



DMUN Foundation

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Keynote Statement

Opening Segment

First Meeting, 2026 ECOSOC Youth Forum

Mr. Jaewon Choi

Executive Director

DMUN Foundation

Thematic Focal Point for International Tax Cooperation,
Financing for Development Children and Youth Constituency
Major Group for Children and Youth

10:00 - 10:40 AM | 14 April 2026 | Trusteeship Council Chamber

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Your Excellency Ambassador Lok Bahadur Thapa,
President of the Economic and Social Council,

Your Excellency Amina Mohammed,
Deputy Secretary-General,

Your Excellency Ambassador Annalena Baerbock,
President of the General Assembly,

Excellencies,
Distinguished Colleagues,
Fellow Children and Youth,

Today should be a day of joy; a day for all young people to celebrate the United Nations and the impact it has accomplished.

Yet, are we truly in the moment to celebrate?

Every 4.4 seconds, a young person dies.

They die from malnutrition, from preventable disease, from violence, from natural disasters, and from the tragedy of being excluded from every system that was mandated to protect them.

I come from a small island in the Republic of Korea, more than eleven thousand miles away from the United Nations Headquarters.

For a very long time, the United Nations felt very distant from me, not simply in terms of physical proximity, but in every meaningful sense.

Growing up in a country that has experienced colonization, independence, division, war, and economic growth in less than a century, I am no stranger to the importance of peace, justice, and inclusion; the sacrosanct values that this Organization is charged to uphold.

Yet, I never felt that this place was for me. I believed that a child from a small island on a whole other continent would never have any place inside it.

Coming closer to the UN from this lens has taught me two things:

First, multilateralism still matters. The idea that dialogue can prevent war, that intergovernmental cooperation can defend justice, and that our institutions can be built to serve all of humanity is one I feel is worth fighting for.

But I also saw how far these institutions can be isolated from the people most impacted by their decisions. The distance I felt as a child never fully disappeared, but it only passed on to the next generation, who once again look at these halls and ponder whether any of this is for them.

Dear Friends,

It is now a common fact that we live in an ever-riskier, ever-vulnerable world. Climate change is disrupting livelihoods. Armed conflict is separating children from their families. Poverty is increasing, rather than declining.

Amid these crises, I want to make this one thing clear:

We are the ones who will, and are already, inheriting, the consequences of every decision that is formed or avoided. We deserve the fundamental right to be part of making these decisions, through meaningful, effective, and inclusive engagement.

To grow up well means to live a healthy, safe, and fulfilling life.

Young people require access to the basic conditions that allow them to build a meaningful future, including decent jobs, education, community participation, and, most importantly, the ability to shape their own lives for the better.

Yet right now, for billions of young people around the world, these inalienable conditions are being actively taken away. The gap between what is promised and experienced is too wide for us to ignore.

Fellow young people,

I want to conclude today by offering my response to the very question that I asked at the beginning.

Are we truly in the moment to celebrate?

I would answer, no, not yet.

Not while every 4.4 seconds, a child or young person dies from something that we could have prevented. Not while education is cut off for girls. Not while young people remain excluded and silenced because of their age.

But I still came here today, because I believe that multilateralism, at its best, is the most powerful tool that humanity has ever collectively created to protect the vulnerable and defend the future.

However, that belief must be complemented by action.

Real action. Urgent action.

Action that travels beyond this room; action that reaches that child who has never once felt that any of this was built for them.

Thank you very much.