

Opening Speech

“Youth Engagement to Foster Global Citizenship, Sustainable Development Initiatives and Peace Building in The Gambia”

- Honorable Representative of the Ministry of Youth and Sport,
- Head of Office of UNFPA,
- Representatives of UNESCO National Commission,
- Teachers and trainers,
- Dear Colleagues,
- Students

It is indeed a great pleasure for me today to address you on the occasion of the opening ceremony of the meeting on Youth Engagement to Foster Global Citizenship, Sustainable Development Initiatives and Peace Building in The Gambia.

Let me start by reminding the preamble of the UNESCO constitution, which declares that: ***“Since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defenses of peace must be constructed”***.

As you know UNESCO’s mission is: ***“to contribute to peace and security by promoting collaboration among nations through education, science and culture in order to further universal respect for justice, for the rule of law and for the human rights and fundamental freedoms which are affirmed for the peoples of the world, without distinction of race, sex, language or religion”***.

Ladies and Gentlemen, Dear Youth,

Peace is not given, as if by magic! Peace is a gift of mankind to each other. It is those who give peace that have peace. Peace is a two-way street. To receive peace, you have to give peace.

Nowadays, young people, are highly engaged in transforming conflict, countering violence and building peace. For example, through universal access to information and communication technologies, young people are often major drivers of political changes. Therefore, their role in building peace, preventing violent extremism and any form of radicalization cannot remain unrecognized. Indeed, in December 2015, the UN Security Council adopted Resolution 2250, the first ever thematic resolution on Youth, Peace and

Security. This resolution recognizes youngsters as pivotal actors to achieve peace and sustainable development.

I am very pleased to see so many dedicated young people in the audience because we cannot talk about sustainable development without the active involvement of youth. Hence, I would like to extend my congratulations to my colleagues from the Gambian National Commission for UNESCO for initiating this workshop and managing to gather more than 250 of you coming from all regions in the country. I would also like to thank our sister agency, UNFPA for their support to the event which marks the beginning of our partnership toward supporting your peacebuilding efforts through the empowerment of you, young people from the Gambia.

Today we gathered together to better understand how you can support the implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 16 defined by the United Nations in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development Goals. Which also promotes peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development. Maintaining a strong focus on human rights, strong and universal educational systems, and stimulating entrepreneurship and global citizenship is more important than ever.

I hope that this week will be a good opportunity for you to learn about Global Citizenship which refers to a sense of belonging to a broader community and to a common humanity, which transcends geographical and political borders.

Indeed, we understand that without support, it has shunned many from participating fully in peacebuilding activities. If young people are given the chance, and provided the necessary skills to take the lead in their own affairs, they can help build bridges to join the gaps our fathers and forefathers have left behind.

Worldwide, young people make up a quarter of the world's population. Therefore, you are a driving force behind change. By inviting you to this event, we hope that after one week of intensive trainings and brainstorming you will return home empowered with new visions and skills, motivated to become factors of change on the level of your communities, friends and family. We strongly encourage you to spread the message beyond and far after this event.

Ladies and Gentlemen, My dear Youth,

Today, The Gambia is facing historical changes, after 22 years of dictatorship regime, the country needs to go through number of reforms, that sometimes requires patience. Those changes will not happen over night. You will witness many frustration, disappointments or criticisms that could sometimes lead to escalation of tensions. Remember that peace should remain as our ultimate

goal. Without peace there will be no development and the life of many people will turn into nightmare.

Finally, I would like to use the opportunity to thank you all on behalf of UNESCO for coming here from very far and I wish you a very successful meeting. You should take full advantage of this opportunity by learning from each other, acquiring new skills, to become more confident and aware of the role that you can play for peace and sustainable development

As a great man, Nelson Mandela, once said: ***“No one is born hating another person because of the color of his skin, or his background, or his religion. People must learn to hate and if they can learn to hate, they can be taught to love. Love comes more naturally to the human heart than its opposite”***.

Thank you and good luck!