

Your majesty, your excellencies, honoured guests,

I would like to begin by thanking all of you for inviting me to the opening of this historic conference. It is an absolute honour that I can lend my voice to millions of children and youth whose lives have been touched by migration.

We live in a world that's home to 1.8 billion young people. We come from all parts of the world, with diverse life stories, but the one thing we share is our hope to lead happy, prosperous lives. And so we cross roads and borders, deserts, and oceans in pursuit of higher education, better and decent work, personal development or marriage. Or, sadly, because of disasters, political instability, violence, and poverty. There's no doubt, that migration can be safe and have a positive impact.

But what about the 30 million children who are forced from their homes by violence or conflict? The 3 million that are stateless? What about the 1 million who are detained today because of their migration status. What about the children who make up one third of trafficking victims?

When I was 16, I was researching for a high school project when I was flipping through a book and my eyes fixated on a description of child sex trafficking. The passage talked about how marginalized girls from the rural areas are sold by their parents or tricked under the false promises of working in hotels or restaurants in the city. But before they would know it, they would find themselves dancing on brightly-lit stages; the girls wearing bikinis, the boys wearing thongs, with a number pinned to each, while a man would order a child like a drink. I couldn't believe what I was reading. I compared my life to the lives of these children, but I couldn't wrap my brain around how children my age and younger were being taken advantage of, in an organized way. I wanted to scream. But I knew I had to do something.

To really understand, I wanted to meet the children, listen to their stories of exploitation, and ask them what I, as a young person could do to help. I convinced my parents to let me take 3.5 months off of school and travel to Sri Lanka, my parent's home country to investigate child exploitation there. I wanted to get as close to the issue as possible, so I partnered with the National Child Protection Authority and their joint police force and played the main role of the decoy—in an undercover STING operation.

The police had been tracking a man. He had been posting on a child pornography site that he was interested in young girls. My job was to play the role of a 15 year old trafficked child and meet with him.

I spent two months training with the police. I learned how to work with spy technology. I learned how to fake an accent. The plan was to move in and arrest him as we were making our way to the hotel.

On that December day, I met with him, and he spoke to me in very graphic detail about the sexual services he wanted from me, and once he decided to purchase me, the police moved in

and made the arrest. I jumped into the police van, and the cops were giving me high-fives. I thought to myself "this man is off the street. He can't hurt another child." But things quickly shifted, once I was home, I began to feel dirty. All I did was talk to him, but I wanted to take ten showers. I thought "if I feel this way, how must children around the world feel serving up to 26 customers a day."

That experience opened my eyes and since then I've committed my life to turning the tables on child sex trafficking. To start, I founded OneChild, with a group of friends, some as young as 13, to empower children and youth to take action against sex trafficking of minors through education, advocacy, survivor care, and survivor empowerment. Our youth were the first to lobby the private sector in Canada to take action on child sex trafficking. We lobbied Air Canada, our national airline, to raise awareness by playing youth-produced videos that warn against child sex trafficking on their domestic and international flights to a viewership of over 22 million passengers. Several airlines then followed. We lobbied airports, hotels, travel agencies, tour operator, and consulates with great success. We raised funds to build a massive rehabilitation centre for 80 rescued girls in a major hotspot country, who now have the chance at a second childhood. In just one year, we had spoken to 74 schools in Canada about sex trafficking.

My story is a testament to the vulnerabilities of migrant children, but it also shows how young people are leading the solution. Along with me, 160 young people from around the world gathered here in Marrakech to dive deep into migration issues, to share their experiences with one another, and most importantly, plan creative and powerful actions in their communities for the implementation of the GCM.

The GCM offers a historic opportunity for you to meet your existing obligations to protect every child and invest in young people around the world. But it doesn't end here. You need to address the underlying risks of forced and unsafe migration like climate change, social and political exclusion, inequality, disasters etc. And you need once and for all put an end immigration detention. You need to prevent trafficking and protect victims. You need to stop criminalizing migrants. You need to keep families together, keep migrant children healthy and keep them in school. You need to take action to combat xenophobia, and do much more to tackle the root causes that push children from their homes. Invest in teachers. Invest in doctors. Train police so they can educate, support and protect us.

Real change is possible. The solutions exist and there are many good examples of states and cities who are already doing the right thing. Now, its time to take it to the next level, and the global compact does exactly that.

As much as children and young migrants count on states and local authorities to do what it takes to implement the Global Compact, you can count on us. I repeat. You can count on us.

But we have three asks for you. Number 1, engage with us: Provide youth a guaranteed seat at the table, at all levels in the implementation, follow-up, and review of the Global Compact, and the GFMD. Number 2, invest in us, we need the support to participate, to win young migrants the support that they need. And Number 3, count us in – we need to be part of data collection efforts, to know the number of youth impacted, and to make this information clear in future reports on international migration.

The UN Major Group for Children and Youth has 6500 member organizations. We're on the ground, but also connected at the global level. We're the face of change. And we're ready to work with you. Just give us a seat at the table. Invest in us. And take us seriously.

As young people, we commit to leading the process as partners with you. Because simply, it's efficient and it's the smart thing to do.

We've already planted the seed. Now you need to give us water, and we'll give you a garden. We can do better. We must do better **together**.

Thank you very much.