**Statement by the Secretary-General’s Envoy on Youth,**

**Jayathma Wickramanayake**

**Intersessional Seminar on Youth Rights**

**12 April 2021, 10am CEST (online)**

Excellencies,

Distinguished Delegates,

Fellow young people,

[Welcome to the Intersessional Seminar on Youth Rights]. It is an ***honor*** to be here with you today, as the Secretary-General’s Envoy on Youth. Please allow me to thank the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights for their ***leadership*** in organizing this Intersessional Seminar, and for their ***kind invitation*** to take part in this initiative.

A discussion on youth rights today is ***timelier*** than ever, and I welcome the opportunity for Member States to engage with young people and youth organizations in an ***open, earnest and honest*** way. Young people face ***numerous*** challenges and barriers in exercising their human rights, and it is ***pertinent*** that we identify potential next steps at the Human Rights Council to not only ***protect,***  but ***promote*** the human rights of youth.

The United Nations first ever system wide youth strategy; youth2030 recognizes this. Protecting and promoting the rights of young people and supporting their civic and political engagement is the fourth priority area of the strategy, aiming to scale up the UN’s action at the global, regional and country levels to ***promote, defend and uphold***the intrinsic human rights of young people.

The UN Secretary General’s Call to Action on Human Rights also targets young people as key partners in a number of priority areas such as climate action and future generations, civic space, new frontiers and the common agenda for protection.

The challenges young people encounter today are ***multiple*** and ***multi-faceted***, and the COVID-19 pandemic has ***exacerbated*** many existing human rights insecurities. There are ***excellent*** young speakers here with us today who will shed light on these challenges, from their own ***lived*** experiences.

Therefore, I want to use this opportunity to put forward ***three*** recommendations for how we can put young people’s rights at the ***heart*** of building back better in the post COVID-19 era.

First, I encourage Member States and representatives of human rights mechanisms to consider answering ***two*** ***key questions*** when discussing how to better integrate youth throughout their work.

* First; how to ensure the ***mainstreaming*** of youth rights into their ***existing*** work, in order to address the human rights violations and concerns that specifically affect youth populations?
* Second; how to ***guarantee*** the ***continuous*** participation of ***diverse*** groups of young people, especially young women, indigenous youth, youth in rural communities, youth with disabilities, LGBTIQ youth, youth without access to technology, and others, to ensure that this mainstreaming process happens together ***with*** young people, and truly reflects their needs?

I ***urge*** the Human Rights Council to consider not only possible methods of ***improving***, but ***institutionalizing*** the participation of youth in its work in a ***permanent, structured and meaningful*** way.

* This could take various forms such as an ***Annual Forum*** mandated by the Council, that was also recommended by the HC’s report in 2018, an ***Annual Panel*** or ***Day of Discussion*** during Council sessions (or others), with a clear ***follow-up plan*** and ***strong accountability mechanisms*** for ***implementation*** of findings and recommendations put forward by youth.
* Existing practices can provide inspiration; for example, young people are regularly invited to brief the Security Council during its formal meetings and Arria-Formula meetings not only addressing Youth issues but also contributing to other important topics pertaining to global peace and security such as gender, climate and country specific situations from a youth perspective.

Lastly, barriers that young people face are complex, and as such cannot be resolved by a ***one-size-fits-all*** solution. Therefore, I call the Human Rights Council to consider additionalrecommendations included in the report of the High Commissioner on Youth and Human Rights, presented in 2018, and consult young people whether these recommendations are still appropriate to resolve the challenges imposed by the global pandemic.

Distinguished Delegates, Fellow young people,

COVID-19 has ***intensified*** issues that we were aware of before, and the rights of youth require ***urgent*** attention.

We must face our problems ***head on***.

We must ***raise*** youth voices, to help us lead the way forward.

Heads cannot be turned away from problems of young people anymore. Youth voices ***cannot be silenced***.

Over the last few years alone, we have seen young people worldwide take to the streets and dominate online spaces demanding climate action, racial and gender equality, democracy, and the respect of fundamental freedoms and human rights.

And here, I want to take a moment to remember and honour the brave young people who have been violated or lost their lives in the process. I hope that this forum gives an opportunity to institutions, particularly to governments, to adapt their approaches to protect and safeguard young people demanding for the rights of themselves and others, instead of seeing them as a threat.

And finally, let's take advantage of these unprecedented times and turn them into an opportunity to finally move from commitment to action, leaving no young person behind.

I thank you.