

Opening session (Monday, 10 February, 10:00am – 1:00pm)

Election of officers

Adoption of the agenda and other organizational matters

Opening remarks

- Mr. Liu Zhenmin, Under-Secretary-General, United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA)
- Mr. Daniel Perell, Chairperson of the NGO Committee on Social Development
- Ms. Olivia Tan Jia Yi, Youth Representative

Speech

Good morning Chair, Under-Secretary-General and esteemed guests. I am Olivia Tan Jia Yi, and I am here today as part of the Yale International Relations Association, speaking on behalf of the UN Major Group for Children and Youth, the General Assembly-mandated space for young people at the UN. First, let us express our support of Dan's remarks, with whom we have worked a lot with in previous years. 2020 marks the start of a new decade, a decade of action. In the past years, we have seen important improvements in many areas - a significant increase in the world's human development index from 1990 to 2018 and a 36% decrease in world poverty levels within the same years. We celebrate these achievements, but are also aware of the growing inequalities, slow progress and deeply rooted issues that systematically put profit over people and planet. We must also look forward to the challenges that face us in the coming decade with renewed ambition and a sense of urgency.

In 2018, OECD countries saw a 34% housing cost overburden rate, where low-income private tenants were spending more than 40% of their income on rent. More worryingly, some OECD countries report a rise in youth homelessness while several indicated rising homelessness among families with children. Even with all that we have

done so far, In 2020, it seems like all our clocks are ticking with universal concerns like the climate emergency, public health issues, rising political divisions and now increasing homelessness amongst our youth and children.

These groups are our future, and yet countries spend only 20% of their Gross Domestic Product on social protection policies, most of which do not reach the youth. There is a need, an urgent one, to address the issue of housing. A roof over our heads and four solid, warm walls are not a human luxury, but a necessity for a fulfilling life and decent livelihoods. It is a necessity that should be accessible and affordable to youth, children, people of all socioeconomic classes. Without a secure environment, the youth find it harder to develop emotional resilience, physical health or even to have a peace of mind. These costs, slowly building, snowball into lowered economic productivity, social malaise and perhaps most regretfully, a defeated and distressed generation.

Homelessness and poor social protection systems is a problem that faces us now, but its consequences will continue to haunt us for decades and generations to come. It is imperative that we invest in our youth now, through a concerted effort by member states and various UN entities to prioritize accessibility. Robust social protection policies are an approach we can undertake to prevent the lifelong consequences of poverty and discrimination. Initiatives beginning from child development such as financial aid for higher education, skills development and nutritious food ensure that the reduction of social inequality is long term. The goal of these policies is simple - to provide every child with the same starting line, a fair chance in life no matter what circumstances they were born into.

However, the crux of the issue lies perhaps not in just the initiation of policies, but their execution and implementation. A report from the International Labour Organization found that only 35 percent of children worldwide enjoy *effective* access to social protection. This is in part due to the lack of coordination between social protection policies. Disjointed policies that do not support the overall well being of a child risk becoming unproductive. UNICEF illustrates a simple example: governments that fund programmes

to expand education but neglect those that tackle malnutrition may find that their children still struggle to attend school. A productive social policy scheme requires synchronization between various stakeholders and dedicated fiscal investment into the futures of our youth.

Even as we gather today in this room, our presence and concern is a testament to the optimism and abilities of many countries, policy makers and civil society. I hope, as a youth myself, that the discussions in this commission will increase our capacity to target homelessness, inequality and discrimination. It is with great hope that we usher in a decade of optimism and action. Thank you very much.