

Esteemed officials,

My name is Ahona Paul and I am a 15 year old student. I stand before you with one goal in mind. I would like to ask each and every one of you to think about the young people in your respective countries and think about how we can allow children to contribute and make a difference.

In our lives as children, we all hope for a secure environment conducive for us to safely live, play and learn. I have been given a safe place to be myself and explore my interests and skills. However, I cannot speak the same of a lot of other children just like me. Achieving this goal means investing in and protecting children and youth from all forms of violence. It means upholding the basic rights of a child, such as the right to a name and identity through birth registration, the right to proper care and development, and the right to be treated as a child in every situation through juvenile justice systems.

Part of implementing SDG 16 is making sure the messages of this goal reach young people so that we can be ambassadors of peace now and into the future. I learned about the goals as part of the Global Campus, which is a club in our school that focuses on a certain SDG every year through the Global Challenge organised by NAE and UNICEF. In this challenge, we try to impact the community around us by implementing these goals in our own way.

I believe that we can achieve more if we allow and support youth to be leaders and changemakers. There are many young people on the forefront of developing initiatives to promote peace and justice. Being from Bangladesh, the work of Shougat Nazbin Khan particularly resonates with me. She has developed a college to provide alternatives for youth susceptible to violence in more than 50 Bangladeshi communities.

To get the children of this world involved, all we need is a platform or an opportunity to have our voices heard. My ask to you today is to not only listen to me right now but listen to the children in your countries with ideas for a more peaceful world and give them answers. I would urge everyone to consider creating programs and organisations that deal with educating the younger people. Listen to their ideas and opinions, give them a chance.

Now, I would like to introduce Charles Young, who was part of a group of young people raising their voices, hoping to be heard.