2016 Junior Chamber International Global Partnership Summit

“Fostering Peace in Today’s World”

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Junior Chamber International Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen

It is a pleasure to speak to you again. Although I am too old to be a member of JCI, I have enjoyed our interactions for almost a decade. Being in a room full of such fresh, determined optimism is invigorating. For that, I thank you. I also want to congratulate all of you for successfully wrapping up your summit by adopting a strong and action-oriented resolution.

We at the United Nations greatly appreciate our partnership with you, especially in such vital areas as the Millennium Development Goals and now the Sustainable Development Goals, as well as the Global Compact. This partnership between the UN and JCI is built upon shared values.

As Secretary-General Ban said, “As the world changes with unprecedented speed, young people are proving to be invaluable partners who can advance meaningful solutions.”

The youth are the future. The only way to build the future you want is to speak up now, contribute ideas now, and act now.

Today I want to speak to you about how you can help the UN bring about a more peaceful world.

Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen

2015 concluded with twin historic achievements. The adoption of the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda and the Paris Climate Agreement demonstrated that the world can be united.

Despite these victories, more work needs to be done. The world’s innocent civilians must be better protected from the dangers of conflict and violence.

Globally, we are witnessing a parade of horrors. More than 1.5 billion human beings live in conflict or with high levels of criminal violence. The number of civil wars has tripled from four in 2007 to eleven in 2014. More than 60 million people have fled their homes. The number of peacekeepers has tripled.

There are more than 15,000 nuclear weapons in the world. Like climate change, nuclear weapons pose an existential threat to humanity. Chemical weapons have again been used against civilian populations. Terrorist groups are actively seeking all kinds of weapons of mass destruction. Terrorist attacks and other violent incidents seem to have become the new normal.
All of this sounds very worrying. But we can turn back this dangerous tide if we work together.

Pope Francis said, when he visited the United Nations last year, “We must work tirelessly to avoid war between nations and peoples.”

We must address the underlying conditions that fuel conflicts, and the weapons that exacerbate them.

This is why disarmament is vital. It has been a priority for the UN since its inception. And it has been a priority for the Secretary-General throughout his entire tenure.

Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen

The question, therefore, is: What can you do to help?

First of all, let me say how impressed I am by the JCI’s “Peace is Possible” campaign. It is an essential platform, through which the message of disarmament can be spread.

And there are a variety of ways in which young people can help the cause of disarmament.

First, become informed and help others become informed by creating a discussion forum. I am concerned that there is not enough understanding about the dangers to humanity posed by weapons, especially nuclear weapons.

Second, voice your concerns and make them heard. You have tools that previous generations did not: the internet and social media. With the push of a button you can reach thousands.

Finally, plan an event such as a film screening or an art exhibition. The impact of culture as a vehicle for change cannot be overemphasized.

Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen

These are initiatives you can undertake as global citizens. Now I would like to turn to what you can do as young entrepreneurs.

As this Summit has recognised, the SDGs are the building blocks of peace, and I welcome JCI’s determination to be an active partner in implementing these goals.

Of course, JCI is already doing such good work to help overcome inequity and injustice. Through the JCI Active Citizen Framework and campaigns such as “Nothing But Nets”, you have achieved significant results on many fronts. These include eradicating malaria deaths, universalising primary school education and tackling youth unemployment.
But we still have a long way to go.

The 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda is owned by everybody, determined not to leave anyone behind. The Agenda makes clear there cannot be development without peace and security. There cannot be peace and development without disarmament.

The SDGs recognise this. They establish – for the first time – a link between sustainable development and the reduction of illicit arms flows.

The world is awash with weapons. The global arms trade in 2015 was around 1.7 trillion dollars. The diversion of weapons to the illicit weapons trade is a driver of violent deaths. The number of direct conflict deaths rose from 56,000 in 2008, to 180,000 in 2014. More than triple.

These weapons destroy lives, but they also destroy livelihoods.

I ask you as young entrepreneurs to help rebuild the livelihoods of those who have had theirs shattered by devastating conflict.

I would like to illustrate just a few ways in which you can help.

First, you can ensure that investment from the businesses you represent does not in any way support the illicit arms trade.

Second, you can encourage investment in those societies recovering from conflict. This can include direct investment in local businesses, but also in training and education.

And it does not take much. A small loan of only 100 dollars enables a woman in post-civil war Sierra Leone to set up a dressmaking business and support a family of six.

Invest in the people themselves. Hundreds of thousands of former combatants need your help to transition to a sustainable future. They desperately require re-training for alternative livelihoods. JCI’s networks, experience and business acumen will be of enormous help.

Finally, gender equality is a core value of the UN. The UN has led the way in recognising the essential role of women in building and sustaining international peace through the landmark Security Council resolution 1325 in 2000.

I count on you to bring attention to the issue. You can seek out projects that will empower gender balance in conflict-affected communities. You can look for initiatives that will give women and girls a greater voice.
Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen

We are facing a complicated world riddled with seemingly intractable challenges.

I have tried to show how you – the young leaders of the world, as global citizens and entrepreneurs – can play an important role in overcoming them.

Let us not be overwhelmed by the scale of the problem. As the Chinese Philosopher Lao Tzu said, “A journey of a thousand miles must begin with a single step”.

There can be no global outcomes without individual efforts. Global visions cannot be achieved without local actions.

The world is getting smaller and more connected. In this globalised world, words and actions by each one of you can mean a lot. Together you can make a big difference.

The JCI has already shown your heart and brainpower to make the world safer and better for all.

Although you will soon hear directly from the Secretary-General, I want to end with his plea, “Be a global citizen. Act with passion and compassion. Help us make this world safer and more sustainable today and for the generations that will follow us. That is our moral responsibility.”

Thank you so much and I wish you all great success in the years ahead.