Ms. Tatiana Valovaya, Director-General of the United Nations Office in Geneva

Ambassador Coly Seck, President of the Human Rights Council

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Children and youth,

It is a great honor to have been appointed as Chairperson-Rapporteur of the 2019 Social Forum, which is dedicated to the promotion and protection of the rights of children and youth through education.

The theme for this year’s Forum shines the spotlight on the crucial topic of empowerment of young people through education at a critical moment in time. Despite the fact that more children and youth are in education than ever before, millions more are not and not all those in education are receiving a quality education.

Children and youth who are disproportionately affected include children in conflict or emergency, girls, children born into the poorest homes and communities, those living on the streets, indigenous children, asylum-**seekers**, migrant children and refugee children, children with disabilities, those of incarcerated parents and children whose birth has not been registered.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Given the subject of this year’s Social Forum, I am particularly glad and honored by the fact that **the Human Rights** Council chose me, as the Permanent Representative of Djibouti, to preside the sessions in the next two days. The Republic of Djibouti is a least developed country small in size, but which has made great efforts resulting in strong progress towards “*the promotion and protection of the rights of children and youth through education.”*

One area that is of particular interest to us is education in emergencies. In December 2017, the Government of the Republic of Djibouti hosted a regional ministerial meeting of the Inter-Governmental Authority on Development (IGAD) on the theme of education in collaboration with the UNHCR, the European Union, and the German Society for International Cooperation.

The outcome of this meeting was the Djibouti Declaration on Regional Refugee Education and Regional Action Plan.

In line with this Declaration, IGAD member states committed to ensure that every refugee, returnee and member of host communities has access to quality education in a safe learning environment within their respective countries without discrimination, including through the Action Plan.

In 2018, Djibouti also committed to protecting students, teachers, schools, and universities during armed conflict by endorsing the Safe Schools Declaration.

In 2019, thanks to funding from the Global Partnership for Education, the World Bank’s International Development Association, and the Qatar-based [Educate a Child](https://educateachild.org/%22%20%5Ct%20%22_blank), which is founded by Her Highness Sheikha Moza, we announced a range of new education measures including integrating refugee schools into our mainstream education system. I would like to take this opportunity to thank Her Highness.

Djibouti is also using increased funding for a results-based program that focuses on improving efficiency, equity and learning outcomes for the most vulnerable children in our education system.

We are placing an emphasis on supporting pre-school learning, helping enrol and retain more children, especially girls, in primary and lower secondary schools, and improving the quality of education by upgrading teaching practices and learning materials.

**In line with this effort, Djibouti is pleased to host the 3rd Forum for Balanced and Inclusive Education 2030 (III BIE), which will take place on 27-29 January 2020 in Djibouti with the participation of all relevant stakeholders.**

Much of the growing youth population is from the developing world. **Africa, including Djibouti, is no exception.** We have a young population, who we must empower to become agents of change and **sustainable development**.

**At this juncture let me recall, that in the Goals and Priority areas for the First Ten Years Plan of Agenda 2063 “the Africa we want;”the reaffirmation of an Africa whose development is people driven, relying on the potential offered by African People, especially its Women and Youth and caring for children.**

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The Social Forum has historically had a strong focus on the importance of education, of young people and of empowerment to achieving rights and sustainable development for all. For example, last year’s Forum on the promotion and protection of human rights through sport and the Olympic ideal had a dedicated session on youth, children and future generations.

Educating communities on their rights and the importance of community education has been a prominent feature of different sessions of the Social Forum including those concentrated on different aspects of human rights and health, climate change, and poverty **eradication.**

Empowerment and participation was a core theme of the 2016 Forum on human rights and people with disabilities, the human rights of older persons in 2014, and the 2012 Forum on people-centred development and globalization

Colleagues, ladies and gentlemen,

The Social Forum is an opportunity to bring together the children and youth communities with those working on education, human rights, and sustainable development. As such, this year’s programme is grounded in human rights and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, recognizing the interlinked and interdependent relationship between the Sustainable Development Goals and human rights norms and obligations.

Close collaboration between governments and civil society, together with other key **stakeholders**, has proven to lead to successful policies in this area. This is something we will hear more about today and something we must build upon. The presence of panelists from such a wide range of agencies and fields demonstrates the global and multi-sectorial approach. To be effective, solutions to ensuring children and youth can access quality, inclusive education must be grounded in human rights laws and have the adequate technical, financial and political support.

Over the course of the next two days we will discuss **about** those children and youth being left behind and how to effectively defend the right to education, education in conflict and emergencies, youth-led human rights education initiatives around the world, education for the future, and the many ways in which education can empower children and youth.We will then conclude on the way forward in a conversation led by some of the children and youth participating in the Forum.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my pleasure to welcome so many people to this Forum, with participants coming **from all continents.**

I ask of the participants to consider how, going forward, we can continue to strengthen and improve this Forum in order to realize its potential as a space for a constructive dialogue between civil society, international organizations, States and other stakeholders. This platform must be put to full use, with governments playing an active role, alongside civil society and all others. The recommendations we make must contribute to making a difference. On my part, I assure you that I will do all I can in order to ensure a constructive, inclusive and action-oriented discussion and outcome of this Forum.

Now, it is a great **pleasure** to invite Ms. Tatiana Valovaya, Director-General of the United Nations Office in Geneva. Ms. Valovaya, you have the floor.