don't be afraid of change, embrace it. And while embracing the change, your compass must be set on promoting fairness, equity, integrity, human dignity and human worth.

Building back better means taking bold decisions now in order to set the course for a sustainable future.

1 - We must focus on the most vulnerable such as young people who are paying the highest price in this crisis. It is your task to prevent a lockdown generation, to ensure stable employment and social safety nets for greater inclusion.

2 – for the recovery, we demand no bailouts for polluters. This is the time to degrow and divest from economic sectors that do not contribute or even harm the achievement of the SDGs and the Paris Agreement.

3 – most importantly, we must think beyond recovery and use the current economic pause to fundamentally change the way our current economic system that perpetuates the concentration of wealth, knowledge, data, and power that leads to growing inequalities between and within countries. Honestly, can we really do no better than a system that - if we put the brakes on for a few weeks - the whole thing implodes? Here are some better ideas:

- Replace GDP as our yardstick of progress and adopt alternative measures of progress to redefine prosperity and to integrate values of human rights, health and wellbeing and those of planet Earth.
- Move from a linear model to a circular economy where we buy services and not products; this should be coupled with assessments of ecological footprints and social impact of products across their lifecycle.
- And mainstream youth rights and intersectionality to tackle the specific barriers faced by young people in accessing their rights, in particular those of young girls, non- binary individuals, youth with disabilities and young migrants and displaced people.

I strongly believe that we can do better. We can build a more equal society where “normal” does not mean inequality, violence and injustice, but where “normal” means fairness, dialogue, human rights and solidarity. In doing so, as Farai pointed out, we need you to trust in us, to believe in us. Youth inclusion is no longer a debate, it is a necessity.

Dear leaders, the best time for a new beginning is now. Gather up the courage. Take a chance. Make a change. Because the time to build back better is now.