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Youth Participation in Peace Processes
Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

The fact that the majority of the population of most countries with ongoing peace processes are young people aged between 15 and 24 years old is an important reason why they should be included in the peace process. Over the last decade, we have observed how the youth of every country in the world has become more active in politics and foreign affairs, making this demographic in the international population an important point of view to consider in peace processes. The participation of the youth in peace processes is essential for creating inclusive solutions which benefit and consider every person affected by conflict. While there exists a stigma that youth are unprepared to engage with topics of international security and policy, the United Nations Youth Council aims to promote the voice of young people across the globe who are affected by violence, persecution, instability, insecurity, and threats to their wellbeing, by including their voice in the conversation of what to do to solve these problems.

It is hard for the youth to participate in peace processes for two main reasons; the stereotyping that youngsters are ignorant and the systematic impediments. The stereotype which categorizes young people as ignorant stems from the idea that they are not well-informed, but this generation is the one with the most access to information in the history of humankind, making it easier for them to read and research on any topic of their interest. Time again, we see the stereotype of the ignorant youngster debunked by figures such as Greta Thunberg, Malala Yousafzai, and Easton La Chappelle. However, we lack a forum where young people can voice their demands and concerns, and contribute to finding solutions for these, since the system does not provide them with a platform to engage. This is one of the goals of the United Nations Youth Council, to serve as a forum and platform that listens to the views of youth on global issues, that can advise the UN on these issues and promote solutions driven by youngsters.
Introduction

1. ‘Youth’ is defined by the United Nations as any person between the ages of 15 and 24 years, while adolescents are considered to be aged between 10 and 19 years. Both youth and adolescents are referred to as ‘young people’.

2. There are 1.8 billion young people in the world, the largest number in history.

3. Almost 90% of these young people live in developing countries and nations affected by armed conflict.

4. Throughout the years, Member States have realized the potential that young people have to engage with peace processes and the Security Council and other United Nation bodies have urged nations to work towards including young voices in decision-making.

5. In 1965, the United Nations endorsed the Declaration on the Promotion among Youth of the Ideals of Peace, Mutual Respect and Understanding between Peoples, which acknowledged that it was necessary to consider how policies and decisions impacted the youth.

6. In 1985, the International Youth Year: Participation, Development and Peace drew attention to the important role youth play in contributing to the economic, social and cultural advancement of their societies and in promotion international cooperation and understanding.

7. In the ten year celebration of the International Youth Year, the United Nations published the World Programme of Action for youth to the year 2000 and beyond to strengthen their commitment to the youth by highlighting the challenges the youth would be facing in the coming years and how these could be tackled.

8. International Youth Day was adopted in the 1999 resolution 54/120 by the General Assembly, following a recommendation from the World Conference of Ministers Responsible for Youth. Through International Youth Day, a challenge or issue faced by young people is presented to the international community, with varying topics every year, as a form to raise awareness.

9. To celebrate 25 years of the first International Youth Year, in December 2009, the General Assembly proclaimed the year commencing in August 2010 as International Youth Year.

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1 The United Nations Youth Council (UNYC) is a futuristic simulation of WFUNA International Model United Nations (WIMUN). This council has been proposed to the United Nations by think tanks, but it has not been approved or included as an official committee as of present. The official representation of the Youth in the United Nations is the United Nations Youth Delegates, made up of young people that participate in discussions of General Assembly, Commission for Social Development, High Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development, and the Economic & Social Council. The inclusion of the UNYC in WIMUN is to provide a glimpse into how this council could potentially work if it were ever adopted as an organism of the United Nations.
Youth Year. They called on Member States to honour this year by implementing programs and policies that benefit and include youth.

10. After years of advocacy from over 11,000 young people\(^2\), Security Council S/RES/2250 (2015) on Youth, Peace and Security recognized the important contributions youth have made to in the maintenance and promotion of peace and security.

11. Security Council S/RES/2419 (2018) called on Member States to increase the representation of youth in the prevention and resolution of conflict, including when negotiating and implementing peace agreements.

12. Both Security Council S/RES/2250 (2015) and S/RES/2419 (2018) emphasize the importance of Member States to collaborate with international organizations on including the youth in a strategic level on peace processes and negotiations, as well as the in conflict and post conflict situations.


14. In March 2019, the first International Symposium on Youth Participation in Peace Processes, co-hosted by Finland, Qatar, and Colombia, took place in Helsinki, Finland.

15. Following the recommendation from UN think tanks and the previously mentioned resolutions, The United Nations Development Programme launched the Global Programme for Sustainable Development & Peace, which ran from July 2016 to January 2020. This forum empowered young people to draft responses to challenges they face worldwide.

16. The Declaration on the Commemoration of the Seventy-fifth Anniversary of the United Nations (UN75 Declaration), adopted on September 21, 2020, included a groundbreaking commitment to the youth, promising to create an advisory council.

17. As a potential advisory council, the United Nations Youth Council (UNYC) would support and assist the United Nations General Assembly in including the youth in implementing the UN Youth Strategy and participating in achieving the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals.

18. Member states of the United Nations must engage with the UNYC to strengthen youth participation in policymaking and to create an inclusive dialogue that considers how

\(^2\) This statistic (11,000 young people) is provided by the Secretary General’s Envoy on Youth, and was shared in their congratulation message to the UN Security Council after adopting resolution 2250 on Youth, Peace and Security.
young people are affected by global issues and how they can engage in solutions to solve them.

II. Challenges

19. Most of the world’s young people live in developing countries, where they face increased poverty, economic and political crisis, limited access to education and malnourishment.

20. In today’s society, young people’s futures tend to rely on academic achievements, yet many drop out of school and many do not pursue a college degree. This impacts their job opportunities, and consequently, their lifestyle and economic security in the future.

21. Many students drop out of school to enter the labor force to help sustain their families or because parents cannot afford to pay for their education.

22. The United Nations Institute for Statistics reported that 258 million children and youth were not enrolled in school at the end of 2018, with more than half living in developing areas or conflict zones.

23. This lack of education results in decreased job opportunities and higher unemployment rates among young people. The World Youth Report of 2019 argues there are over 70 million unemployed young people and millions more working in informal jobs. One hundred and fifty-six million young people in low-and middle-income countries are working poor.

24. During the COVID-19 crisis, youth employment fell 8.7 per cent compared with 3.7 per cent for adults from 2019 to 2020, according to the International Labour Organization.

25. In the labour market, young people are considered easier and cheaper to fire, which left them unprotected during the massive job loss experienced in the coronavirus pandemic.

26. Many young people are recruited by organized crime organizations or for illicit activities because they promise to turn their lives around and do not require them to have academic titles.

27. Currently, the demand for skilled workforce is higher than before, which means young people without work experience, or a degree are disadvantaged against their educated peers.

28. Low education levels also limit their scope of knowledge and leaves them unprepared for job opportunities in public sectors or within organizations where they can get more involved in national development.
29. When engaging in politics, there is a mutual distrust from young people towards politicians and vice versa. Young people tend to have negative views of the true intentions of politicians while politicians see young people as unreliable.

30. Due to their tendency to distrust the government, young people disengage from political activities like voting. Instead, they will protest and show their disapproval of policies through online platforms.

31. Since they disengage with political activities, there are not many young politicians who can lobby on behalf of youth interests.

32. The United Nations Global Youth Report showed that less than 5% of active members in political parties around the world are aged between 18 and 29.

33. Since there is an age restriction for engaging with politics directly, voting or running for office, children growing up to be young adults feel it is not their duty to care about political processes until they are of age. When they do reach the age, they are uninterested in participating in political activities because they grew up not caring about these things.

34. There is a systematic exclusion of young people in politics because some cultures have established a societal norm where politics is controlled by older men, mostly wealthy. The people in power continue to make decisions that exclude the youth, and with no youth representation to change this status quo, the cycle continues.

35. There is a leadership barrier that favors older people over younger people, valuing their opinions and thoughts over those of the young population.

36. The generational tension between the youth and the older generations lies in the different ways they approach conflicts. The youth are willing to strive for more and work for immediate success, while older generations are more patient and analytical.

37. Also, young people who lack a certain level of education and have not received training in civic affairs are not prepared to stand up to traditional parties and are sometimes used as pawns.

38. Geographical barriers exist in many cities where young people cannot participate in political processes because they happen far from their city, and it is difficult for them to make the journey.

39. Participation in peace processes is also hampered by the fact that many times these negotiations take place in a host/mediator country that young people cannot afford to travel to. Other times, people living in rural areas cannot go to the capital where official business is handled.
III. Future Priorities

Recognizing Youth as political actors

40. It is necessary for younger people to be recognized as agents of change and empower them to voice their opinions and contribute to decision-making and be recognized as political actors, just like their older counterparts. It is important for member states to give young people the opportunity to develop the skills they need for engaging in political processes. The youth must be allowed to engage in political forums to represent this age group and make policies that address their needs.

Increasing educations

41. Education should be promoted among young people and made accessible to increase the chances of younger generations securing well-paid jobs and pulling them out of poverty. By giving people the opportunity to develop skills and access information, they will be better informed and therefore contribute to the peace process in a more helpful way by implementing tactics and plans of action rather than just expressing opinions. When education is increased, young people will be better equipped to engage in the political process and will establish better academic opportunities for the younger generations, consequently improving the population's literacy rate.

42. Education is not only in academia, but young people should also be trained in peacebuilding tactics so that they are better prepared to understand the dimensions of the conflict and can propose relevant solutions.

Including Youth in the discussion

43. Member states must include youth in policy-making that is directed to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. Once they have been recognized as political actors, they will have ability to propose policies and new approaches that have never been tried before to benefit those that are often ignored. Involving the youth in peace building in conflict zones can help protect them from being recruited or targeted by criminals or engaging in illicit activities on the streets. Including the youth in the peace process allows them to be directly involved making decisions that affect them. Many times, young people are disregarded as vulnerable and ignored when politicians rule.

Changing the narrative surrounding youth

44. One Member States should work towards changing the social stereotypes that exist in their cultures, especially developing countries which tend to maintain a patriarchal hierarchy. This puts women under a double threat where they are disregarded for their political views due to their gender by the patriarchal hierarchy and for being a young person. The voices of young people and older generations must hold the same
importance in peacemaking to ensure solutions are inclusive and beneficial to the whole population.

45. Member states must promote the inclusion of young people in policy making by developing equal partnerships with youth organizations and supporting youth-led initiatives. This support must include guidance, funds, and technical resources. Capacity building and guidance is essential to provide young people with the tools and knowledge to confidently engage with and participate in peace initiatives.

46. In addition, setting up platforms that allow young people to express their ideas with these initiatives can help create a wider dialogue with more inclusion from the young population within countries. It is necessary to incorporate young people from diverse and intersecting backgrounds to ensure that all needs are met, and everyone has an equal opportunity to contribute to the ongoing debate.

47. Member states must work on changing the mindset and perception of existing authorities towards young people, promoting mutual respect of the youth and political actors alike. For dialogue to be effective between both generations, they must be viewed in the same light.