



A very good morning to Your Royal Highness, child helpline members, partners, and dear friends. It is a true privilege to be here amongst all of you today.

I am Cathryn Anila, a 22-year-old student of sociology and anthropology from Malaysia. I am also one of the co-chairs for Child Helpline International's Youth Advisory Council, which is also known as #Youth.

I vividly remember that Saturday morning when my mother woke me to attend a child rights workshop for children. As she persuaded me, I remember telling her: "okay, I will get out of bed, but if I don't like it, I will come back!" She agreed with a smile. I went without any knowledge on what child rights was. It was there that I realised that so many children around the world do not enjoy basic rights, and that our rights are not just common sense alone, and that we have conventions and declarations that states that each and every right children are entitled to... I was shocked! What stood out most to me was "the right to participation". That child in me felt that I was also responsible in creating awareness on the existence of child rights, accompanying and empowering children like me to be advocates for child rights and child participation. That day was the turning point in the life of that 12-year old Cathryn!

To encourage child and youth participation, spaces need to be created. I founded my NGO "Vanguards4Change" when I was 18 and after almost a decade of active involvement in child rights advocacy, I applied to be a member of #YOUTH, because I saw it as an important space to represent the voices of children and youth at various levels.

Your Royal Highness and dear friends, I am not special, each and every young person has in them altruism, an acute sense of justice, the eagerness to learn about the universe and a desire to contribute to the construction of a better world. In other words, we are like a reservoir of capacity, waiting to be tapped.

If inclusive spaces for child and youth participation are not created, if this reservoir is not tapped... where do we channel all of our potential? What do we do with all this energy?

By having the Youth Advisory Council, Child Helpline International not only encourages but also ensures that young voices are heard, amplified, and acted upon. I am humbly, evidence of that.

Last year, Child Helpline International conducted a survey with our member helplines. Out of all the responses, 71% of the member helplines said they had child or youth participation activities during Covid-19. However, what was surprising is that as we were filtering out duplicate responses from the same helplines, we noticed that people for the same helpline have different ideas / understanding on what child participation is – there was one helpline with 4 responses and 2 responded "yes, they have c/y participation" while the other 2 responded "no, they didn't." It's interesting as it made us think about how across different countries and cultures, our understanding of certain terms is different. So, the question is this: what is child / youth participation?

This is the central theme of the International Consultation.

Over the next three days, let us explore together what child and youth participation means to all of us here, as well as to learn & share experiences with everyone.

Again, I am humbled to be here among all of you who bring along with you your valuable experiences and insights from around the world.

I wish everyone an insightful and of course, a joyful three days ahead! Thank you very much.