My fellow Sisters and Brothers of the Sahel,

I am very pleased and quite enthusiastic in moderating WEEK 2 of the “Voices from the Sahel – Conversations, Visions and Solutions” where Sahelian youth and women themselves are at the center stage of the conversations to find a sustainable way forward to solving the many challenges in the region. I am taking over my colleague Mar Dieye, who has moderated the first week of these conversations, and he set the bar quite high! In addition, the lively, thoughtful and innovative ideas that emerged from this first week discussions are planting the seeds for a renewed and transformative partnership with the people of the Sahel.

I am Giovanie Biha, a child of Burundi, a country between Central and East Africa that is not part of the Sahel but that shares many of its features/realities at the political, socio-economic, and cultural levels, so I can relate! Most of my career at the United Nations in the field is the West Africa and Sahel region, which also gives me another reason for being quite invested in the ascent of the region and its youth towards a greater and brighter future. I am a Sahelian at heart!

I recently joined as Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS – EN, FR), a special political mission based in Dakar with the overall responsibility for fostering peace and preventing conflicts in the sub-region. We support countries and regional institutions in West Africa and the Sahel in their efforts to address multiple challenges related to peace and security.

I wanted to take the time to explain a bit the mission so that you get an idea of what we do and to understand where I intend to go with you during this week. Development is indeed quite important but without sustainable peace and security, development will not strive. And there is no more denying that women and youth are the conduit to sustaining peace.

We know that women and youth are essential to identifying durable and inclusive political solutions that can lead to sustainable peace. Through our good offices and advocacy, we promote the implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000) on Women Peace and Security (EN, FR) as well as UN Security Council Resolution (EN, FR) on Youth Peace 2250 (2015) and Security and subsequent resolutions. Thus, we are working towards the large participation of women and youth in all peace processes and conflict prevention and resolution efforts as well as in decision-making bodies and platforms. Much has been achieved thus far and many mechanisms have been put in place but we, as the people, are still not getting there.

My Dear young Sahelians, Dear colleagues,

I followed keenly last week’s discussions and saw the readiness and agility in the Youth to transform this region. So many excellent ideas to tap-from and leverage. Indeed, if there is any better time to have direct engagement with the people of the Sahel, it is now. If there are any particular population groups to directly exchange with, it is you – the
young people and women of the Sahel. I strongly believe that this Consultation is not a one-off. The spirit demonstrated already in WEEK ONE by you all, shows that we need more of such open and frank discussions.

Now let's discuss, let's talk, let's voice our concerns on these very instructive themes of the Conversation:

1. **What priorities of the UN Sahel Plan are the most relevant to your context and why?** Here, I want you to demonstrate pragmatics, tell us why the UN should prioritize the particular priority and how?
2. **How can young people, including women, contribute to a peaceful and prosperous Sahel?** Here, tell us about strategies?
3. **How can the UN and young people work together to change the negative narrative on the Sahel?** Here, illustrate with best practices in your respective communities. What models, can you recommend to the UN?
4. **How can youth, women, and governments partner in the areas of development, resilience, and peacebuilding in the Sahel?** Tell us in practical terms the type of partnership you wish to see between your country government and youths. Give us examples of existing partnerships as well.

I leave it up to you to share your views while keeping in mind the **Peace-Security-Development** nexus that we cannot bypass. The floor is given to you! Please don’t miss this opportunity.

I look forward to reading you and being enlightened with your refreshing ideas!

I thank you

Giovanie.