

Youth Statement - UNECE Regional Forum for Sustainable Development

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Your Excellencies, colleagues of civil society, and my fellow young people,

I am Rashima Kwatra, a young, lesbian, migrant, feminist, speaking on behalf of youths from the pre-meeting to the Regional Forum.

We express our solidarity with the people of Ukraine as well as those in Russia who stand against the human rights violations being committed by the government. I wanted to echo Svitlana, there is nothing more unsustainable than war and militarism.

Youths today are not inheriting the future we deserve. Decision-makers around the world sacrifice our future for capitalistic and political gains, and do so without accountability.

The world is burning, those hardest hit by the climate crisis and COVID-19 are dying, and colonialist, neocolonialist, extractive, States and actors, continue to exploit those who are already oppressed, with impunity.

Historically marginalized youth are among the greatest affected by COVID-19. This includes young women and girls, poor, rural, and remote students, young people of diverse sexual orientation, gender identity and expression and sex characteristics, indigenous, and migrant youths, young refugees, and key populations affected by HIV, and others.

This year's theme is "Building back better from the coronavirus disease", yet what we need to do is build forward better.

We want to stress for everyone here today and beyond to hear us when we say:

- We are the experts of our own lives and best placed to serve our peers. We need the financial resources and opportunities to drive decision-making and lead action on sustainable development.
- The barriers to our participation must be removed. Policies that are made for us cannot keep being made without us.
- Young people in our region experience sexism, racism, ageism, ableism, misogyny, gender-based violence and other intersecting forms of discrimination.
- We must tackle patriarchy and the systemic forms of oppression, including the Western, binary, and socially constructed notion of gender, which drive inequality.
- We demand accessible education that ensures all the needs of young people with disabilities are met.

- We need to institutionalize comprehensive sexuality education, adequate access to sexual and reproductive health services, and education around consent and agency, in schools.
- We must end deforestation, which often occurs for private interests at the expense of local communities and indigenous peoples. We call on all States to ratify ILO Convention 169.
- We call for clearer regulation and monitoring to stop illegal and unsustainable fishing, practices of consumption and production, and to address the issue of microplastics. We need to stop polluting our waters, where we see a future with more plastic than sealife.
- We need to address the inequitable access to UN headquarters and Offices due to restrictive visa processes, which affect youth disproportionately, leaving many behind and silenced.

The youth pre-meeting was a good example of SDG17 in action. We worked in partnership across different countries, various constituency groups and stakeholders, and had an accessible event, with the provision of interpretation in Russian, international sign language, and live captioning.

We understand that the only way forward is to work together, intersectionally, and ask that you work with us.

Transformative change and the 2030 Agenda can only be achieved in a peaceful world with our inclusion.

Thank you.