

Distinguished Madam President, distinguished Ministers, dear participants!

Young people of Kyrgyzstan, thank you for this opportunity today to speak to you. You are truly Kyrgyzstan's future !

I should like to underline the importance and responsibility upon your shoulders before saying a little specifically about the elections.

Before this though, let me thank our partners here today - the Ministry of Youth Affairs, the UN Development Program, GTZ (?), the International Foundation for Election Systems - for their cooperation in organizing this Conference.

The Youth of Kyrgyzstan have an especially important role to play in the future of the Nation, given the high percentage of the population aged under 28. The creation of the Ministry of Youth reflects this pivotal importance. The OSCE through its Centre in Bishkek will give increasing attention to next generational aspects in all our mandated work. This Youth Congress will help the Centre understand better the aspirations and concerns of young people in contemporary Kyrgyzstan.

It is clear that in recent years, young people are increasingly exercising their rights and their wish to participate in the processes of Government and governance. These are very welcome aspirations. The Ministry of Youth's readiness to engage Youth in dialogue is an excellent first step. At the same time, young people must themselves recognise that they have responsibilities as well as rights.

Young people should be constructive in their proposals and advocate good values, such as honesty, openness, tolerance, and inter-ethnic and inter-religious harmony. In turn, the State should place their trust in young people and invest in them, give them training and responsibility, and see them as partners in building a democratic and prosperous country.

Turning to the forthcoming elections, in 5 days the people of Kyrgyzstan will elect a new Parliament. Young people are very actively involved in these elections. Young people are well represented in political party lists. Young people are working on voter education and independent election monitoring. The OSCE Centre in Bishkek has been happy to support a variety of projects, initiated by youth organizations. This is part of the OSCE Centre's efforts to increase the level of youth participation in political, economic and social life.

With these few words, let me wish you all success and fruitful discussions. Thank you for your attention.