

Honourable ministers,
Regional Delegates,
Esteemed speakers,
Distinguished guests,
Ladies and gentlemen,

Good evening.

It is my great pleasure to welcome you this evening, to this Youth Forum Series on *perceptions*, which will ask each and everyone here today, to look within to provide a sincere answer to the question ‘What do you stand for?’.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Starting from 2007, these forums have served as a platform for our youth to come together and discuss topics speaking directly to their social, educational, political and professional interests.

Over the years, these forums have brought diverse speakers to present topics related to entrepreneurship, leadership, self-development, reconciliation, national identity, and other topics. All these conversations are designed with the youth in mind, looking to empower them with the tools needed to advance in this world, a better prepared and more confident in themselves, when facing the challenges found in their communities.

Today’s topic is one that refers to something quite sensitive and personal. Indeed, attempting to provide an answer to ‘What do you stand for?’ requires us to analyze the way we live our lives, interact, and ultimately, connect with one another in this world.

Young people,

As the leaders of tomorrow, we need you to challenge yourselves to dig deeper when choosing the values that will guide your way of life, and know that there is pride in believing in your culture, in what defines you and representing it in a dignified manner, wherever you go.

I encourage you to take a greater interest in our continent's history and to discover the beauty of our cultures. This exercise will help you learn about the great trend-setters who changed the face of this continent, and still inspire us to not give up, but rather keep working hard to instill a sense of dignity and respect for all mankind.

Our hope is that you go home tonight, feeling challenged to reassess the way you view our societies. That you feel responsible of the image you give of yourselves to others; that you answer the call of rising to the challenge of not being afraid to stand for something that is truly your own, while learning to become critical of these socio-cultural and political influences that continue to dominate the world we live in.

Distinguished guests,

As I leave the floor to our panel, I would like to thank our speakers, for accepting our invitation to contribute their insights to this important conversation.

I thank you all for your kind attention and wish you fruitful discussions.