

Statement from Keren Dunaway Gonzalez, Honduras

Read by Christina Rodriguez at "A call to action: Protecting mothers and children against AIDS".

United Nations, New York, Wednesday 23 September.

My name is Keren Dunaway Gonzalez. I am 13 years old, and I live in Honduras. I regret I cannot join you in person today, but I am very glad that my fellow - Christina Rodriguez - is able to make it, and to make sure that the voices of girls and boys living with HIV are heard by the global leaders.

Our generation is living in a world with AIDS. And the world suffers because of this, especially children, adolescents and youth who live with the infection.

Being young should be one of the most pleasant and special experiences that we can all have during all of our stages as human beings. To be young is marvelous, and many people desire to return to their youth to be able to appreciate all of the marvelous moments again. But being a youth with HIV, in a world that discriminates and stigmatizes, is traumatic and could destroy the dreams and plans a person might have in the first years of his/her life.

HIV and AIDS, is one problem that we face as children, adolescents, and youth, in addition to other situations such as poverty, a lack of opportunities, and the use and abuse of boys and girls.

We, the youth, do not deserve this; no one deserves this. We only want to be free, know that we can grow healthy, study, participate and be able to laugh! To feel unique, to feel loved.

I was born with HIV since my mother had neither the information, nor the medical care necessary so that I would not be born with the infection. On more than one occasion my life has been in danger because I did not receive the adequate treatment and care. And like me, thousands of boys and girls, adolescents and youth around the world, continue to go through these situations.

I am also without a father, as he died earlier this year. And I fear that I will experience this again if I lose my mother or another loved one. To be an orphan; to live with HIV; not to have access to health care, education, a dignified life, and to be

able enjoy all of our rights, put us at a great disadvantage, which makes it difficult to reach our goals.

In these situations, experienced by boys and girls, where do our dreams and hopes fit in? Dreams of growing healthy, studying and having a family. Some of us dream of becoming artists. I want to dedicate myself to the arts; but to fulfill this dream; the world should guarantee us that we will have the care we need. And the world should guarantee us that we will live without stigma or discrimination.

But the world and its governments should also assume with leadership the prevention of new infections in children, adolescents, and youth. Thank you, Madame Sarkozy, for your Call to Action for the protection of mothers and children against AIDS.

In Latin America, even prevention of HIV transmitted from mother to child is limited, and there is too much fear of talking openly to children and youth about sexuality and all of the forms of HIV prevention.

The boys, girls, adolescents, and youth need hope and joy, as much as we need help to continue living, to give us the care we need and hope to live.

Thank you very much.