



Your Majesty, your Excellency, fellow speakers, fellow delegates, dear friends,

It is my privilege to be the last to address you all this morning before the 10<sup>th</sup> International Consultation of Child Helplines begins in earnest. As many of you will know, we in fact already made a very great start. A special addition to our agenda took place yesterday afternoon, when some of you participated in a session looking at the Future of Tech for Child Helplines.

Technology has always been central to our International Consultations. At our last meeting – in Toronto, Canada, in 2018 – our partner Tech Matters and our beloved founder, Jeroo Billimoria, launched what was then tentatively known as “Toronto Line”. This is of course now known as Aselo, the contact centre system that more and more of you continue to embrace to this day.

I am therefore especially delighted to welcome Jeroo and Jim plus team to *this* International Consultation, in acknowledgement of the success their vision has already enjoyed, and in anticipation of the many successes that are yet to come.

As has already been said, it is four years since we were last all together in one place. And although I say “we”, I was not fortunate enough to be among you at that time. I only joined Child Helpline International in the spring of 2019, and we were already busy making plans for our next IC. This was to have been held here in Stockholm, in 2020.

But the world changed forever in the run up to 2020, and it soon became very clear that we would not – *could* not – go ahead with our plans. Instead, we started to hold our meetings online. Our connections with each other were made possibly even stronger by those new efforts we were all required to go to in order to simply stay in touch. We truly had to show our resilience in the face of what the world was throwing at us.

The world has changed again since then, and it will continue to change.

We can once again come together, and be together, in the same room.

But elsewhere, peoples’ lives – especially the lives of children and young people – are being devastated by new problems, new difficulties, new disasters; whether natural or human-made, whether the result of struggling to live in a world affected by climate change or struggling to survive in a world torn apart by conflict.

For the next three days, this place at least provides a safe haven for us all. We have much to discuss, much to share with each other, and very much more to learn from each other.

For me, personally, this is a wonderful moment when I can finally meet so many of you face-to-face, in person, for the very first time. So many of you are already trusted colleagues, invaluable partners, and old friends. I look forward to building on these friendships, and making many new ones, this week.

We are, and will always be, a family.

We all have friendships and partnerships to further strengthen, and we can make important new connections here, this week: strengthening ourselves as individual child helplines, and strengthening ourselves as a global network of organisations sharing a common vision:

“To put the rights of our children first, and to protect and support children and young people, whoever they are, wherever they are, whatever they need. To ensure that every child, everywhere, has a voice and that this voice is heard.”

Indeed, our latest annual data report, bringing those Voices of Children & Young People to the fore, has just been released.

We have recently passed the half-way mark of our three-year Multi-Annual plan, and we have already achieved so much. I am so proud of you all, and I am so proud of this network. I know for certain that there are many more successes, many more improvements and innovations and impacts still to come, and many of those will have their beginnings here, in the International Consultation, just like “Toronto Line” had its own beginnings in an International Consultation several years ago.

I wish every single one of you a happy, successful, productive and inspiring International Consultation.

And as so many parents, so many caregivers, so many storytellers and teachers and educators have said before:

*“Are you sitting comfortably? Then let us begin...”*