

Excellencies,
Dear friends,

Good morning everybody.

I want to begin by thanking the European Commission and the conference organisers for extending an invitation to address you today. The European Youth Forum is honoured and proud to be here on such an important occasion and we find it vital for young people, who will probably be the generation facing the biggest impact of climate change, has a space at the table.

The European Youth Forum is the biggest youth organizations-led movement in the world, representing the voices of 50 million young Europeans towards the EU, the Council of Europe and the UN. We work to advance the rights of those in our generation, and disrupt institutions in order to #YouthUp Europe.

In the spirit of the Talanoa Dialogue, I come before you today as someone who has a story to tell, somebody speaking on behalf of young people. **Our** story. The story of the largest generation of young people in the world to date.

[pause]

The world we know is on the edge. We are already experiencing man-made climate change around the globe, including here in Europe. Inaction on climate change today will lock coming generations into a future of instability, injustice and climate chaos.

Young people in Europe and across the world will be at the forefront of what will be the worst and most unpredictable effects of climate change in the future. It is **our** right to be heard and **your** duty to listen carefully and act on some of our claims.

While still being underrepresented in the power structures, young people – being disruptive by nature have already started tackling this challenge by themselves. From innovating in technology, and shaking up politics, to using social media to call out injustice and leading social movements on the ground. Young people today are also incredibly aware of their consumer choices, and are destroying entire industries not upholding to ethical and sustainable standards.

[pause]

While much good work has been done on fighting climate change in the last years– from institutions, to Member States, to the private sector and even youth organizations and movement (including by our member at Youth and Environment Europe or the Federation of Young European Greens), the very bitter truth is that despite our best efforts, most indicators measuring the health of our planet are showing **negative** trends.

We've already lost nearly **two-thirds** of all vertebrates since 1970 - the sixth mass extinction,

Today, soil depletion has destroyed **one-third** of all arable land,

Climate change already causes **400,000** deaths annually mainly due to hunger and communicable diseases.

My generation will have to inherit this planet, on the verge of global warming, with higher sea levels, higher risks in our cities and communities, worse air quality, and a very long etc.

I do not intend to dwell on this difficult news, but simply to indicate that there are very large order trends taking place that are negative and that are

escalating. Rather, I would like to focus the remainder of my remarks on the question of “**Why?**”

[pause]

The starting point of our story is our understanding of the problem. If we don't see the problem clearly, our responses will always miss the mark.

We **cannot** see climate change as a problem in isolation. Climate change is a **symptom**. The **principle** problem and the cause of climate change is overconsumption. Today, natural resources are being consumed at more than 1.5 times the Earth's ability to regenerate them.

For us young people, climate change is a matter of **justice**. Those who are most responsible for it rarely feel the worst impacts. It is those who are already vulnerable to extreme weather events, natural disasters and rising sea levels – often those who are socially marginalised due to their economic status, age, race and gender – who bear the brunt. Climate change is exacerbating existing inequality and leading to conflict and violence.

This is **not** to say that countries in the global North or rich people should be blamed. Instead, we believe that the problem is **systemic**. It has to do with the stories about the possibility of endless economic growth that are programmed into our economy and our mindsets.

Let's just have a look at how we see our systems and how we think about our economy. An economy without growth is small and weak, irrelevant in the global stage. Only economies which grow, fastly and strongly are worth our attention. But what is the limit to this growth?

This is why we need a distinction between growth and maturity. Right now, no such distinctions exist for the global economy. Growth means growth in its

physical size. In fact, we have an economy programmed almost like a human body in a state of permanent puberty. I know we all want to be forever young, but is the survival the planet the cost?

Taking climate change into the equation, the story we are told is that of decoupling growth from emissions. There is an active debate going on right now on whether it is possible to fully or partially decouple economic growth from greenhouse gas emissions. Historically, they have moved as one.

There are some signs that some decoupling is happening. GDP and energy use are not quite as tightly correlated in recent years as they have been. But the hard research is quite clear. Even relative, or partial, decoupling to the degree that would make any material difference is probably a myth. Absolute decoupling, which is what we need, is a full-blown fairytale. We certainly cannot rest our hopes on either.

We are surrounded by visions of ‘inclusive growth’, ‘sustainable growth’ or ‘green growth’ and promising technological solutions to environmental problems. However, we don’t dare to name the one we should blame – infinite growth.

We urgently need fresh thinking. We urgently need a new story. A story that puts climate justice front centre. A story that breaks with the suicidal logic of ‘infinite growth on a finite planet’.

Let me get back to the question posed in this opening session: ‘Where are we?’

[pause]

We are now at a crossroads. Never in human history has a generation faced an existential question on this scale. We are the first. If we are not to be the last, we must throw off our reserve, our fear, our old logics, and our broken stories.

Never have our cities been more urbanised, our sea levels higher, our consumption patterns more out of control and the quality of our air worst. These are a real threat to our way of life, especially to the European way of life.

[pause]

But we also believe that there is plenty of real hope, if we can just pry ourselves off the false hope.

Real hope starts with **honesty [pause]** We need to acknowledge that we are **not** on track with meeting our global targets. We know that the EU's targets are **not** compatible with the Paris Agreement goals. The EU has committed to reduce its emissions by 40% by 2030, and by 80% by 2050 - this will **not** put us on a path to a fully decarbonised world as we agreed in Paris in 2015.

Real hope starts with **ambition [pause]** The EU must strive to be as ambitious as possible, and aim for a maximum increase of 1.5°C compared to pre-industrial levels. This means also that EU should revise its 2030 climate target, and adopt a much more ambitious long-term target. What we are calling for is a target of net zero emissions by 2050 at the latest. Full decarbonisation by 2050 is not a dream scenario but the **only** way to go. Carbon-free is the **only** option.

The EU must be that global inspiration and standard setter. We can lead this conversation and show other regions of the world what is possible.

We still see today, despite the huge efforts of some, the corporate and private sector not doing the part they need to and not being held accountable for their actions. To our friends from the private sector – this cannot be achieved without you. In the public realm neither the resources, data, human talent and necessary roadmaps exist alone. You need to be full part of this – and my generation will keep you accountable. The Financial Times published last week how Millennials

are hunting down unsustainable companies, one choice at a time. Your own survival is at stake.

And we still don't give cities and regions the place they deserve in this conversation. In the new urbanized era of our civilization, cities, especially in Europe represent a window of opportunity to tackle these challenges – right where they originate. Mayors are leading the way when it comes to climate around the world, and in Europe we must be an example in allowing them to co-lead this process at the highest levels.

We are seeing it in our cities, through the European Youth Capital awards – empowering young people to achieve sustainability locally through participatory approaches - and we also see it in many other global city networks such as C40, Covenant of Mayors, 100 Resilient Cities, and Eurocities among others advancing ambitiously the common agenda.

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Real hope also starts with **including youth [pause]** The right for participation of young people is enshrined in international human rights law, but while climate change concerns our generation the most, our right to participate is not guaranteed. This needs to change. Young people possess the energy, the most powerful renewable energy in the world – their youth. They also bring creativity, passion and innovation to the table to create a Europe that can live up to the challenges facing it.

A report published by the World Economic Forum and its Global Shapers interviewing thousands of young people in Europe a few months gave us a very strong signal – yes Millennials identify climate change as the biggest threat of their time. Young people are highly aware of the risk and are equipped to actively contribute. They want to be the ones pioneering the transitions of their communities – so create meaningful spaces for them to do so.

Finally, real hope lies in all the knowledge we have about what makes worth living **[pause]** Have you heard that old saying, we measure what we value and value what we measure? **[pause]** As long as we are taking GDP as a yardstick for progress in our societies, we're screwed.

Let me give you an example: When there is an oil spill and experts need to clean up the mess - GDP will increase. The economy is said to be doing well.

As US Senator Robert Kennedy put it back in 1968: "GDP measures everything **except** that which makes life worthwhile". And yet, 50 years onwards we still take GDP as a shorthand for progress.

We don't need to start from scratch. Alternative indicators already exist. The Youth Progress Index is one such instrument we, the European Youth Forum, developed to give the full story of what life is like for a young person today, independent of economic indicators. Very insightful on what actions are the most urgent! Go check it out online!

It is high time to **rethink** our current policy-making in the European Union. We must give up the elusive quest for growth. We must make GDP as a measure of progress history. We need to move towards alternative measures of progress that reflect the **real** wellbeing of people and planet.

[pause]

We are running out of time. There is no plan B. There is also no planet B. This is the greatest challenge of our times, and only by working intergenerationally, cross sectorally and in a multilevel manner we will be able to save this planet.

Failing is not an option.

My generation of young people in Europe and the world, dream of a future in which every newborn child will have the same opportunities as we have now, will be free from hunger, thirst and insecurity, and where the world's ecosystems are respected and allowed to thrive. **[pause]** Think of the Europe which you are leaving for your children and families. What Europe do you want?

A world where Europe continues to inspire others and leads by example. A Europe that fights for climate and social justice, and preserves the cultural and natural heritage for many more generations to come. A Europe which is sustainable, resilient and young – and where your children and mine, will grow healthy.

Join us in making this a reality and let's #YouthUp Europe together.

Thank you very much

- **END**