

Speech: Youth, Peace and Security

Thank you very much indeed Mr President, and thank you for calling this debate today. I think it's clear that there's a lot of interest in the room. I think it's clear that a lot of us are all wrestling with common challenges, but we all have very similar hopes and aspirations for what might be done in this area. So while I take Dimitri's point about different bits of the UN should remain in their own lane, so to speak, I think as a number of speakers have said, if we don't factor in as a long-term trend of growing numbers of youth, particularly unemployed youth, in certain parts of the world then we will find ourselves facing many more peace and security challenges. So as I say, thank you for raising that today.

Thank you very much to the briefers. It is very good to see again the Youth Envoy who I had the pleasure of meeting recently. I think from our perspective, it is good to do this in the Security Council because it touches, as I say, on a very important angle: the future of peace and security.

Speaking for myself, I would be very interested to have the youth and economic development discussion in ECOSOC or the General Assembly as a complement to what we're talking about today. And if anyone else's is interested in that, I'd be very keen to have a discussion.

It's very good to be able to evaluate the impact of Resolution 2250 and as I said it is fantastic that we can hear directly from youth and civil society. Through our part, for the UK, we really welcome the independent progress study and we congratulate its authors on its participatory and consultative methodology. It's striking that it has brought together more than 4,000 youth voices from all over the globe. Now I think this isn't just important in itself; I think it sets an important model, a high standard for future UN reports and if there's any way of embedding that consultative approach more widely, we for one would definitely welcome that.

As a number of speakers have noted, more than half of the world's population is below the age of 30. So this means that young people are not just key stakeholders in every sphere of life, from driving political change to defending and promoting human rights to peacebuilding and contributing to economic development. It also means, as I said at the beginning, they represent a key risk factor. If we don't get the development and encouragement and aspirations of young people right, then it's very difficult to keep countries on an upwards trajectory. So I think we should all reflect about that.

And as we have also heard today, the failure to include youth can often actually exacerbate a conflict. Too often conflicts emerge when people don't feel represented by their political leaders, and I think we've seen that in Syria, but not just in Syria. At the same time, in countries like Afghanistan, maybe even Iran, what youth think can often be an important indication of the potential for reform in those societies.

For the United Kingdom, we believe that enabling young people to speak for themselves in political processes can be the first step to taking real action. We have British Youth Council. It has 600 democratically elected members. It sits annually in the House of Commons and it debates a subject chosen by a youth ballot, and last year, almost a million people participated. I think many of our countries are familiar with Model United Nations that does something very similar here and also in Geneva. Last week Mr. President, London hosted the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting and the 11th Commonwealth Youth Forum met. They pledged their ongoing commitment to countries' efforts to build a more prosperous, secure and sustainable future.

A number of speakers have mentioned preventing violent extremism. It's very important that strategies for this, sometimes called countering violent extremism, should include youth. Young people often understand much more than my generation the dynamics and the impacts of terrorist narratives on radicalization and recruitment and they can be involved in promoting an alternative narrative of tolerance and inclusion. If anyone doubts that Mr President, I invite them to get hold of the ISIS equivalent of Vogue, which is targeted at a very particular section of young women. And in its propaganda it is incredibly skilful about getting out certain messages and countering that, dealing with that, putting out a positive narrative is something we all need to give attention to.

Supporting youth advocates goes beyond just giving them a platform. It's about building capacity and that's about providing education to ensure that all young people have that chance. There's a clear case for education, particularly girls' education. We know this contributes to a safer more prosperous world. We know it reduces conflict, and we know it increases stability. Today, 131 million girls across the world are deprived of an education. Of the world's 774 million illiterate adults, two thirds of those are women and this is why girls' education is one of the United Kingdom's priorities, one of the Foreign Secretary's priorities, and we will be working with other partners to try to deliver a minimum of 12 years of quality schooling for every girl. This commitment to education is also why the United Kingdom endorsed the Safe Schools Declaration on Thursday last week. It's vital that our schools remain places of safety and that they're protected from conflict. Resolution 2250 outlined the need the young people's voices to be heard in government, civil society and industry, and this open debate is a key opportunity to reflect on the implementation of the strategy it set out and we look forward to sharing experiences with others.

And thank you again Mr. President for calling this debate.