

Dear children, adults and members of the UN General Assembly.

Six months ago, we signed up to express our views of the future at the Children's General Assembly. Strangers among strangers. From different countries, different religions and different ethnicities. We even spoke different languages. But we shared the same vision. To make our voices heard – and to create change for children all over the world.

Today, despite our differences, we stand before you with our joint declaration. A declaration which we have co-created and agreed upon.

But first – we would like you to join us in a quick experiment. Everybody, please close your eyes.

Imagine a child. A child feeling helpless. Left alone. Not fitting in. Afraid of being itself.

Now imagine a child fearing a future threatened by climate change. A fear of having nothing to eat. Of hunger and malnutrition. A fear of having no water to drink. A fear of air pollution and water-borne diseases. Of having to flee your own home because of climate disasters.

Next, imagine having no access to education. Education that helps children like us speak truth to power. Education that helps us make informed decisions. That helps us take actions towards a sustainable future.

Please – open your eyes again. What you just imagined is the reality of not one child, but of millions of children around the world.

Only, these children do not need to close their eyes to imagine it.

According to UNICEF, one billion children are poor and lack basic necessities. 617 million children will never get a proper education. Children make up two thirds of the world's refugees. One in seven children experience mental health issues. And all children are affected by the consequences of climate change such as floods, storms, droughts and wildfires.

But wait. Look who I am talking to. The UN General Assembly. You already know these facts and figures.

You know that inequality can be fought by knowledge. You know that education is one of the best weapons against poverty.

You know that giving children a fair chance in life is the first step towards solving global problems that we will have to deal with when we ourselves are adults.

Yet there might be something you don't know. That perhaps the road to solving some of these problems is to put yourself in our shoes and to act with our best interests at heart.

All children are born creative and curious. We don't worry about rules. We can play, experiment and dream up worlds that do not exist. So perhaps you can learn from us and use creative and curious ways to ensure a better future for children all over the world?

We urge you – leaders of the world – to act responsibly and to act now.

We ask you to invest more time and money in education than you do in military. To invest more in green energy and technology than you invest in monetary growth. And to focus on growth for all – not profit for some.

And if you teach us about our differences like religion, nationality and gender roles – remember to also teach us about our similarities. About compassion, kindness and love – and our potential to create a positive future together. Please prioritize the Sustainable Development Goals and targets relating to equality, education, poverty, mental health and climate justice.

Back when this project started, we as children may have felt like strangers among strangers. That we were too different to find common ground. But standing here today, I am filled with hope that we can in fact create change for the better. If we think with curiosity and act with creativity. This is crucial.

So when you continue at your UN Assembly today, be curious like children. Open-minded like children. And most importantly, please take action. For the sake of children and the future of our planet.

On behalf of all of us, I would like to thank everyone at the UN General Assembly. For listening to our declaration – and for opening your eyes just a little bit more. To see that the power may be yours, but that the future is ours.

And next year we will ask you, “What did you do?”

Thank you.

