

Your Excellencies,

My name is Kehkashan and I am the Founder-President of Green Hope Foundation, a children and youth led social innovation enterprise that empowers young people, especially those from marginalized communities in 25 countries. I am 20 years old now and I started my advocacy when I was 8. I, therefore, speak from my lived experience when I say that I faced tremendous discrimination right from the day I began my work, solely due to my age. It came not only from adults and institutions, but more severely from older youth, many of whom were part of the UN Youth Caucuses. It resulted in cyberbullying, online stalking, anonymous hate mails and threats of violence and there were many others like me who faced it similarly. That was one of the reasons for founding Green Hope Foundation to provide children and youth, especially those who are vulnerable, a safe platform through which they could drive change within their communities. COVID-19 has not only exacerbated inequalities but has added a further obstacle of digital access. This excludes a much larger group of young people, who are already marginalized, and it also exposes many of us to online hate and cyber-exploitation, that in turn has severe impacts on our mental health and directly infringes on our human rights. My recommendations therefore are:

- Realign the existing UN youth causes to ensure that leadership and decision making are not restricted to those youth who live in western countries only. We must include children in them as well.
- Assign financing to LDCs specifically to build digital infrastructure, with proper safety protocols, and monitored mechanisms that track the improvement of digital access of children and youth in these countries.
- Most importantly, provide safe spaces, both online and on the ground for children and young people to follow their dreams.

I thank you.