

ADDRESS TO UNICEF EXECUTIVE BOARD – September 2022 meeting

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(Intro - name and organization)

The development of sub-Saharan Africa is closely linked to the well-being of its youth. The youth of our countries represent a unique opportunity to accelerate economic growth, reduce poverty and disparities, promote human rights and respect for the environment, provided that nations make the right investments.

In the Sahel, access to and quality of education remain a major challenge. Children in our countries are among the least likely to attend school. There are numerous and persistent factors that exclude children from formal education: violence within communities, discrimination, early marriage, poverty, insecurity and conflict.

When I was asked to present the challenges that undermine our youth's development and to suggest a way forward in only 3 minutes, I wondered how I could contribute. The reality is that we all know the transformative potential of education. But education is not just about accumulating diplomas without any promise of a better future. Educating means training a productive workforce and building skills that provide the key to personal development and informed decision making.

Efforts must be made in all areas to promote access to education, from health to protection services. Schools must be safe spaces, where children feel free to learn and express their views on issues that affect their future. To end all forms of discrimination and violence against young people, especially adolescent girls, strong advocacy is needed with policy makers as well as with traditional leaders, and parents.

Young people must be better equipped for the future. Youth organizations must be supported and strengthened, as they contribute to development and citizenship.

Let us take the example of the programmes supported by UNICEF: JEUNES VOIX DU SAHEL, U. REPORT, AFRIYAN which, with few resources, play an important role in community impact activities and in the accountability of public authorities. With political commitment and adequate resources, young people have the potential to transform the world.

These combined interventions will help break the intergenerational cycle of poverty, further building youth resilience.

Young people are the capital of our countries to emerge from crises and the solution is investing in inclusive education. We are ready to play our part, we just need the opportunity and the support to do that.

Thank you.