

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentleman

It is my honour to be with you today on behalf of the UNMGCY, the principal platform for youth engagement with the United Nations. I would first like to take this opportunity to thank the Chairs and organisers for their hard work and for the chance to share the floor with such distinguished colleagues from the international arena.

At approximately 1.8 billion, under 24 year olds alone comprise the largest youth demographic the world has ever seen to date. As a generation, we represent an important constituency for crime prevention, yet have historically been associated with negative stereotypes.

The Doha Declaration marked a normative shift in the way youth are perceived in the framework of international criminal justice and the rule of law. In recent years, we have seen a significant transition away from perceptions of youth as perpetrators of illicit activities which undermined our potential to contribute. Or indeed, which compounded harmful gender narratives of young men as transgressors and young women as passive victims of transnational crime.

In recognising, for the first time, the role of young people in crime prevention, the Declaration bolsters the work of the hundreds of thousands of youth led initiatives around the world. As an entity, we are proud to have witnessed the realisation of youth sensitive policies and programming. We particularly take note of the UNODC's Education for Justice initiative, which partners with young people and has done much to highlight the positive agency of youth in the context of the rule of law and anti corruption.

Ladies and gentleman, we call on you to continue with this momentum.

That it is I speaking with you today is in itself significant. I have the privilege of electricity 24 hours a day, open access to the internet and an ability to speak frankly and freely. My colleagues do not benefit from the same circumstances. Against the backdrop of conflict, displacement and instability, they work tirelessly and at great personal risk to promote respect for the rule of law. Today, I speak for them. At the forefront of anti corruption drives and calls for greater accountability, my colleagues have served as a bridge between the informal and formal with creative, imaginative and innovative avenues of participation.

Evidently, youth are not a homogenous category . By virtue of our age, we face disproportionate vulnerability to transnational crime. Where this intersects with race, religion, class, gender or context, among others, we are further predisposed to victimisation. The global pandemic, far from being an equaliser, has exacerbated pre- existing inequalities.

The statistics are stark ; around one third of trafficking victims are children and the destabilising impact of confinement has seen increased instances of child exploitation, gender based violence and recruitment of young people by organised crime or terrorist non state actors.

Ladies and gentleman, our ability to tackle international crime undoubtedly hinges on cooperation and partnerships. We reiterate the imperative to support youth who face intersectional barriers in this context, in line with leaving no-one behind. This is undoubtedly a critical opportunity for the international community and as youth, we wish to underline our readiness to act as equal partners.