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Statement by the Forum of young parliamentarians

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Member of the Board of the Forum

135th Assembly
General Debate

Geneva, 24 October 2016

Mr. President,
Mr. Director General of the United Nations Office in Geneva,
Madam President of the Forum of women parliamentarians,
Distinguished guests,
Colleagues and friends,

I am very pleased to be speaking to you today on behalf of the Forum of Young Parliamentarians as we launch this debate on human rights abuses as precursors of conflict and the role of our parliaments.

This is a timely debate as we are currently witnessing the devastating effects of a number of wars and conflicts. And I believe that this should lead us to question ourselves: “What could we have done? What should we do to break the cycle of violence, or to stop it even before it begins?”

Conflicts and war need fertile ground to build and spread. The ground for conflict is ideal when people’s dignity is denied, when freedoms become a luxury, when justice belongs to the few, and when equity and equality are nothing but faraway concepts.

This is the sad reality that millions of young people face today. Today’s youth generation is the largest the world has ever known. Young people are often a majority of the population in countries affected by war and conflict. Many are refugees, many others are displaced persons and many more are cut off from education and economic opportunities. The reality they live in at present is a foregone conclusion. Even worse, their future is signed and sealed in the same way.

Where there is no hope, no freedom, no dignity, no justice, no equity and no equality, there can be no youth. For the truest meaning of being young is to have hopes and dreams. The right to dream and be hopeful is not a given for young people today.

Some people see youth as a cause of tension. They might say that young people are easily driven towards violence and extremist ideologies. They might be worried by young people, or might even fear them. People who think like that fail to see that, behind a small minority of young people engaged in violence, there is a vast majority engaged in peace. That majority is an untapped potential.

We need to harness young people's energy and passion. We need to open spaces for them to contribute locally, nationally, regionally and internationally. When young people are engaged in their communities, when they have a say in debates, when they are empowered to contribute to policymaking, when they are listened to and valued – that is when they can be agents of peace and stability.

As a young parliamentarian, I work closely with youth organizations and youth movements. I meet with youth advocates, including those working on human rights. I can tell you that they are a golden warning system! Their passion and sense of justice make them perceptive to abuses and inequalities. Let's listen to them and channel their concerns in our parliaments. We can do this by increasing their participation as young MPs and by engaging them in our parliamentary work, to name just two ideas.

For us young MPs, there is no doubt about what builds, drives and sustains peace. And that is good governance and social justice, as well as a respect for human rights, freedoms and dignity that can be enjoyed by everyone and without exception.