



**Joint statement by Mr Andraž Šiler, UN Youth Delegate from Slovenia and Mr Klemen Ponikvar, First Secretary, Permanent Mission of the Republic of Slovenia to United Nations Office in Geneva, on Creating an enabling environment for the effective participation of youth in public decision-making**

*1<sup>st</sup> Forum on Human Rights, Democracy and Rule of Law, Geneva, 22 November 2016*

Mr. Moderator,

I will be making the following statement in my personal capacity, as the UN youth representative from Slovenia:

One of the basic principles of democracy and political participation is voting. I am coming from a country where voter turnouts are generally low, especially among young people.

When I am speaking to young people, trying to find reasons for this political abstinence, I am usually hearing very similar answers; “My vote doesn’t count” they are saying, “Elections can’t change anything”, “They are all the same, they don’t care about us, they are all corrupt, I don’t have anybody to vote for” represent quite common responses. Or simply that they are just not interested in politics at all. For me it is really hard to understand how someone is not interested in something that is all around us, defines our present and shapes our future.

But then I realized that majority of young people around the world see politics as a "very dirty game, full of corruption and nepotism." Unfortunately in many cases they are right. And it is somehow understandable that they just don’t want to be part of this.

I think, that it is a duty of all of us here (Governments, international or regional organizations, civil societies and NGO's ), a duty of every single politician, to show to the youth that politics can be in fact also a very noble thing. Youth must notice that politicians are working for them and not for their personal gain or interest of multinational corporations. We must show them that much of our future depends on good, reflective and wise political decisions. And young people must get a feeling that their voice is being heard and that their vote counts.

But we shouldn’t think of youth just as voters, remembering them every four years during elections campaigns. Young people must become equal partners in all phases of decision making process.

Active and equal presence of young people in the room when we are discussing future should become a norm. Future belongs to us. Please don't shape it for us without us.

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Co-Chairs, Ladies and Gentleman,

Please, allow me to say a couple of words also on behalf of Slovenia.

I would like to begin with a saying that we hear at the UN corridors very often: "Nothing about us, without us!" It is with this very thought in mind Slovenia decided to establish the mandate of the UN Youth Delegate in 2014. My country believes in empowering youth and to do so, we need to make every effort to establish an enabling environment.

Good cooperation with youth is one of the key policies of our administration: just last week Prime Minister dr. Cerar participated in the clustered dialogue with youth, this time focusing on the issue of business and youth. The government has been focusing on different measures which would make business environment more conducive to job growth, especially for the youth.

Also the Ministry of Foreign Affairs participates in promotion of youth policies in its own capacity: at the beginning of November we hosted young diplomats for a two-week educational seminar part of the Positive Agenda for Youth in the Western Balkans.

This is by far not the only initiative promoted by the Ministry: as the organizer of Bled Strategic Forum, an annual high level gathering on contemporary political, security and development challenges taking place in Bled, Slovenia, we also host Young Bled Strategic Forum. Latter, on one hand enables young leaders from Slovenia and abroad to discuss issues which directly affect youth, as well as solutions for all generations. At last forum we discussed issues such as youth mobility, political participation, intergenerational cooperation, etc. At the Forum the crucial role of critical thought in our societies was emphasized.

Co-Chairs, Ladies and Gentleman,

As Deputy Secretary General Eliasson once said "Young People Must Be Recognized as Agents of Change with Much to Offer". We believe that by supporting the youth today, we reinforce our prospects for tomorrow.

I thank you.