



AUSTRALIA



AUSTRALIAN MISSION TO THE UNITED NATIONS

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UNGA THIRD COMMITTEE

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Debate on Social Development

Statement by Amos Washington 2018 Australian Youth Representative to the United Nations

(Check against delivery)

I am proud to be here representing Australian young people, a diverse and multicultural generation of our vibrant nation. This year, I embarked on a nationwide Listening Tour, consulting with thousands of young people across the country. I sought to answer the question, *what would Australia look like if young people had a greater say?*

From Albany to Alice Springs, Coober Pedy to Canberra, I spoke with young people from a diverse range of backgrounds and heard about the challenges they face. This experience is difficult to summarise in this short period of time, but I wanted to reflect on a few key learnings.

Firstly, it is crucial that we consider young people as participating members of society. There is a misconception that young people are waiting in the wings, yet to experience the real world. However, the issues the young people raised with me affect people of all ages, and are among the many issues that the 2030 Agenda strives to address. I spoke to culturally diverse

young people, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young peoples, members of the oldest continuing culture in the world, enduring racial prejudice. I engaged with young people experiencing discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity. I worked with young people living with disabilities, who taught me about the importance of accessible and inclusive spaces. I heard from young people who want safe and affordable housing, secure employment, a fair and equitable justice system, a healthy environment, an education system that encourages young people to thrive, and better support for those suffering from substance abuse. Young people I met advocated for a kinder society, free from bullying and harassment. In this sense, youth issues are community issues, and community issues are youth issues. Young people's experiences and perspectives of these issues are unique and varied, and we cannot get a full picture if we don't listen to these experiences and perspectives.

Secondly, it is clear that young people are concerned about the wellbeing of their generation. Young Australians in educational institutions, community groups, and juvenile detention centres consider mental health to be at a crisis point. In consultations, young people saw the interconnections between mental health and other community issues. An education system should emphasise the importance of mental health, and support services should consider the diversity of young people. Young people need to feel valued. The wellbeing of young people impacts on the rest of community, and when young people succeed, everyone benefits.

Finally, it is important that we include young people in policy decision-making, because young people are visionaries. We can enrich our policy conversations if we provide young people with a seat at the table, as young

people have nuanced solutions to offer. A young woman from regional South Australia said to me: ‘if I could influence one thing in my community, I would try to show that youth are an incredible, diverse group of people who deserve attention and the chance to influence change.’ We cannot generalise about young people, and when it comes to creating policy, we cannot make assumptions about what young people want and need.

Young Australians are members of the global community and are part of the largest generation in world history; a generation of more than 1.8 billion people.¹ Three years ago, we set the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, an ambitious blueprint for a more prosperous and sustainable world. However, in order to successfully implement the Agenda and meet the Sustainable Development Goals, we need to embrace the potential of young people to help shape a better future for all of us.

This year, I sought to answer the question *what would Australia look like if young people had a greater say?* If young people had a greater say in decision-making and setting our policy agenda, our world would be kinder, safer, and healthier. If young people had a greater say, our world would truly be more united.

¹ Sec-Gen press release: <https://www.un.org/press/en/2018/sgsm19234.doc.htm>; Special Envoy for youth statement: <https://www.un.org/youthenvoy/2018/08/international-youth-day-observance/>;