

UNON Director-General's remarks for the 3rd annual Young Diplomats of Kenya conference, 11 June 2018

It is a pleasure to welcome you to the United Nations Office at Nairobi for the 3rd annual conference of the Young Diplomats of Kenya.

It is very fitting that you are meeting here on this United Nations compound today. Just the name of your organization itself – Young Diplomats of Kenya – alludes to three things that are very important to the work of the United Nations: Youth, diplomacy, and Kenya.

First youth. If the United Nations is to meet the goals enshrined in the UN Charter, it needs to engage much more with young people. That is because empowered young men and women can play a critical role in forging solutions to today's global challenges – from unemployment to climate change, and from armed conflict to humanitarian crises.

You can demand accountability from Governments, exercise influence as consumers and commentators, and provide momentum through your ideas and energy.

You can help turn the UN's ideals into action – whether it be the SDGs, the Paris climate change agreement, or resolution 2419 on Youth, Peace and Security, which was adopted unanimously by the Security Council just 5 days ago.

That resolution, a follow-up to resolution 2250 of 2015, reflects a global commitment to increase the meaningful engagement of young people in building and sustaining peace.

Among other things, it calls on “all relevant actors to consider ways to increase the inclusive representation of youth for the prevention and resolution of conflict..., recognizing that their marginalization is detrimental to building sustainable peace and countering violent extremism.” It also requests the Secretary-General to submit a report to the Council on the implementation of resolutions 2419 and 2250, no later than May 2020.

Much more needs to be done to give young people the voice they deserve, but the resolution provides an important step forward.

Next is diplomacy. From its founding in 1945, diplomacy has been in the DNA of the United Nations. I know many of you are aspiring diplomats, and students of international relations, political science and related fields. The knowledge you are gaining in your studies is very important in today's turbulent world. Indeed, diplomacy seems to be needed now more than ever.

Whether we are talking about mediation aimed at ending conflicts, or multilateral negotiations on combatting climate change, these types of efforts all rely on the exercise of diplomacy.

There are many different ways to describe diplomacy. In broad terms, it can be defined as the art of dealing with people in a sensitive and tactful way, or of building bridges, being an honest broker, finding common ground, even agreeing to peacefully disagree.

As Secretary-General Antonio Guterres has said, we need “a surge in diplomacy for peace.” He has also stressed the need for the UN to put more focus on preventive diplomacy – to address the root causes of tensions before they result in violent conflict.

We must also recognize the inextricable links between development and peace. This linkage is well captured in the SDGs.

Kenya, as co-facilitator of the multilateral negotiations that led to the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, has played a critical role in the formulation of the SDGs.

Kenya is a long-standing advocate for multilateralism and a trusted partner of the United Nations.

It is also a gracious host, not only to UNON but to a large and unique mix of UN entities – including the global headquarters of UNEP and UN-Habitat, several Regional Offices of UN agencies, a vibrant UNCT for Kenya, and Special Political Missions and peace support operations mandated by the Security Council.

Collectively, the work carried out from this UN compound is vital for the success of the 2030 Agenda.

But the implementation of the SDGs cannot be left to the UN alone. Everyone has a role to play – Governments, the media, religious communities, the private sector, civil society and engaged young people such as you.

And so, as young people, aspiring diplomats and global citizens from Kenya, you are all most welcome here today.

I hope you will have a productive and successful conference.

Thank you for your kind attention.