



UNV Deputy Executive Coordinator Toily Kurbanov addresses youth at the Y20 Inception in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia.  
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## What story will today's Arab youth be telling in 2050?

On 1 March 2020, Mr Toily Kurbanov, the Deputy Executive Coordinator of the United Nations Volunteers (UNV) programme, addressed a group of youth leaders in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, alongside Ms Henrietta Fore, the Executive Director of UNICEF. The event marked the inception of the Y20, the official youth engagement group of the G20, co-chaired for 2020 by the Prince Mohammed bin Salman bin Abdulaziz Foundation (MiSK) and Ithra Cultural Centre. The below is the keynote speech delivered by Mr Kurbanov.

I was invited to deliver keynote remarks in front of you. I can do that. Or, I can ask us to pause and reflect about a future keynote speech that one of *you* may be asked to deliver to a youth audience in the year 2050.

2050 is when the world will mark mid-century. By that time, the 21st century's identity will have been cast. And it is you—your generation—that will have a major role in casting this

identity.

2050 is when many of you will be in 50s and 60s, and you will be making all major decisions in the world. Some of you will be accomplished writers, others—psychiatrists, scientists, business executives. One of you may be serving as the Secretary-General of the United Nations. What will you say to the youth audience in your speech?

Perhaps you will share with them the story of how your generation eliminated global poverty. You will tell the youth of 2050 how strange it was to live in 2020 in the world where hundreds of million of people experienced hunger, while at the same time restaurants in the world’s major cities were disposing tons of tiramisu leftovers every night.

Or you might share with them how it was to live at the beginning of the century when climate-induced disasters (floods, droughts) were destroying livelihoods and elevated the world’s anxieties about the future. That was all before your generation took charge of the Green growth revolution and made our planet liveable.

Or you will share your generation’s proud story of eliminating global pandemics. You will recall, almost in disbelief, how a spread of a virus from China was locking down cities across Europe. Your generation will have put stop on this thanks to medical breakthroughs and investing in public health systems across the globe.

Perhaps, after delivering the speech you will go on a weekend trip to Hodeida. Because, by that time, the city will have become the world’s capital of modern art. As Nelson Mandela taught us many years ago: “It always seems impossible, until it’s done”.

Being in 50s and 60s is the age when you can reflect both backward and forward. Event today we say that 70 is the new 50. In 2050 that surely will remain the case, perhaps even more so.

Hard to say what kind of future will loom in the year 2050. Maybe in your keynote speech you will task the youth audience to go out and establish human settlements beyond the Solar system. That is a very hypothetical task, though!

More likely you might want to share with the youth an advice of how the industrial era’s conception of life experience as a 3-stage process—education, employment, retirement—does not hold in post-industrial era. Even today, the switch between education and employment doesn’t happen overnight, and retirement is no longer about retiring but about staying engaged and contributing to the societies where we live. That, and the Future of Work, might still remain relevant topics in the year 2050.

But I do hope that whatever advice you will choose to share with the youth in 2050, you will spare few minutes to stress important human values: Kindness, Care, Compassion. These values are truly universal and eternal, and will continue to carry weight in any society, at all

times.

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I do hope that when discussing these values you will also reflect on the importance of volunteering. Because volunteering is where compassion meets solidarity. It is for my generation an avenue by which one can do good, while also doing well. And I hope it will remain so for your generation too.

Even now, by UNV's estimates, up to 1 billion people are engaged in one form of volunteer work or another every year. Most of this happens on an informal and part time basis (few hours a week, or a day every month).

When a natural disaster hits a community, who is the first to provide response? In large cities, where family support is weaker, who plays major role in elderly care? Who often leads social innovation? Time and again, then answer is: Volunteers.

And so in the United Nations, we are trying to create opportunities for global citizens to volunteer for development work, for humanitarian action, and for peace building. Every year UNV facilitates about 8,000 volunteer assignments in the UN system. On top of that close to 15,000 people are volunteering online to support the UN in delivering location-neutral tasks: translation, data mapping, infographics and many more.

UN Volunteers are also contributing to the work of the UN family of agencies, funds and programmes in your neighborhood. They are working on urban development in East Jerusalem. In Egypt they are providing support to migrants and refugees. In Lebanon and Jordan UN Volunteers are working on climate change projects in the communities. As we say, once a volunteer—always a volunteer. In Morocco one of former UN Volunteers is now working in UNDP's SDG Acceleration Lab. We also have citizens of Saudi Arabia as UN Volunteers, but we will need many more of you. As this discussion shows, you certainly have many skills and talents to continue to global development!

This might be time for me to start closing remarks. Don't start drafting your 2050 keynote speech yet: take charge of the world first. Stop listening and agreeing that youth is the future, because youth is the present too. No decision about you should be made without you. And don't wait for other to create agenda for you, create your own agenda. Set out an agenda, focus on priorities and get things done. And when you can—volunteer. This way you will do good while doing well. And this is how you will be able to pass on an even better planet to the generation after you.

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