



## **World Youth Rights Conference**

### **“Involving Youth in Global Action”**

*12 August 2021*

#### **Opening address by OSCE PA President Margareta Cederfelt**

*As delivered*

Thank you, Mr. Saidov,

Excellencies,

Ambassadors,

Dear participants,

First of all, I would like to express my thanks to the President of Uzbekistan for arranging this important conference. I would also like to send my best wishes to the Delegation of Uzbekistan to the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly for our good co-operation.

It is my pleasure today to take part in this important conference and I thank you very much for inviting me to. I would have been delighted to be in Uzbekistan but it was not possible. Right now, I am in the very northern part of Sweden, in the mountain area, and it is a lovely early morning.

I have had the pleasure to visit Uzbekistan as an observer during the parliamentary elections in 2019. I look forward to visiting Uzbekistan again in my capacity as President of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly. But, in the meantime, I am pleased that we have the technology to participate in this conference from wherever you are in the world.

I would like to commend all the organisers for putting together an impressive programme as we also celebrate International Youth Day. I note in particular the efforts that

Uzbekistan continues to make in supporting and empowering youth. This is a priority that should be shared by all of our member countries in the OSCE.

Indeed, the coronavirus pandemic continues to have a strong impact on youth all across the globe. I think here of course of the loss of elderly family members, teachers, and others. But also the impact that COVID has had on societies as a whole: even though young people are less likely to suffer from the virus in health terms, the broader COVID-19 crisis has had a disproportionate negative effect on younger people. I think here of education and schools that have been closed, students that have been asked to take classes online, some that have been unable to take their courses. But also activities outside of school, including sports or gatherings for young people have been cancelled. I think it is important to keep this in mind when talking about the situation of young people and working towards a return to a normal life and how to limit the impact of COVID-19.

Younger people have also been entering the job market. Maybe there have not been enough jobs, maybe they have had to leave their job. It is not a good start to life. As all sectors of the economy have had to find savings, this has often come at the expense of the youngest people in the society. This is an important issue for us politicians to have in mind and we must make sure that we secure resources for young people.

Looking at the situation from a broader perspective, you will notice that in every country a whole generation of young adults has come of age between the global financial crisis and the COVID-19 pandemic. We must also keep this in mind. This succession of major crises has also had a clear social impact and affected the readiness and ability of younger adults to enter education, the labour market, and social life. This is not only about financial resources, it is also about political will.

Considering this, it is urgent that we do not add a crisis of representation on top of these social and economic difficulties. We must remain careful that this crisis does not contribute to further alienating a whole segment of our population by undermining the confidence of young people in our institutions and turning them away from public life. Instead, we must do all we can to harness the energy of young people to bring the changes we all seek.

The younger generation can provide answers to many global challenges. Not alone – but we must let them in our rooms and to take a seat at the table. On climate change, for example, their commitment is extraordinary. As I am sure you know about Greta Thunberg, a young Swedish woman who has taken part in discussions all over the world, met with world leaders, and proved leadership when it comes to climate change. Many more of the young generation can take a step forward and contribute to a better world.

In order to realize the vision of younger people, it is important that we – the older ones – empower younger generations. We can do this by encouraging young people to invest time and energy in youth associations, civil society organizations, and political parties. But ultimately, what is needed is real influence through inclusive representation in all stages of decision-making.

Unfortunately, younger people continue to be underrepresented in our national parliaments. In the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, we are seeking to address this challenge by providing platforms for networking and discussion for our youngest Members. We organize meetings and seminars to ensure that younger parliamentarians are better represented in multilateral organizations. But we still can do more to strengthen youth political dialogue, capacity-building, and the sharing of best practices through mentorship programmes.

This is why in the coming weeks, I will create a new portfolio for a Special Representative on Youth within the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly. I hope that this will provide a focal point to further streamline our efforts to promote meaningful youth engagement in our discussions and include youth perspectives and considerations in our debates and activities.

I wish you fruitful discussions today and tomorrow, and I look forward to the outcome of the conference, because as I said the participation of young people in society is one of the most important issues for the future.

Thank you very much for giving me the floor.