

Poems and speeches

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7th Form

1. Risk, Anais Nin

And then the day came,
when the risk to remain
tight in a bud was more
painful than the risk it took
to Blossom.

2. Evolution, John Bannister Tabb

Out of the dusk a shadow,
Then, a spark; Out of the cloud
a silence, Then, a lark; Out of
the heart a rapture, Then, a
pain; Out of the dead, cold
ashes, Life again.

3. Caterpillar, Christina Rossetti

Brown and furry Caterpillar in a hurry,
Take your walk To the shady leaf, or
stalk, Or what not, Which may be the
chosen spot. No toad spy you,
Hovering bird of prey pass by you;
Spin and die, To live again a butterfly

4. Dreams, Langston Hughes

Hold fast to dreams For if
dreams die Life is a
broken-winged bird That cannot
fly.

Hold fast to dreams For
when dreams go Life is
a barren field Frozen
with snow.

5. Speech by William Saroyan

“I should like to see any power of the world destroy this race: this small tribe of unimportant people whose history is ended, whose wars have all been fought and lost, whose structures have crumbled, whose literature is unread, whose music is unheard, whose prayers are no longer uttered. Go ahead, destroy this race. Let us say that it is again 1915, there is war in the world. Destroy Armenia. See if you can do it. Send them from their homes into the desert. Let them have neither bread nor water. Burn their houses and their churches. See if they will not live again. See if they will not laugh again. See if you can stop them from mocking the big ideas of the world. ... Go ahead, try to destroy them. For when two of them meet anywhere in the world, see if they will not create a new Armenia.”

8th Form

1. Changing of the Seasons, Shel Silverstein

Oh the changing of the seasons it's a pretty thing to see And though
I find this balmy weather pleasin' There's the wind come from

tomorrow and I hear it callin' me And I'm bound for the changing
of the seasons Oh it's blowin' in Chicago and it's snowin' up in
Maine And the Islands to the south are warm and sunny And I've
got to feel the earth shake and I gotta feel the rain And I've got to
know a taste of more than honey

So don't ask me where I'm goin' or how long I'm gonna be away Don't make
me give you all the hollow reasons I'll think of you like summer and I might be
back some day When my heart miss the changing of the seasons Oh it's blowin'
in Chicago... [guitar] Oh it's nothing that you said and it ain't nothing that you
done And I wish I could explain you why I'm leavin' But there's some men
need the winter and there's some men need the sun And there's some men need
the changing of the seasons Yeah it's blowin' in Chicago...

2. Rain, Kazim Ali

With thick strokes of ink the sky fills with rain. Pretending to run
for cover but secretly praying for more rain.

Over the echo of the water, I hear a voice saying my name. No one in the city moves under the quick sightless rain.

The pages of my notebook soak, then curl. I've written:
"Yogis opened their mouths for hours to drink the rain."

The sky is a bowl of dark water, rinsing your face. The window trembles; liquid glass could shatter into rain.

I am a dark bowl, waiting to be filled. If I open my mouth now, I could drown in the rain.

I hurry home as though someone is there waiting for me. The night collapses into your skin. I am the rain.

3. Robo, Nick Carbo

I must admit to this outright theft.
Before the crickets could impede me,

I reached outside my window to
grab as much of Andalusia as

I could in the palm of my hand. I
took the evening's silver

from the olive trees, the yellow slumber
from the lemons, the recipe for gazpacho.

I made a small incision in my heart
and slipped in as much as my left

and right ventricles could hold. I reached
for a pen and a piece of paper

to ease-out the land into this poem. I
closed the small incision in my heart

and closed the wooden shutters of
my window.

4. Theories of Space and Time, Natasha Trethewey

You can get there from here, though
there's no going home.

Everywhere you go will be somewhere
you've never been. Try this:

head south on Mississippi 49, one-
by-one mile markers ticking off

another minute of your life. Follow this to
its natural conclusion—dead end

at the coast, the pier at Gulfport where
riggings of shrimp boats are loose stitches

in a sky threatening rain. Cross over the
man-made beach, 26 miles of sand

dumped on the mangrove swamp—buried
terrain of the past. Bring only

what you must carry—tome of memory, its
random blank pages. On the dock

where you board the boat for Ship Island,
someone will take your picture:

the photograph—who you were— will
be waiting when you return.

5. Speech by Charlie Chaplin

Greed has poisoned men's souls, has barricaded the world with hate, has goose-stepped us into misery and bloodshed. We have developed speed, but we have shut ourselves in. Machinery that gives us abundance has left us in want. Our knowledge has made us cynical. Our cleverness, hard and unkind. We think too much, and feel too little. More than machinery, we need humanity. More than cleverness, we need kindness and gentleness. Without these qualities life will be violent, and all will be lost. The aeroplane and the radio have brought us closer together. The very nature of these inventions cries out for the goodness in men - cries out for universal brotherhood - for the unity of us all.

9th Form

1. Jerusalem, William Blake

And did those feet in ancient time Walk
upon Englands mountains green: And was
the holy Lamb of God, On Englands

pleasant pastures seen!

And did the Countenance Divine,
Shine forth upon our clouded hills?
And was Jerusalem builded here,
Among these dark Satanic Mills?

Bring me my Bow of burning gold:
Bring me my arrows of desire: Bring me
my Spear: O clouds unfold! Bring me
my Chariot of fire!

I will not cease from Mental Fight, Nor
shall my sword sleep in my hand: Till we
have built Jerusalem, In Englands green
& pleasant Land.

Let the light of late afternoon shine through
chinks in the barn, moving up the bales as the
sun moves down.

Let the cricket take up chafing as a
woman takes up her needles and her
yarn. Let evening come.

Let dew collect on the hoe abandoned in
long grass. Let the stars appear and the
moon disclose her silver horn.

Let the fox go back to its sandy den. Let
the wind die down. Let the shed go
black inside. Let evening come.

To the bottle in the ditch, to the scoop in
the oats, to air in the lung let evening
come.

Let it come, as it will, and don't be
afraid. God does not leave us
comfortless, so let evening come.

3. Perhaps the World Ends Here, Joy Harjo

The world begins at a kitchen table. No matter what, we must eat to live.

The gifts of earth are brought and prepared, set on the table. So it has been since creation, and it will go on.

We chase chickens or dogs away from it. Babies teethe at the corners. They scrape their knees under it.

It is here that children are given instructions on what it means to be human.
We make men at it, we make women.

At this table we gossip, recall enemies and the ghosts of lovers.

Our dreams drink coffee with us as they put their arms around our children.

They laugh with us at our poor falling-down selves and as we put ourselves back together once again at the table.

This table has been a house in the rain, an umbrella in the sun.

Wars have begun and ended at this table. It is a place to hide in the shadow of terror. A place to celebrate the terrible victory. We have given birth on this table, and have prepared our parents for burial
here.

At this table we sing with joy, with sorrow. We pray of suffering and remorse.
We give thanks.

Perhaps the world will end at the kitchen table, while we are laughing and crying, eating of the last sweet bite.

4. The Seedling, Paul Laurence Dunbar

As a quiet little seedling Lay
within its darksome bed, To
itself it fell a—talking, And this is
what it said:

“I am not so very robust, But I ‘ll do the
best I can;” And the seedling from that
moment Its work of life began.

So it pushed a little leaflet Up
into the light of day, To examine
the surroundings And show the
rest the way.

The leaflet liked the prospect, So it
called its brother, Stem; Then two
other leaflets heard it, And quickly
followed them.

To be sure, the haste and hurry Made
the seedling sweat and pant; But
almost before it knew it It found itself
a plant.

The sunshine poured upon it, And the
clouds they gave a shower; And the
little plant kept growing Till it found
itself a flower.

Little folks, be like the seedling,
Always do the best you can; Every
child must share life's labor Just as
well as every man.

And the sun and showers will help you
Through the lonesome, struggling hours,

Till you raise to light and beauty
Virtue's fair, unfading flowers.

5. Speech by Ed Sheeran

I was a very, very weird child. Very weird child. And I had a port-wine stain birthmark on my face that I got lasered off when I was very young, and one day they forgot to put the anesthetic on, and then ever since then I had a stutter— and I also had very, very big blue NHS glasses – NHS is the National Health Service, one day, I hope you'll have the same.

And I lacked an ear drum on one side of my face—one side of my ear—so stuttering was actually the least of my problems when I went to school, but it was still quite a difficult thing, and the thing that I found most difficult about it was, knowing what to say but not really being able to express it in the right way....

And just be yourself, embrace your quirks—being weird is a wonderful thing.

But I think, you know, I'm not very good at speeches, I don't really do a lot of speeches but I think the one thing I want to say is be yourself, embrace yourself, embrace your quirks, and embrace your weirdness.

10th Form

1. I'm a Fool to Love You, Cornelius Eady

Some folks will tell you the blues is a woman,

Some type of supernatural creature.

My mother would tell you, if she could,

About her life with my father,

A strange and sometimes cruel gentleman.

She would tell you about the choices

A young black woman faces.

Is falling in love with some man

A deal with the devil

In blue terms, the tongue we use

When we don't want nuance

To get in the way,

When we need to talk straight.

My mother chooses my father

After choosing a man

Who was, as we sing it,

Of no account.

This man made my father look good,

That's how bad it was.

He made my father seem like an island

In the middle of a stormy sea,

He made my father look like a rock.

And is the blues the moment you realize

You exist in a stacked deck,

You look in a mirror at your young face,
The face my sister carries,
And you know it's the only leverage
You've got.

Does this create a hurt that whispers
How you going to do?
Is the blues the moment
You shrug your shoulders
And agree, a girl without money
Is nothing, dust
To be pushed around by any old breeze.
Compared to this,
My father seems, briefly,
To be a fire escape.

This is the way the blues works
Its sorry wonders,
Makes trouble look like
A feather bed,
Makes the wrong man's kisses

A healing.

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2. My Therapist Wants to Know about My Relationship to Work, Tiana Clark

I hustle

upstream.

I grasp.

I grind.

I control & panic. Poke

balloons in my chest,

always popping there,

always my thoughts thump,

thump. I snooze — wake & go

boom. All day, like this I short

my breath. I scroll & scroll.

I see what you wrote — I like.

I heart. My thumb, so tired.
My head bent down, but not
in prayer, heavy from the looking.
I see your face, your phone-lit
faces. I tap your food, two times
for more hearts. I retweet.
I email: yes & yes & yes.
Then I cry & need to say: no-no-no.
Why does it take so long to reply?
I FOMO* & shout. I read. I never
enough. New book. New post.
New ping. A new tab, then another.

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Papers on the floor, scattered & stacked.
So many journals, unbroken white spines,
waiting. Did you hear that new new?
I start to text back. Ellipsis, then I forget.
I balk. I lazy the bed. I wallow when I write.
I truth when I lie. I throw a book
when a poem undoes me. I underline

Clifton: today we are possible. I start
from image. I begin with Phillis Wheatley.
I begin with Phillis Wheatley. I begin
with Phillis Wheatley reaching for coal.
I start with a napkin, receipt, or my hand.
I muscle memory. I stutter the page. I fail.
Hit delete — scratch out one more line. I sonnet,
then break form. I make tea, use two bags.
Rooibos again. I bathe now. Epsom salt.
No books or phone. Just water & the sound
of water filling, glory — be my buoyant body,
bowl of me. Yes, lavender, more bubbles
& bath bomb, of course some candles too.
All alone with Coltrane. My favorite, “Naima,”
for his wife, now for me, inside my own womb.
Again, I child back. I float. I sing. I simple
& humble. Eyes close. I low my voice,
was it a psalm? Don’t know. But I stopped.

3. Ode to Gossips, Safia Elhillo

i was mothered by lonely women some of them
wives some of them with

plumes of smoke for husbands all lonely
smelling of onions & milk all mothers

some of them to children some to old names
phantom girls acting out a life only half

a life away instead copper kitchenware bangles
pushed up the arm fingernails rusted

with henna kneading raw meat with salt with
coriander sweating upper lip

in the steam weak tea hair unwound against the
nape my deities each one

sandal slapping against stone heel sandal- wood
& oud bright chiffon spun

about each head coffee in the dowry china butter
biscuits on a painted plate crumbs

suspended in eggshell demitasse & they begin i
heard people are saying

i saw it with my own eyes []'s daughter a

scandal she was wearing []

& not wearing [] can you imagine a shame a
shame

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4. We Lived Happily During the War, Ilya Kaminsky

And when they bombed other people's houses, we

protested but not enough, we opposed them
but not

enough. I was in my bed, around my
bed America

was falling: invisible house by invisible house by invisible house.

I took a chair outside and watched the sun.

In the sixth month of a disastrous reign in the
house of money

in the street of money in the city of money in the country of money, our
great country of money, we (forgive us)

lived happily during the war.

5. Speech by Oprah Winfrey

What I know for sure is that speaking your truth is the most powerful tool we all have. And I'm especially proud and inspired by all the women who have felt strong enough and empowered enough to speak up and share their personal stories. Each of us in this room are celebrated because of the stories that we tell. And this year we became the story. But it's not just a story affecting the entertainment industry. It's one that transcends any culture, geography, race, religion, politics or workplace.

So I want tonight to express gratitude to all the women who have endured years of abuse and assault, because they — like my mother — had children to feed and bills to pay and dreams to pursue. They're the women whose names we'll never know. They are domestic workers and farmworkers; they are working in factories and they work in restaurants, and they're in academia and engineering and medicine and science; they're part of the world of tech and politics and business; they're our

athletes in the Olympics and they're our soldiers in the military...

So I want all the girls watching here and now to know that a new day is on the horizon! And when that new day finally dawns, it will be because of a lot of magnificent women, many of whom are right here in this room tonight, and some pretty phenomenal men, fighting hard to make sure that they become the leaders who take us to the time when nobody ever has to say, 'Me too' again. Thank you."

11th Form

1. A Brief for the Defense, Jack Gilbert

Sorrow everywhere. Slaughter everywhere. If babies are not starving someplace, they are starving somewhere else. With flies in their nostrils. But we enjoy our lives because that's what God wants. Otherwise the mornings before summer dawn would not be made so fine. The Bengal tiger would not be fashioned so miraculously well. The poor women at the fountain are laughing together between the suffering they have known and the awfulness in their future, smiling and laughing while somebody in the village is very sick. There is laughter every day in the terrible streets of Calcutta, and the women laugh in the cages of Bombay. If we deny our happiness, resist our satisfaction, we lessen the importance of their deprivation. We must risk delight. We can do without pleasure, but not

delight. Not enjoyment. We must have the stubbornness to accept our gladness in the ruthless furnace of this world. To make injustice the only measure of our attention is to praise the Devil. If the locomotive of the Lord runs us down, we should give thanks that the end had magnitude. We must admit there will be music despite everything. We stand at the prow again of a small ship anchored late at night in the tiny port looking over to the sleeping island: the waterfront is three shuttered cafés and one naked light burning. To hear the faint sound of oars in the silence as a rowboat comes slowly out and then goes back is truly worth all the years of sorrow that are to come.

2. Both Sides Now, Joni Mitchell

Rows and floes of angel hair And ice
cream castles in the air And feather
canyons everywhere I've looked at
clouds that way

But now they only block the sun They
rain and snow on everyone So many
things I would have done But clouds
got in my way

I've looked at clouds from both sides now
From up and down, and still somehow It's
cloud illusions I recall I really don't know

clouds at all

Moons and Junes and Ferris wheels
The dizzy dancing way you feel As
every fairy tale comes real I've looked
at love that way

But now it's just another show You leave
'em laughing when you go And if you
care, don't let them know Don't give
yourself away

I've looked at love from both sides now
From give and take, and still somehow It's
love's illusions I recall I really don't know
love at all

Tears and fears and feeling proud To
say "I love you" right out loud

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Dreams and schemes and circus crowds
I've looked at life that way

But now old friends are acting strange They shake
their heads, they say I've changed Well
something's lost, but something's gained In living
every day

I've looked at life from both sides now From
win and lose and still somehow It's life's

illusions I recall I really don't know life at
all

3. Metamorphosis, Jenny Xie

Nowhere in those kerosene years

could she find a soft-headed match.

The wife crosses over an ocean, red-faced and cheerless.

Trades the flat pad of a stethoscope for a dining hall spatula.

Life is two choices, she thinks:

you hatch a life, or you pass through one.

Photographs of a child swaddled in layers arrive by post.

Money doesn't, to her embarrassment.

Over time, she grows out her hair. Then she sprouts nerves.

The wife was no fool, but neither did she wander.

She lives inside a season of thrift, which stretches on.

Her sorrow has thickness and a certain sheen.

The wife knows to hurry when she washes.

When she cooks, she licks spoons slowly.

Every night, she made a dish with ground pork.

Paired with a dish that was fibrous.

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4. The End and the Beginning, Wislawa Szymborska

After every war someone has to clean
up. Things won't straighten
themselves up, after all.

Someone has to push the rubble to
the side of the road, so the
corpse-filled wagons can pass.

Someone has to get mired in
scum and ashes, sofa springs,
splintered glass, and bloody
rags.

Someone has to drag in a girder to
prop up a wall. Someone has to
glaze a window, rehang a door.

Photogenic it's not, and
takes years. All the cameras
have left for another war.

We'll need the bridges back,
and new railway stations.

Sleeves will go ragged from
rolling them up.

Someone, broom in hand, still
recalls the way it was. Someone
else listens and nods with
unsevered head.

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But already there are those nearby
starting to mill about who will find it
dull.

From out of the bushes sometimes
someone still unearths rusted-out
arguments and carries them to the
garbage pile.

Those who knew what was going
on here must make way for those
who know little. And less than
little. And finally as little as
nothing.

In the grass that has overgrown
causes and effects, someone must
be stretched out blade of grass in
his mouth gazing at the clouds.

5. Speech by Dalai Lama

No matter what part of the world we come from, we are all basically the same human beings. We all seek happiness and try to avoid suffering. We have the same basic human needs and concerns. All of us human beings want freedom and the right to determine our own destiny as individuals and as peoples. That is human nature...

As a Buddhist monk, my concern extends to all members of the human family and, indeed, to all sentient beings who suffer. I believe all suffering is caused by ignorance. People inflict pain on others in the selfish pursuit of their happiness or satisfaction. Yet true happiness comes from a sense of brotherhood and sisterhood. We need to cultivate a universal responsibility for one another and the planet we share. Although I have found my own Buddhist religion helpful in generating love and compassion, even for those we consider our enemies, I am convinced that everyone can develop a good heart and a sense of universal responsibility with or

without religion.

With the ever-growing impact of science on our lives, religion and spirituality have a greater role to play reminding us of our humanity. There is no contradiction between the two. Each gives us valuable insights into the other. Both science and the teachings of the Buddha tell us of the fundamental unity of all things. This understanding is crucial if we are to take positive and decisive action on the pressing global concern with the environment.

I believe all religions pursue the same goals, that of cultivating human goodness and bringing happiness to all human beings. Though the means might appear different the ends are the same.

12th Form

1. Burning of the Old Year, Naomi Shihab Nye

Letters swallow themselves in seconds.

Notes friends tied to the doorknob,
transparent scarlet paper,
sizzle like moth wings,
marry the air.

So much of any year is flammable,
lists of vegetables, partial poems.
Orange swirling flame of days,
so little is a stone.

Where there was something and suddenly isn't,
an absence shouts, celebrates, leaves a space.
I begin again with the smallest numbers.

Quick dance, shuffle of losses and leaves,
only the things I didn't do
crackle after the blazing dies.

2. For my Grandmother Knitting, Liz Lochhead

There is no need they say but the needles still
move their rhythms in the working of your hands
as easily as if your hands were once again those
sure and skilful hands of the fisher-girl.

You are old now and your grasp of things is
not so good but master of your moments
then deft and swift you slit the still-ticking
quick silver fish. Hard work it was too of
necessity.

But now they say there is no need as the
needles move in the working of your
hands once the hands of the bride with the
hand-span waist once the hands of the
miner's wife who scrubbed his back in a
tin bath by the coal fire once the hands of
the mother of six who made do and
mended scraped and slaved slapped
sometimes when necessary.

But now they say there is no need the
kids they say grandma have too much

already more than they can wear too
many scarves and cardigans – gran
you do too much there's no
necessity...

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At your window you wave them goodbye
Sunday. With your painful hands big on
shrunk wrists. Swollen-jointed. Red.
Arthritic. Old. But the needles still move their
rhythms in the working of your hands easily as
if your hands remembered of their own accord
the pattern as if your hands had forgotten how
to stop.

3. Romance, W. J. Turner

WHEN I was but thirteen or so I
went into a golden land,
Chimborazo, Cotopaxi Took me by
the hand.

My father died, my brother too, They
passed like fleeting dreams, I stood
where Popocatepetl In the sunlight
gleams.

I dimly heard the master's voice
And boys far-off at play,
Chimborazo, Cotopaxi Had stolen
me away.

I walked in a great golden dream To
and fro from school-- Shining
Popocatepetl The dusty streets did
rule.

I walked home with a gold dark boy,
And never a word I'd say, Chimborazo,
Cotopaxi Had taken my speech away:

I gazed entranced upon his face
Fairer than any flower-- O shining
Popocatepetl It was thy magic
hour:

The houses, people, traffic seemed
Thin fading dreams by day,
Chimborazo, Cotopaxi They had
stolen my soul away!

4. The Men, BH Fairchild

As a kid sitting in a yellow vinyl
booth in the back of Earl's Tavern,
you watch the late-afternoon drunks
coming and going, sunlight breaking
through the smoky dark as the door
opens and closes, and it's the future
flashing ahead like the taillights
of a semi as you drop over a rise
in the road on your way to Amarillo,
bright lights and blonde-haired women,
as Billy used to say, slumped over
his beer like a snail, make a real man
out of you, the smile bleak as the gaps
between his teeth, stay loose, son,
don't die before you're dead. Always

the warnings from men you worked with
before they broke, blue fingernails,
eyes red as fate. A different life
for me, you think, and outside later,
feeling young and strong enough to raise
the sun back up, you stare down Highway 54,
pushing everything—stars, sky, moon,
all but a thin line at the edge
of the world—behind you. Your headlights
sweep across the tavern window,
ripping the dark from the small, humped
shapes of men inside who turn and look,
like small animals caught in the glare
of your lights on the road to Amarillo.

5. Speech by Nikol Pashinyan

Ladies and Gentlemen, It is a great honor to address you as a leader, who has recently become the Prime Minister of Armenia as a result of people's revolution, which is now known as the Armenian Velvet revolution. I would like to take a minute to share the story of our victory over the authoritarian rule. The people of Armenia succeeded in unpredicted and unprecedented revolution, without any violence, any victims or public disorder. And it was not a coincidence. Our intention was to make a revolution of love and solidarity. From the very beginning, we declared that we ruled out any violence. We declared that, even if violence was used against us, we would not respond with violence. We declared that our response would be with raised and open hands, smile and love. When we started this political process, there were only dozens of us marching from the second biggest city of Armenia, Gyumri to the capital Yerevan. When we reached Yerevan, and showed our determination and devotion to the principle of non-violence, our entire nation rose against the ruling regime, in unity and solidarity. And we won without a single shot and without any victims only through the peaceful demonstrations. We succeeded against all expectations: even well-known experts and think-tanks were skeptical about our victory. Against all odds, I was elected Prime Minister. I was elected in a Parliament, where I had only four reliable votes, including my own. Yet it was possible. It happened, because people were firm in their demand and the parliament, elected just a year ago, had no other choice than to follow the people's will. Today, that parliament continues to work, however it does not represent our people's will, as it was not before and during the revolution. Why is it so? The answer is short. Because it was elected through the elections with massive vote buying process and use of administrative resources and oppression. An important test for holding genuinely free and fair and competitive elections was the Yerevan city council election which took place just before my departure to New York. The fact that all the candidates for the first time since Armenia's independence congratulated the winning candidate, speaks about the establishment of a completely new political culture in Armenia. In the same spirit, we are now getting ready for snap parliamentary elections in Armenia. Free, fair and transparent elections will become an irreversible reality 39

in Armenia and will bring strong and vibrant democratic institutions, the functioning system of checks and balances. Protecting our citizens' rights and ensuring freedom

of speech, expression and assembly is very high on our government's agenda. From now on, there will be no possibility to manipulate the electoral process and undermine the trust of citizens. I would also like to stress that the current situation in Armenia is not just a change of a government or a ruling party. It is an establishment of a new political and governance system, which we name people's direct rule and people's direct governance.

