STATEMENT BY

Ms. Zehra Sariaslan

Youth Representative of the Kingdom of the Netherlands

on the occasion of the sixty-eighth session of the General Assembly, Third Committee, under agenda item 27 b: (b) Social development: “Social development, including questions relating to the world social situation and to youth, ageing, disabled persons and the family.”

NEW YORK, 7 October 2013
Mr President, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

When I was a child, my grandmother told me her life story. She had a very difficult life. In her time many women didn’t go to school but instead got married at a young age. They worked hard, living under difficult circumstances, and many were often victims of violence. At the time I didn’t understand what she was saying and I continued to play without a care in the world.

Now, years later, as an adult, I understand what she was trying to tell me. Her message was that we as youth need to continue developing ourselves as an investment in our and others future. In other words: go to school, get your degree, be independent and change the world! This is what I have set out to do, in my own way, and that way is by igniting the fire that will allow the voices of women and youth to be heard. For giving them a place at the decision-making table is vital in protecting women from violence, ending gender inequality, and giving youths the platform to speak, one they rightfully deserve.

Living in the Netherlands, one grows up in the middle of different cultures, religions and ethnicities. Despite the difficulties that come with being raised between two cultures, I have been fortunate enough to live in society which supports me for who I am, and who I want to be. Who I want to be is someone who fights for women and youth around the world to be afforded the same security and opportunities as in the Netherlands.

Looking at the issue of violence against women, I want to share with you a quote of a Syrian woman from a refugee camp. Speaking of her trauma, she said "we had to leave everything behind. Even our dignity." Action is needed in areas where women like this are dealing with rape and abuse everyday. The world will lose its dignity if we don’t help women who play a key role in reducing poverty, peace building, and promoting social and economic development.

Mr. / Ms Chairman,

Women and young people alike really want to participate more in the a society of which they are an integral part. Having been elected as youth representative of the Netherlands, I know that young people want to see more action from their governments. They tell me that promises that have been made aren't being
fulfilled. Though I understand their frustration, I am here to tell young people not to give up and fight for their dreams. But I am also here to tell the government officials gathered here today, to take us seriously.

This is because the involvement of young people cannot be undervalued. Let's not forget young people have an enormous influence on the course of society, for instance via the use of social media. Therefore, our governments should support young people by allowing them to be involved in policy making, as their involvement is a necessary precondition for safeguarding broad support. And a good start would be that as of next year, every delegation here today should include at least one youth delegates to ensure their voices being heard at the highest level. But that is not enough. We, as youth representatives, could organize a UN forum on youth where young people can create, act and be heard. We are not only the leaders of tomorrow, but also the youth leaders today!

In 1990 my grandmother immigrated to the Netherlands. There is only one generation between my grandmother and I, yet so much change has been possible in that short time. Every step towards change is one more step away from silencing the voices of women and youth. I ask that every country here today, every person sitting in this assembly, listen to my calls for what are basic and fundamental human rights. Protecting women from violence, ending inequalities, and investing in the voices of youth. Now is the time to give opportunities to two groups which have been largely underrepresented and undervalued. To the latter I say, no more. There can be no peace, no prosperity, no progress without the full and equal participation of women and youth all over the world! One more step towards progress is another step away from the mistakes of the past.

Thank you.