Remarks by the Secretary-General Envoy on Youth at the Opening Ceremony of the Global Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction

Wednesday 15th May, 12:00 - 12:45 Room 1

On the 25th of April, Cyclone Kenneth hit Mozambique at its peak intensity. It killed more than 600 people and displaced thousands.

Just 6 weeks earlier, on the 14th of March, Cyclone Idai hit Mozambique at its peak intensity. It left 175,000 people displaced, and 3 million in need with countless lives shattered by the loss of loved ones and livelihoods.

All of this happened in less than two months just this year, in 2019. It is the first time in known history that Mozambique has been hit by two deadly cyclones in just one season. The country had not experienced a storm like Kenneth in 60 years – with winds gusting up to 174mph.

Mozambique is just one such example. In the last 10 years, close to quarter of humanity (**1.7 billion people!)** has been affected by disasters.

Disasters are largely a consequences of the ongoing climate change, and are happening all over the world right now.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Growing up In Sri Lanka, I learnt this the hard way. Having witnessed a devastating Tsunami as a child and regularly experiencing floods and droughts interchangeably in different parts of the country, I was not surprised to see my country ranked number two in the Global Climate Risk Index this year. 96% of the disasters occurred, costing many innocent lives in my country, was due to climate change.

I often cannot help but think about how unfair it is, that communities and countries least contributing to carbon emissions are the ones most affected by climate change.

Throughout the years, I have met so many young people with similar stories. They have lived through cyclones, hurricanes, wild fires, tsunamis, floods, earthquakes and tornadoes. For the same young people, and many more inspired by these stories, fighting climate change and building resilience is a personal fight. Young people are not only disproportionally affected by the impact of disasters, they are always among the first responders in emergencies. They are there, helping their communities, even before official help arrives. They dig, pull, protect, and save.

Young people’s resilience and resourcefulness in times of crisis too often goes unnoticed. With their ideas, energy and ingenuity to develop new and innovative solutions, young people have the power to improve emergency response at all levels, and help build durable solutions for their communities.

Today 1.8 billion people in the world are between the ages of 10-24 years. This is the largest and most interconnected generation in history. This translates into unbelievable untapped potential.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentleman,

While thanking Switzerland and UNDRR for organizing this platform, I like to also congratulate the young people attending, especially the Major Group for Children and Youth, on having organized a comprehensive youth programme for the Global Platform, including a preparatory day, online and offline engagement, participating in key sessions, and providing leadership in the organization of the Stakeholder Forum, as a key partner in the UNDRR Stakeholder Engagement Mechanism.

The theme for this year’s Global Platform ‘***The Resilience Dividend: Towards Sustainable & Inclusive Societies’*** underlines the ‘whole-of-society’ approach of the Sendai Framework.

Youth engagement is an integral part of the framework.

As agents for change for DRR, youth are already providing leadership, entrepreneurship and innovative solutions to reduce disaster risk.

We must not underestimate their potential to make a real difference in the time of disasters.

In places such as Kerala and Niger, youth are creating innovative mobile phone applications to strengthen disaster preparedness in their communities.

A Youth in School Safety Programme by Red Cross Red Crescent Southeast Asia Youth Network has rolled out in six countries, training 150 youth volunteers who in turn conducted countless school safety actions.

Young people are resilient and are very resourceful in times of crisis. But in Disaster situations, many young people experience simultaneous and ongoing disruptions in their lives including in their families, communities, education, access to healthcare, and suffer from trauma related to these shocks.

It is important that we understand how young people are impacted by disasters to ensure that no one is left behind. We need to step up collective efforts to ensure that we have access to disaggregated data by sex, age and disability, to know how exactly their lives are impacted.

But despite the challenges, today’s young people are also the very generation who can teach their communities - and the wider world - how to reduce the risks and impact of disasters.

Young people are unmatched by any other demographic group in their ability to bring about meaningful change in social behavior and attitudes.

2019 is critical year for our planet and for our people. Last year, The UN Secretary-General, sounded the alarm, that “Climate change is moving faster than we are – and its speed has provoked a sonic boom SOS across our world.”

Considering the growing influence of climate change, which is increasingly exacerbating disasters, one conclusion is clear: the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals will remain elusive or significantly delayed so long as disaster risks are left unchecked.

Climate change is already disrupting the environment of our planet, but not the least the future of young people.

There is still time to tackle climate change, but it will require an unprecedented effort from all sectors of society.

This is why the Secretary-General has convened the Climate Action Summit this September to showcase a leap in collective national political ambition and to demonstrate massive movements in the real economy in support of the Climate Action in the context of the Paris Agreement.

Dear Friends,

Strengthening meaningful participation of young people and treating them as a partner in disaster risk management is not only the right thing to do, but the smart thing to do.

Building the capacity of young people through education and intercultural communication on disaster preparedness, giving them the necessary tools and resources, as well as engaging them in leading public awareness efforts will undoubtedly help young people to do more, do better, and reach further in reducing disaster risks.

I join my voice with that of other young people to call governments to broaden the active participation of youth and children to ensure their meaningful engagement in the implementation Sendai Framework and the Paris Agreement.

The world is desperately looking for leadership on this issue and young people are not waiting for political leaders to step up. Millions of young people marched in the world’s capitals on the 15th of March this year and millions more continue to bring innovative solutions to build resilience in their communities.

Let us not leave here without ambition.

We are running out of time and young people are becoming impatient.

They are resisting, protesting and mobilizing.

We need to listen to them. Young people are calling world leaders to action, let us not let their call become a missed call.

Thank You