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TECHO is an NGO founded 22 years ago in Chile. We are youth-led, and our vision is a fair society and inclusive cities that are free of poverty, where every person can exercise their duties, claim their rights, and seek opportunities to develop their capacities. We work almost exclusively in urban and semi urban informal settlements and slums.

Why slums? We know more than 30 per cent of people live in poverty in Latin America and more than 65 percent of them in extreme poverty. According to United Nations Habitat, one in four people residing in urban areas lives in informal settlements. And it is in slums where populations experience the most extreme manifestations of inequality. Where poverty exists in all its forms. Currently, we work in more than 560 slums.

In 2009, UNDEF provided TECHO with support for a program to create a space for democratic community-level participation for slum dwellers in Argentina, Colombia, El Salvador, and Peru. And we are grateful for their commitment because we know that as inequality continues to rise, people living in slums will face stauncher social, political, and economic exclusion. Thanks to UNDEF's key support, today we run similar participation fora across 60 cities in 19 countries in Latin America and the Caribbean.

This important UNDEF seed support allowed us to grow so that today we strengthen democratic and community-level participation not only of slum dwellers but of young citizens, young volunteers who are integral to our program, as well as of key stakeholders, for example, the private sector.

As inequality continues to rise in Latin America, people living in informal settlements will, too, tend to remain voiceless in the political arena where

‘solutions’ to combat poverty and resource allocation are decided. Their social, cultural, civil and political rights will continue to be violated.

Let’s reflect on the meaning of today --- of this day we observe --- to galvanize each other to overcome the tall barriers we face, to empower our people, to fuel hope in the institutions of democracy instead of resentment against them, and to equip each other with the savvy we need to combat corruption in all its forms.

How will we do it? What is our commitment to UNDEF and our compact with everyone in this room?

1. First, we will continue to promote community development aimed at strengthening grassroots leadership abilities, and foster their understanding of --and active participation in-- civic duties.
2. Secondly, we will continue to convene and mobilize large numbers of volunteers from different sectors in society. *Actually, our mandate is to massively mobilize a volunteer force that becomes highly empathetic with the needs of those facing exclusion.* Over 20 years, TECHO has mobilized more than 1.1 million volunteers.... most of them quite young .... Our goal is to mobilize at least 2 million by 2030.
3. Thirdly, we will continue to advocate for policy change. We will do this by building the capacity of our partners, beneficiaries’ and our own, to work with national and international cooperation partners. More importantly, we will implement biannual Youth Advocacy Summits that include advocacy labs and accelerators, and implement new technology to reach those who have typically been left behind. We will continue to share evidence from the field to inform policymakers --- especially at the local level.

As I suspect is true for my fellow practitioners in the audience and my fellow co-panelists, centering inclusion and participation at the core of our strategy has left us a few lessons learned about the cost of democracy, and the evergreen question of sustainability: Here are three big ones for us:

1. There is absolutely no way we will achieve significant participation and inclusion outcomes by our siloed selves. We must continue to invest in partnerships with usual suspects and strange bedfellows.

2. We must design for, and then ask ourselves if our community development model is contributing to measurable participation gains. Our monitoring and all types of evaluations should be equipped for this.

3. Last but not least, a word on data: TECHO has and will keep working on sourcing data to continue the development of an open platform that integrates and provides access to information on all informal settlements in the main cities of Latin America. By offering this valuable asset, we have been able to partner and fund larger scale participation programs.

I want to thank UNDEF for this wonderful space, for your trust and investment in the Latin American youth, and offer you congratulations on a job well done.

Thank you.