

Matti Niemi,  
Finnish Youth delegate to the 64<sup>th</sup> UN General Assembly

Honorable Secretary General,

Fellow representatives of the Finnish civil society,

About twelve years ago, the former Secretary General, Mr. Kofi Annan, made a visit to Finland. That year was also special for another United Nations –related reason: that year Finland sent it's first United Nations Youth Delegate to attend the General Assembly. Since then, the role of Finnish youth in the formulation of United Nations agenda for youth has been only growing.

Twelve years ago we were facing a somewhat different world: economy was on the upbeat, Internet was making it's way to people's lives and it had been only two years since Finland had won the hockey world championship. Today we are faced with a multitude of problems: the climate crisis, the economic crisis and the growing number of young people affected by the wars and other violence in the world.

The role of youth in addressing these questions is of utmost importance. It is us, who are to face the consequences, if we do not act swiftly in repelling the climate crisis. It is us, who are left without jobs or livelihood, should the economy continue to crumble.

This is why I have been glad to see that at least in Finland, young people are being heard by decision makers. We are beginning to see democratically elected youth councils in Finnish municipalities, national youth parliaments and growing international activity.

Despite of all this, some questions are left unanswered. In about one and a half weeks we will be having the European parliamentary elections in Finland. According to the latest forecasts, only about 12 percent of people between 18 and 25, are going to vote. Some commentators say this will all change as the new, Europe-oriented generation takes over in politics, but at the moment the situation is rather lamentable, not least from democracy's point of view.

Through enhancing youth and civil society participation in the European level, I believe we could achieve a stronger, more democratic union. This, I think, would also lead to a stronger United Nations.

A new tool would be a universal declaration of the rights of youth. We need a strong commitment from the international community if we are to change things for the better.

The key to this change is politics; I believe that politics has to change the world. In order for that to happen, we however have to change our politics. And what better time to start the change than in the midst of the crises we need to solve. Every crisis is also a possibility, a possibility to concentrate our efforts and change the world. And dear participants, we could start with the youth.