

Thanks for the introduction Ahona.

~ Insert friendly banter here ~

I think that one of the most untenable thoughts is that violence against children only has an impact on the children involved. This is because while violence against children has immediate implications on the children affected, it also has ramifications on the economy and social welfare of your state. I can affirmatively say that violence in schools affect students' productivity and psychological well-being. Let's work towards ending violence in schools. For the children, and for the improvement of your state.

My presence today is a representation of the youth's acknowledgement that the existence of violence in our schools is a very critical and pervasive issue. It also shows our interest in resolving the problem alongside our nation's leadership. I was 15 years old when I first started advocating for the rights of children. Interestingly enough, it was at a sub-regional conference in Jamaica on violence against children. It was an issue then, and it's still an issue now. While not neglecting strides and improvements that individual states have made, it becomes saliently clear that there is more that needs to be done.

I believe that the key to solving the issue is increasing our dialogue with the youth. There needs to be more consultations where we are not present as merely a symbolic gesture, but as actual parties in the dialogue. Our recommendations need to start becoming actionable items within national development agendas. This is why I am eternally grateful for being able to contribute to the End Violence Youth Manifesto. It's a huge step forward, and it represents the voice of over a million youth across the world, who were instrumental in its drafting.

What's interesting about the Youth Manifesto is that it highlights the issue and provides pragmatic solutions for addressing violence in schools, all within the SDG framework. It tackles goal 4, specifically target 4 which speaks to building and upgrading educational facilities that are child, disability and gender sensitive and provide safe non-violent inclusive and effective learning environments for all. The manifesto also seamlessly connects to Goal 16 which is about promoting peaceful and inclusive societies. Specifically target 2 which speaks to ending abuse, exploitation, trafficking and all forms of violence against and torture of children. This becomes entirely relevant since they're both under review this year.

That's why the Youth Manifesto should be at the centre of all discussions surrounding violence against children in schools. It should then be further compounded by your respective youth consultations and dialogues.

In Jamaica, we have a saying, "No wait till drum beat before you grind you axe." Which translates simply to do not save until tomorrow, what can be done today. Let us make today the catalyst for change. Let's end violence against children in schools. Starting today.