

## **Keynote speech “Human Rights Olympics”**

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It's a great honour for me to be here at this marvellous Education Institute of the Ministry of Justice again this year as you launch the National Final of the Human Rights Olympics. The United Nations Information Service in Vienna has had the privilege to cooperate with the National Commission of the Human Rights Olympics, and the Olymp Organization, for many years now. We were glad to again host and evaluate the English essay competition.

On behalf of my whole team, allow me once again to offer sincere condolences for our deceased friend Miroslav Kusý. Professor Kusý was a remarkable man who made an outstanding contribution to the cause of democracy and human rights. He would be proud to see you are continuing the tradition he helped to establish.

2019 is a very special year for us as we celebrate the 40th anniversary of the Vienna International Centre, the UN headquarters in Austria, from where we work on human rights, peace and security and sustainable development around the world. It is also fitting that Slovakia is chairing the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe this year.

To mark Human Rights Day on 10 December last year, UN Secretary-General António Guterres reminded the world that: “For 70 years, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights has been a global beacon shining a light for dignity, equality and well-being ... and bringing hope to dark places. The rights proclaimed in the Declaration apply to everyone – no matter our race, belief, location or other distinction of any kind. Human rights are universal and eternal. They are also indivisible. One cannot pick and choose among civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights.”

Unfortunately, in many parts of the world human rights are being violated every day rather than respected. The Secretary-General has said that human rights are under siege around the world. Universal values are being eroded.

That's why, for the theme of this year's English essay competition, we asked participants to come up with ideas on how we can strengthen those values. Peace. Justice. Human Dignity. Tolerance. Solidarity. And how we ensure we leave no one behind.

Many of you provided deep analysis and came up with excellent suggestions how to fight growing inequality and intolerance and stand up for human rights. After all, human rights underpin everything we do, including on the 17 Sustainable Development Goals that are our blueprint for peace and prosperity on a healthy planet.

Let me thank the organizers of the Human Rights Olympics, and especially Dr. Dagmar Horná, for this wonderful initiative and your dedication.

I also want to extend my sincere gratitude to all teachers here for preparing your students for this important occasion. It is of great importance that teachers act as multipliers who assist students to develop a sense of global citizenship and teach them about their role in promoting human rights. It is our collective responsibility to equip young people to handle the challenges our world is facing. This you are doing remarkably.

Now I would like to turn to you, the finalists.

You already demonstrated your talent, knowledge and commitment by writing essays and undertaking related tasks on this year's theme of the Velvet Revolution. It's something I remember well because I was posted in East Berlin at the time.

I had the opportunity to read your English essays and I was really impressed by the high standard. They were sharp, eloquent, insightful and witty.

Good luck to all of you as you move towards the final challenge over the next days.

As youth activist Wendy Lesko said: "If you ever think you're too small to be effective, you've never been in bed with a mosquito!"

You are the present and the future of our world. You will be the generation to shape our world. As Secretary-General Guterres told young people in New York just yesterday, we need you to be the change and to push world leaders to step up their ambition. Don't take no for an answer. If you check out Instagram, you'll see Slovakia's UN youth delegate, Dominik Porvažník, was there too.

Slovakia, as part of former Czechoslovakia, was one of the founding signatories of the UN Charter nearly 75 years ago. Your country continues to place priority on the work of the United Nations, and that is something you can be proud about.

To come back to the Secretary-General; he has said that now more than ever, our shared duty is clear: to stand up for human rights for everyone, everywhere, in every corner of the world. Thank you for demonstrating your commitment to this important task.

Thank you!