

NKOSILATHI NYATHI SPEECH

Special Message by Representatives of Young People

9am February 25th – African Regional Forum on Sustainable Development, Victoria Falls.

Good Morning. My name is Nkosilathi Nyathi, and I am a UNICEF-Climate Youth Ambassador and a proud Zimbabwean and African youth under the Zimbabwe Youth Council.

Welcome to Victoria Falls. My home. It is also home to the magnificent Victoria Falls or in our local Lozi language, Mosi-oa-tunya which means the ‘Smoke that Thunders’.

I grew up just a few minutes from where we are today. In Chinotimba township. And while I grew up in poverty, with everybody struggling all around me. I noticed something that affected the poverty of my community, of my family and friends, just as much as all the economic and social problems and the political issues we face in my country.

It was the environment! Our natural world around us, our atmosphere and our biodiversity.

We are experiencing the worst drought, right here in my backyard, in 100 years. I live it. My family lives it. Farmers have had little harvest for years now. When it doesn’t rain we suffer. And now when it does rain, it floods and we suffer.

Two weeks ago, about one hundred kilometres down the Zambezi river the town of Binga was left devastated after many homes and livelihoods were washed away by floods.

We all know about the devastating impact of Cyclone Idai that hit Mozambique, Malawi and Zimbabwe last year turning the lives of 1 million children upside down.

Friends, leaders....

Climate Change is now our reality. It is causing these extreme weather events to be more frequent and more severe. The plagues of locusts that are decimating Eastern Africa – many of your countries – are made worse through climatic impacts such as drought and floods.

Since I was 10, I have been passionate about this.

I am proud that I have been part of environmental clubs since grade 5.

I am currently the vice president of the environmental club at my school – Inyathi high school.

In December last year I embarked on the biggest adventure of my life. I had the honour of speaking at the COP 25 in Madrid. I experienced and was involved in the debates, the meetings and the negotiations to figure out how we can lower our emissions and adapt to climate change. It opened my eyes to the huge efforts going on at the global scale.

But what struck me, as I nervously sat in that airplane for the first time, and I looked down at the parched landscape of Zimbabwe and Southern Africa with farmland laying bare, the rivers and dams drying up.

I thought to myself that there millions of children and young people down there dealing with these harsh environments, food shortages and failing social conditions on the ground. They... *We* are the future.

We are here to talk about Sustainable Development. But we need to recognise that the environment and climate change form the foundation of all the SDGs.

If we fail to achieve the goals related to Clean Water and Sanitation, Climate Action, Life Below Water, and Life on Land, the world will fail to achieve all the other remaining goals.

The eradication of poverty, zero hunger, peace and justice, education, good health, just to name a few. These are the goals that affect my life every day!

Protecting the environment is one of the most important requirements for social justice and economic development... and ensuring the rights of children all around the world.

In Spain I called on the leaders at the COP to work extra hard to solve the climate and biodiversity emergency.

I also made a plea to involve us – the voices and opinions of children and young people – in creating the policies and making decisions about the climate and environment, which in the end will impact us and our children in the future.

I am happy that in Zimbabwe, the government involved young people the production of the country's climate policy document. But please, can the plans now become actions!

We are here. We are smart. We are activists. We have solutions. Involve us!

Did you know that when I was 14, I invented a biogas stove in my backyard. I learned that if we composted food scraps in a special container they would breakdown and provide natural gas that could be tapped into a stove to cook on.

I built it. And it not only reuses our food and kitchen waste in a sustainable way, but it meant we don't need to rely on burning fossil fuels for energy. And in a place like Zimbabwe, where we have a terrible fuel and power crisis, this helped us survive.

So friends and leaders...

As I speak to you here today on this stage, with my President beside me, other important leaders and decision makers, down here on the ground in Victoria Falls, in my backyard.

I make a bigger plea to you.... A demand. Please take all the things we talk about and debate this week and put it into action.... Young people have already started putting their words into practice through the various forums on Youth SDGs. Go back to Harare, to Nairobi, to Pretoria, to Geneva, to New York and Act!

But in doing so, call on your young people... the student leaders, the activists, the science enthusiasts, the video gamers, the young sports stars and bring them into the rooms when you are planning your actions and policies. Listen to their views and ideas!

Because....

'Nothing for us, without us, is for us'

I hope you enjoy your stay in my hometown and that for generations to come Mosi-oa-tunya's smoke continues to thunder!

Thank you