



LEADERS: Your words must become action, or you will fail the world's most marginalised children and young people

Youth activists' statement on the 2019 High-Level Political Forum/Sustainable Development Goals Summit

The youth activist delegation of the 100 Million campaign welcomes the renewed commitments made by world leaders to deliver the Sustainable Development Goals, especially those which aim to protect and deliver the rights of children and young people. But a promise made to children should never be broken, and we are extremely concerned at the lack of pledges from leaders to take urgent and practical action to ensure their commitments are delivered.

This concern is based on the evidence and experience of the four full years since the SDGs were agreed. Despite some progress to achieve the SDGs, it is being delivered through 'business as usual', not through any concerted effort to end extreme poverty or to realise a fairer, sustainable, peaceful world. In fact, these four years have seen conflicts intensify, increased isolationism and nationalism, and climate disaster taking its toll in some of the world's poorest regions – all of which have claimed millions of children as victims.

Our shared hope for the SDG Summit was that our government representatives would acknowledge the poor pace of progress and agree a path to accelerate the realisation of children's rights – including stronger and better financing to achieve the ambitious 2030 Agenda. While we welcome the announcements of new funding for some targets, such as the Education Cannot Wait fund to support education for children in emergencies, other pledges remain insufficient and we are disappointed by the lack of serious ambition to end the exclusion of hundreds of millions of children worldwide.

We believed that the inspirational youth movements around the world – and the passionate actors for climate justice who demonstrated right here in New York City – would be fairly represented and listened to. But we were not. Representative youth organisations struggled to get access to decision-makers, while few with an official seat at the table have a constituency or mandate among the young people they are supposed to represent. Worse still, demands made by these young people are side-lined into 'youth declarations' or 'youth statements', not included in the main declaration. This is not youth representation, and it is not youth involvement. But we are inspired by and stand in solidarity with the youth climate actors suing governments for their failure, and express our hope that we can unite to force our governments to act in the best interests of every child in every community.

We fully acknowledge our own role in holding governments to account. As citizens, we must demand more and better action from our representatives. Together, as members of the 100 Million campaign, we will be taking action from 17 October by holding Rallies for Every Child on the streets of our countries, all around the world. We will be asking our governments: when will every child have justice? We will also be inviting our representatives to meet us on 10 December, Human Rights Day, giving them the opportunity to answer our question.

But the current processes for any citizen to get involved in accountability for the SDGs are buried in the depths of government departments, making them inaccessible – especially to children and young people. As an absolute minimum, we believe the UN Major Groups and other Stakeholders should be formally involved in the review processes of the High-Level Political Forum, but we need serious action to open up accountability structures to citizens in every country.

Today, one child in five lives in extreme poverty. One child in six does not go to school. One child in ten is forced to work. And the likelihood is that one child is the same child, enduring multiple disadvantage and deprivation while governments fail to act. Our rights are indivisible, and we want ambitious, multidimensional policies which tackle these multiple injustices. How many more childhoods will be destroyed before our leaders take action? When will every child have justice?

With only a decade left to achieve the SDGs – and only six years to end child labour by 2025 – time is running out. We are committed to mobilising for the rights of the most marginalised children in our world, and we sincerely hope our leaders will act on their commitments, and do so too.

DELEGATION OF THE 100 MILLION CAMPAIGN:

- All Africa Students' Union
- Bachpan Bachao Andolan
- European Students' Union
- Organising Bureau of European School Student Unions
- Zimbabwe National Students' Union
- 100 Million National Youth Committee of Brazil
- 100 Million National Youth Planning Group US