**MOTIVATIONAL SPEECH**

**FOR**

**YAMILE JANA**

“She won national championships with broken toes on both feet. She won world championships while battling a kidney stone. She faced impossible obstacles and broke down once forbidden barriers….” Those words were spoken about Simone Biles, Olympian gymnast. She started her training at just 8 years old. Today, she is 24, and represents the strength, determination, self awareness, and possibilities for young people throughout the world. On this day, we celebrate International Youth Day, 2021, and we acknowledge all of you who are getting ready to build your own strength and find your own places and possibilities in this world. Congratulations!!

Don’t worry…. We who are older… who have paved a path… understand that life can be scary, and that stepping up and taking your place in the world, wherever or however that may be, can get uncomfortable, but remember this…. Each and every one of you have the potential to be great… to achieve… to break down walls and push through barriers… it takes time, determination, interest to learn and grow from your mistakes, and the understanding that if **YOU** don’t step up, **WHO WILL**??? Please remember…. I am not asking you to be an Olympian. I am not suggesting you move impossibly big mountains… what I **AM** doing is **inviting** you to be part of a movement… one that involves a little research, an open mind, and the willingness to connect to others in order to share ideas and grow strong… **together**. One small pebble tossed into the water makes a barely visible ripple…. Thousands of pebbles tossed at the same time can shift the tides!

Simone Biles made history through sports. She also recently made history by stepping back in order to take care of herself. That was so important because as well as showing her earlier focus on winning, we learned it’s okay that she knows her limits. We all have limits, but how do we tap into our **power**… our **strength**? I believe the key is to be that self-aware…. To be your **own** greatest challenge. As we celebrate International Youth Day, where do you see **YOURSELF** making a difference??? Change can happen in small ways… where will you toss **YOUR** pebble? There are others out there, like you, to share actions for positive change. How can you take your inner strength and empower your family? Your friends?? Your community? Where are your partners and comrades? This year’s celebration focuses on “Transforming Food Systems….” That sounds like a big deal!!! Almost too big to handle…. But let’s break it down…it’s about planting seeds… just like we are doing here today…. The seeds we plant today are **ideas**… We’re thinking about what to do…. Here’s the **GOOD** part… we can think about how to change the world, and we can actually **DO** it…. With real seeds or pits, and some dirt, a pot, and some water. We can each experience what it’s like to grow food to nourish ourselves, our families, our communities… to share ideas and feed our selves and our world by working **together**. Transformation begins with one pebble… or seed… of an idea.

So many powerful movements have been started by young people… Greta Thunberg is just a teenager, yet she brought attention to the global climate crisis with her Friday’s for Future movement. Malala Yousafazi won a Nobel Prize for her work in education reform. She was 15 years old when she was shot… for going to school. Not willing to be a victim, she started a revolution… a **POSITIVE** one.

Wherever we turn in today’s world, we see the youth leading the way… transforming how we all communicate, how we react, and how we respond. We see what’s going on in this world and it’s very important for you, who may be kids today…. to protect your own future. You can do it!!! How do I know??? Because it’s been the young people of each generation who have inspired change in the world, and that’s truer now more than ever. It is no longer okay to think you don’t have the strength and power to inspire change…. Audrey Hepburn was a famous actress and devoted United Nations ambassador. She once said, “**NOTHING** is impossible, the very word says it all… **I’M** **POSSIBLE**!!! Each one of you… (**point to members of the audience and say**) you… and you… and you… are the living example of **POSSIBILITY**!!! Now go out there and make your mark!!! Congratulations, once again, and thank you all!!