

## **Mei-Ling Ho-Shing (USA) Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School, Parkland, Florida**

My name is Mei-Ling Ho-Shing and I am 17 years old. On February 14<sup>th</sup> of this year I was at my school, Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School, in Parkland, Florida. In my math class, I came face to face with the terrifying reality of gun violence. Crouching in the corner of my classroom, I can still hear the screams of the students and teachers from the floors above and below.

14 students and 3 staff were killed that day. The same number of people were injured, and thousands of us Parkland students were severely traumatized.

I feel that I am here today on behalf of my friend, Helena Ramsay, who was shot and killed on February 14. She was passionate about international affairs and fascinated by the work of the United Nations. She would have loved to be here today.

A lot of things have changed in my life since the tragedy. I have learned things that I never thought about before. Like how to hide from a person shooting at me and my friends. And how to provide emergency treatment for bullet wounds. American schools are now putting special kits for treating bullet wounds in every classroom. Many of you in this conference have children, and I hope that they never have to learn in school how to treat a bullet wound.

Worst of all, I have learned how to deal with the grief of sitting next to an empty desk every day.

I've also learned a lot in the past few days here at the United Nations. I've learned that most gun violence occurs in developing countries. But I am from the richest country in the world. I don't live in a poor urban neighborhood. I go to a wealthy school – and yet my friends and I have reason to fear for our lives when we go to school.

I've recently learned about the Sustainable Development Goals, including Goal Number 4 on education, and Target 4.A which promises me a safe and non-violent learning environment. As long as military-style assault weapons are freely available in society, I won't be safe in school — or anywhere.

As a result of the tragedy at my school, I am one of millions of young people who have joined the national debate on the regulation of guns and ammunition, and prohibiting the sale of military-style assault weapons. We are an example of another concept I've learned about at the United Nations Security Council Resolution Number 2250, dealing with youth, peace and security.

I understand that this conference is about how countries can work together to stop gun trafficking and gun violence. I know that some other nations have much lower rates of gun violence, and I hope that my country can learn from them.

The decisions that governments make here this week will affect my future, and all young people around the world. Please don't let us down.