

Speech: DFID Ghana Social Sector Team Leader's speech at Adolescent and Youth Pre-Summit to African Union Second Girl Summit

Honourable Minister of Gender, Children & Social Protection,

H.E. The Second Lady of the Republic of Ghana,

UN Resident Coordinator,

Representative from the Canadian High Commission,

Regional Director of the International Planned Parenthood Federation.

Thank you to the African Union and the Government of Ghana for hosting this important conference.

Yesterday marked the anniversary of the Declaration and the Convention of Children's Rights, the most widely-ratified human rights treaty in history which Ghana was the first country to ratify. So it is a time for celebrating children's rights, to continue to press for action that will improve the lives of children and youth around the world, and to recognise that the future belongs to them– not us.

So I am delighted to be here. The UK government is committed to empowering young people and giving them the chance to have their voices heard, especially on issues that affect them specifically.

This includes the crucially important issue of child marriage, which we know is incredibly widespread. Over 650 million women alive today were married during their adolescent years. And every day, 20,000 adolescent girls become pregnant. I look forward to this Summit's discussions and decisions on how to tackle this.

We know that young people have enormous potential to shape the future of their countries when given the right opportunities and support. Without the active participation of young people, we will not be successful in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. This is why DFID provides support to youth programming and policy development that enables productive employment; develops future leaders and active citizens; protects young people from harm; and raises awareness of development issues.

And if I may speak specifically on Ghana for a moment.

The UK Government's International Citizen Service programme brings together young people from the UK and young Ghanaians. Working in Eastern region and Upper West, these young volunteers build their own skills, confidence and job

prospects as well as working to promote gender equality, adult literacy and help to support education for children with disabilities. To date, this UK Aid programme has supported 35,000 young people across the globe.

I also want to note His Excellency the President's vision for a self-reliant Ghana. This vision is truly inspiring and is applauded by the UK and all development partners. In the long term, economic development and investment in human capital, which means an investment in young people's health, education and tackling barriers that block their potential, is the sustainable pathway to self-reliance.

The summit...

It is fantastic to be part of the adolescent and youth pre-summit, and to see so many impressive young people represented here today. To the young people – I would urge you all to raise your voice and use this forum to share your expertise and knowledge of the issues that are affecting your generation. And to the not-so-young... I would encourage you to listen openly to what young people are telling us.

This final point is summed up by the [#ourlivesourleadership](#), [#enoughwiththesilence](#) and [#endchildmarriagenow](#) hashtag that will be circulating Twitter to tie in with the summit. These issues affect young people, and we should be empowering young people to speak out and end the silence.