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Stone Soup Leadership Institute
P.O. Box 4551
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Dear Youth Delegates,

I am extremely privileged to have the opportunity to welcome you to the sixth annual Stone Soup Youth Summit, and the first Youth Summit to be held on Martha's Vineyard. I want to extend a special welcome to those of you who have traveled a great distance to attend this unique event, and I want to personally welcome you all to the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.

You have all expressed different reasons for choosing to attend this conference. Some of you are here because you are curious about other islands and their ways of life. Some of you are here, because you want to protect and preserve the fragile ecosystems on your island. Some of you are here because you have recognized local, national, or international problems, and you want to do something to address these issues. Among all of these noble reasons for your attendance, I see a common thread: you are all here because you are willing to confront – and to solve – some of the most difficult and perplexing problems that our world faces. You are all here, because you understand that the very survival of our planet depends upon the ability of your generation to recognize the imminent need for sustainable development across all fronts.

Several grave problems currently threaten the very existence of our planet: rising sea levels, poverty, pollution, lack of medical resources, and dependence on nonrenewable energy sources—and I don't need to tell you that the crisis is growing. Carbon pollution threatens to damage our health and radically and irreversibly alter our climate. If inaction prevails, our planet will face impending famines, droughts, pandemics, natural disasters of terrible intensity, and human displacement on a staggering scale.

All of these problems require immediate action. The Vineyard Youth Summit is taking an important leadership role in providing you with the tools and education necessary to make such action possible. Your generation—a generation of inspired youth—can make an enormous impact on our ability to overcome these pressing issues. You are our hope for the future. Your innovation, creativeness, imagination, persistence, and hard work can produce the solutions we need.

In his famous letter from Birmingham Jail, Martin Luther King, Jr. wrote,

“I am cognizant of the interrelatedness of all communities and states. I cannot sit idly... and not be concerned about what happens... Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly.”

At this summit, you will have the opportunity to meet people from islands all over the world. There are delegates here from Martha's Vineyard, the Bahamas, Jamaica, Virgin Gorda, Vieques, Puerto Rico, and St. Vincent and the Grenadines. Over the course of the week, I urge you to remind yourselves that we are all connected to one another, and that we have an obligation to preserve the health and sanctity of our shared planet.

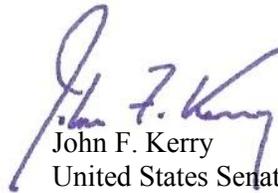
I believe we can overcome these challenges, but to do so, we have to do it together. In many ways, this effort begins with small, often overlooked deeds like recycling and reducing waste; encouraging people to ride bikes, use public transportation, or walk, if the weather permits; and educating people about the adverse consequences of exploiting natural resources. The “multiplier effect” that the Youth Summit emphasizes – “Each one, teach one” – is an initiative that is based on the idea that leaders must teach by example. If all of you adopt sustainable living habits, it will encourage your families, friends, and communities to do the same.

Your participation in the Vineyard Youth Summit will prepare you to become leaders in the movement towards sustainable international partnerships, sustainable local, national, and transnational economies, and sustainable living habits. You will develop leadership skills and you will learn how to develop action plans and troubleshoot challenges. In the end, you will produce videos that will help educate islanders about the interrelatedness of all life, foster a respect for our land and the lands of our neighbors-both near and far, and teach your communities about what they can do to make a difference.

One of my most treasured places to visit is the beautiful island community of Nantucket, MA. The preservation of the island and its vibrant fishing industry is an effort that the community undertakes with great pride. I hope that all of you leave here with a new found conviction to be stewards of the Earth, willing and ready to teach by example and work vigilantly to ensure the preservation of island communities, their unique ways of life, and their fragile ecosystems– whether in Nantucket, Martha’s Vineyard, Virgin Gorda, Puerto Rico, Vieques, Jamaica, the Bahamas, or St. Vincent and the Grenadines.

I hope you enjoy your time in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, and again I want to sincerely thank and applaud you for all that you have done, all that you are doing, and especially all that you will do in the future. Our task is a difficult one, but with young, inspired leaders that are willing to lead the fight, I have no doubt we will prevail.

Sincerely,



John F. Kerry
United States Senator (MA)

JFK/cmc