



## **Remarks by Incoming UN Youth Envoy Ms. Jayathma Wickramanayake at informal Media briefing**

**27 June 2017, Colombo:**

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Secretary-General, António Guterres for appointing me as his Envoy on Youth, I'll be taking office in July as the 2<sup>nd</sup> Youth Envoy in the history of the United Nations System.

I'd also like to remind you that Ahmad Alhendawi is my predecessor and has done an amazing job as the Youth Envoy. I hope to take on from where he left off to continue his legacy and also bring in new perspectives from my side to advance the UN's global youth agenda. I think this is a great opportunity for all stakeholders to come together, especially the member states, the civil society organizations, youth organizations, private sector, academia and all other partners. In my role as the UN youth Envoy I will be working very closely with all these partners to create a more tangible and visionary agenda for young people and youth participation in the UN System.

Before I go into detail I would like to thank those who ran my campaign, especially my colleagues from Hashtag Generation and my family, my in-laws, friends and my schools and university that gave me the strength to come this far.

I'm here because I was fortunate enough to utilize the opportunities that were made available to me as a Sri Lankan. I am someone who benefitted from the Free Education system, from Grade 1 – 13 and then in university. So, I'm very much obliged to the people of Sri Lanka for the opportunities that were given to me as a young woman from a rural area, I was born in Bentota and I initially schooled at Sangamiththa Vidyalaya in Aluthgama until the scholarship exams at which point I entered Visakha Vidyalaya and continued my education from there. These opportunities were made available to me by the people of Sri Lanka from the money of the tax payer and I'm very much grateful to everyone that has contributed in creating my path up to this point in time.

From becoming the 1<sup>st</sup> ever UN Youth Delegate, to the negotiator of the UN Resolution that declared the World Youth Skills Day, now as the newly appointed UN Envoy on Youth to the Secretary-General, my journey has been truly wonderful. Today I represent young people from across the globe, however I am a testament to what a young Asian woman can achieve if she's empowered. This is the message that I want to send across to other young women in the world, girls who are dreaming of becoming something big, if you have a will then you will have a way!

Facing the challenges that you must inevitably face being a woman in today's world and enjoying being a successful change-maker globally, the sense of responsibility I have to work for others is due to the cultural environment that I grew up in. Most of you know me as the co-founder of Hashtag Generation, a large youth led movement, advocating for full and effective participation of young people in politics, with an especial focus on young women. We've conducted many trainings across Sri Lanka to empower young women to run for office.

I've also been active in several high-level international initiatives for young people, starting from Rio +20 in 2012 to the Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting to the World Conference on Youth, to the negotiations for the high level political forum on post 2015 Sustainable Development Agenda. I also worked very closely with the UN Country team here in Sri Lanka, especially as a UN volunteer and contributing to the ILO Zero Child Labor campaign in 2013 as a volunteer.

The turning point in my life was becoming the 1<sup>st</sup> runner up in the emerging young leader award competition that was organized by the Ministry of Youth Affairs in 2011. Following this competition, I started working on the National Youth Services Council on their global campaign for the World Conference on Youth in 2014. When the NYSC designed the Youth delegate programme I was selected as the first ever UN Youth delegate from Sri Lanka along with Aruthra Rajasingham. This experience inspired me greatly to see how the United Nations can make a difference in the world.

The UN Youth Delegate programme is a programme that empowers young people to directly participate in inter-governmental negotiations of the UN. This experience empowered me to a great extent to take leadership and participate, not just as a young person but also as a partner with Member States in inter-governmental negotiations.

I would say that the most important contribution I've made to the global youth development agenda is the UN World Youth Skills Day. I took leadership in 2014 after the World Conference on Youth to bring forth a resolution to the United Nations to declare a World Youth Skills Day on 15 July. It was a follow up on the World Youth Conference and also an initiative that was directed and led by Sri Lanka.

Something I personally love is bringing people together, I like creating movements and platforms that bring different stakeholders together. I also worked with certain Non-Governmental Organizations in Sri Lanka to bring young political party leaders together to bring recommendations for reconciliation and constitutional reform. I've been working on this specially in conflict affected areas, getting Tamil speaking young politicians to work together with their Sinhalese speaking counterparts in Sri Lanka over the last year. That experience also helped shape my profile in receiving this appointment as someone who advocates for conflict prevention in the long run.

This opportunity to serve in the Secretary-General's office as the Envoy on Youth is an opportunity to work with a lot more people worldwide than I've been working with here in Sri Lanka and I believe youth development is one of the key elements in our attempts towards sustainable development, not just for Sri Lanka but for everyone, everywhere across the globe. Investing in youth development is an investment that they make for the future, this will be one of the slogans that I'll be working under, encouraging governments to invest more on youth development, introduce youth policies where there are no youth policies and initiate youth councils where there are no youth councils in the world.

I will be working alongside the three pillars of the UN; peace and security, development and human rights. Under Peace and Security, I'll be working very closely with the Security Council Resolution 2250 on Youth, Peace and Security and under development I'll be focusing on getting young people to take leadership on implementation and evaluation of the Sustainable Development Agenda and under Human Rights, I'll be working very closely with youth communities that are most vulnerable and marginalized in the world with an especial focus on young refugees and young women.

This is the plan that I have for my term in the future and I'm counting on the support of the UN, the Member States and all other stakeholders, especially of young people to make my term a success.

Thank you very much.