How are you?

Let me begin by saying how delighted I am to be with you, as we explore together the power of youth to help build more inclusive societies.

And what a better way to launch our conversation than by watching such an invigorating performance by Queendom.

Did you enjoy it?

Please give them another round of applause.

Queendom: your music speaks volumes about the power of the arts to bring people together above and beyond cultural and ethnic differences.

And it is on that spirit of togetherness that I would like to dwell for a moment.

For our societies are facing a turning point.

Unprecedented levels of international migration, the Internet, and globalization, are challenging us all to revisit the ways in which we understand and relate to each other both as citizens of a given country and as citizens of the world.

In more and more countries around the globe, it is no longer realistic to cling to the fantasy of a homogenous nation or state.

Let’s face it: Diversity is a fundamental fact of modernity.

Diversity is here to stay.

And you are all part of it!

Take a look around the room for a moment.

We are all living proof that as we speak, peoples are mingling, social practices are being transformed, and cultures are becoming richer and more complex than ever before.

This of course may destabilize some who feel the ground shifting beneath their feet.
To others, however, it represents an exciting adventure.

An adventure in which we must acknowledge our limitations and accept to be guided by a spirit of compassion, understanding, patience, diligence and vigilance as we chart a new path forwards.

Many of you know that Canada started that adventure over two hundred years ago.

The historic blending of many different Aboriginal nations, French and British settlers, African slaves, and subsequent waves of immigrants from all corners of the globe have led to the creation of a society that celebrates its diversity with pride while encouraging its citizens to come together, to unite, around the core values of equality, freedom, mutual respect, justice and democracy.

This is not to say that we have not faced obstacles along the way.

Yes even in Canada, situations of injustice and inequality—colonization, slavery, forced assimilation, and other social ills—are strewn across the pages of our history.

And some even manage to rear their ugly heads today.

Yet we remain steadfast in our commitment to acknowledge and to atone for the darkest chapters of our history, and we work hard to realize the ideal of a society in which everyone can flourish.

Our adventure continues today, as we seek to discover new and exciting ways to build on the efforts of countless women and men to build a more inclusive society.

Interestingly, youth in Canada are leading the way with their use of new information technologies and the arts and culture as tools to bring people together.

And I have a hunch that young Norwegians are doing the same here.

Since the beginning of my mandate, I have focused on giving youth a national and international voice, because I am convinced that far from being the mere “leaders of tomorrow,” young people are leaders today—here and now.

Don’t you agree?

That is why I decided to host a Youth Dialogue here in Oslo to explore the crucial role youth are playing in fostering integration and social inclusion in Norway.
So I would like to know:

What are some of the challenges you are facing?

What role do youth play in developing strategies to move forward?

What are the obstacles that continue to lie in your path?

As you will see, I am accompanied by a delegation of Canadians who represent a cross-section of Canadian civil society.

They will share their experiences working on diversity in Canada, laying the groundwork for an enriching dialogue about our two countries.

In addition, I have invited students from the Ascension of Our Lord Secondary School in Mississauga, Ontario, Canada, to meet with you online through a special Facebook group page on diversity.

The students are looking forward to exchanging with you on your ideas and experiences.

As we share our ideas and our points of view today, promises for the future will begin to emerge, for us and for all of humanity.

I look forward to hearing what you have to say.