

The ceremony opened by MC and program director Nozuko, a young girl from Bush Radio. The proceedings opened with a session where young people shared their stories on what has inspired them and brought them to this point in their lives. Some of the stories told which remain top of mind were shared by two young women, one from Sudan and the other from Burundi.

Grace Gire Alex from Burundi, shared with us her story: she explained that she has overcome great odds to get an education in her war torn country where girls are considered stupid and were refused schooling and that through her mothers strength and determination, she has managed to succeed and become one of the few girls in her country to go to school and get an education. She wants to study further to become a journalist so she can be the voice for other young women like herself and speak out against the wrong and right things that occur in her country.

The second young woman, **Shadia Nyota from Burundi** told of her story, that although the media reports that the war is over in her country, it is actually still continuing and media reports are not true. She explained that in her war torn country, she faces many challenges and pressures as a young school going girl and that she has grown up missing being a child, like many of her peers, because she is faced with too much responsibility at her young age. She feels that this has robbed her of her youth because she is growing up faster than her other peers. Sometimes her responsibilities get in the way of her studies and doing homework. This has resulted in her losing her identity and not knowing who she has become. She delivered an emotional speech and had many people in the crowd reduced to tears.

The keynote speaker followed. He was **14 year old Dylan Roberts** who in his keynote address spoke about the role of kids and that, "for a long time, young people have been under valued and that we often come from homes where we are taught a child must be seen and not heard". He assured his peers that all this needs to change or as he put it, "...it is changing" because he believes that with the help of the, the youth can gain more understanding and improve their confidence in who they are. He encouraged his peers that in the next 6 days they will work hard exploring and gaining a better understanding on different topics such as gender, sexuality, arts & culture, rights and labour issues.

UNICEF Country Representative Macharia Kamau delivered a strong message to the young crowd saying that young people must carve their future now because they have the power to make decisions. The Almighty has given them a brain and they must use it to make wise decisions that will determine who and what they become in their future. He made reference to the fact that education does not necessarily create greatness, referring to the many who were imprisoned here at Robben Island. He asked how many of these had become great leaders like Nelson Mandela. His message was inspiring and left the young crowd feeling enthusiastic about the power they possess to determine their own future.

Guest speaker Danny K opened with a song from his latest release titled 'Real Men'. He said he was inspired by the stories he had heard from the young women and that he wanted to speak to the young men specifically, because his song addresses, "Real men don't rape, abuse their women physically, emotionally." He followed with an inspirational phrase from Nelson Mandela that reads: "I pray tribute to the women, wives and sisters of our nation. You are the rock-hard foundation of our struggle". He related this to today's event saying that women must be treated with kindness and respect at all times because they the jewels of our nation. He also added that young people should believe in themselves and strive for good things, no matter what their circumstances, they can achieve anything they set their minds to. He closed saying that "the only limitation to the youngsters is their imagination" because if they do not dare to dream, and

believe in their dream, then the universe cannot help them achieve it because that is the power of positive affirmations.

The last speaker was from the board of Bush Radio, Lea Abramson who said this is the 7th Kidocracy Konfrence initiated by Bush Radio. She thanked UNICEF and Robben Island for their financial contribution. She continued that Bush Radio's mission is to ensure that communities who have been denied access to resources, take part in producing ethical, creative and responsible radio that encourages them to communicate with each other, take part in decisions that affect their lives, and to celebrate their own cultures, Through such radio, communities will affirm their own dignity and identity and promote social responsibility and critical thinking.

She continued stating that in reading newspapers and listening to TV and Radio – children were among the most vulnerable members of society and that we do not have sufficient checks and balances in place to protect our children and that many children are not valued and treated with the respect they deserve. She told the young delegates that they are the future legislators, scientists, artists and athletes and that it is our responsibility to provide them the opportunity to inform themselves, to discuss and debate the many issues that impact on their lives now and in many years to come. She closed, saying that “Bush Radio provides young people with an empowering way of thinking that is very unusual and greatly advantageous for those that use this opportunity. All the children at Bush Radio are encouraged to think for themselves and they are provided with a forum for discussion and the opportunity to broadcast their ideas. She adds that young people who have the Bush experience are those who speak out, ask lots of questions and are not shy to express themselves clearly and with confidence.”

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