Hello everyone. I am Anxhela, 16 years old from north-east Albania, one of the poorest areas where poverty and unemployment dominate.

In my country, children make up over 35% of the Albanian population. Over 20% of children live in absolute poverty. Poverty is a widespread phenomenon and is on the rise. Poverty affects children’s success and progress in school.

83.3% of children consider poverty, exclusion, and disability as areas of particular concern.

Another barrier to education is violence against children in school. Based on Save the Children’s “Young Voice” Report, children are still affected by widespread violence in Albanian society.

58% of interviewed children have seen someone punched or hit in the past year.

Public transportation and school buses are unsafe places for children.

Another concern is the fact that not all children feel secure and protected in the classroom. One in ten children does not feel safe in the class.

Almost one-third of children have felt bullied or harassed during the last two school terms.

Unfortunately, the education system and the whole of Albanian society are not prepared to cope with bullying. Almost 40% of children reported that they don’t know or are unsure on where to turn when they feel violated or unfairly treated.

Another barrier for children is that they are often prevented from participating in decision-making processes. Their opinions are frequently not taken into consideration.

In order to overcome these barriers, I work with my peers in a child-led group. Its mission is to empower children and have their rights respected in school, the family, and the community.

**At the school level**, we have led campaigns on the importance of children’s education, focusing on girls empowerment and children’s participation in school activities and life. We’ve established children’s rights clubs where girls and boys freely engage in dialogue and exchange their ideas, opinions, and matter of concern for them. We promote children’s participation in school decision-making.

**At the community level,** we advocate to municipal authorities to improve cihldren’s rights situation focusing children’s safety in school, school infrastructure, quality of education, children’s participation, and primary health care for children.

We’ve lobbied to local authorities to become part of the municipal consultative meetings convening children’s rights.

We’ve also worked on a project called Underadio, which is the first ever web platform and by children. It aimed to encourage children to express freely and speak out on issues important to them.

**At the national level**, we have done research and monitoring reports for children’s rights. Recently, we worked with the State Agency for the Rights and Protection of the Child, as well as the Child Rights Ombudsman, to launch a national criteria on children’s participation in decision-making. We have also successfully lobbied to appoint the first ever Commissioner of Child Right’s Protection and Promotion.

And though we’ve achieved a lot as children, there is still a lot more to do.

**We need** children to have access to quality education. They need opportunities to be part of activities where they can be equipped with new skills that will help them to go on to higher education and find a job after school. They also need access to free transportation to and from school.

**We need** safety for children in school. The government, school authorities, teachers, and parents need to work together to ensure that children are safe and protected in school and on their way to school.

**We need** to ensure children’s right to participate at all levels—in school, in the community, and in decision-making processes. Policymakers need to ensure that children’s opinions and views are taken into account and influence policies that concern children and youth.

I’ve talked about these issues that affect me and my peers in Albania, and also other youth around the world. What we want from you all as leaders is to listen to our voices and support our education as a priority.

**Children and youth are the future. When we are educated, we are the ones who can make change and make the world better**.

Thank you all for listening.