

v-EMPOWER YOUTH DECLARATION 2020

ROTA's 12th Annual Youth Conference on Youth Mobilization for Inclusion, Peace, and Security

15-19 July 2020

We, the participants of the 12th Annual EMPOWER Youth Conference, have gathered virtually from 15th-19th July 2020 to explore ways and means of mobilizing youth to strengthen youth inclusive peace and security and to promote youth leadership, service learning and global citizenship

We acknowledge the pain and fear that many people worldwide are currently experiencing due to the COVID-19 pandemic. What we are seeing is truly unprecedented and is impacting the livelihoods of billions of people every day. It is crippling the ability of societies to function, and the most vulnerable are being impacted the most. With this crisis unfolding the way it is, we call for the urgent inclusion of young people as partners in the response to this pandemic, around the world. The voice and lifesaving actions of young people need to be heard and promoted.

We appreciate the UN Security Council Resolutions 2250 (in 2015), 2419 (in 2018) and 2535 on July 14, 2020 as they unequivocally call on Member States to engage young people as partners not a threat or burden, something critical during this Pandemic. They collectively strengthen the legal mandate to protecting young people as they exercise their rights. These Resolutions also call on Member States to take appropriate measures to promote the physical and psychological recovery and social reintegration of young survivors of armed conflict including those with disability, and survivors of sexual violence in conflict by providing, amongst others, access to quality education, socio-economic support and skills development such as vocational training, to resume social and economic life. Resolutions 2523 also calls upon Member States to protect educational institutions as spaces free from all forms of violence, and to ensure that they are accessible to all youth, including marginalized youth, and take steps to address young women's equal enjoyment of their right to education. It also calls on Member States to take steps to encourage the meaningful participation of youth in the reconstruction of areas devastated by conflict, to bring help to refugees, internally displaced persons, and war victims and promote peace, reconciliation and rehabilitation, The resolution also encourages Member States to develop and implement policies and programs for youth and to facilitate their constructive engagement, including through dedicated local, national and regional road maps on youth, peace and security, with sufficient resources, through a participatory inclusive process. These resolutions collectively recognize the agency, resilience, and power of 1.85 Billion young people in the world as partners in peace and security. Young people will live with the consequences of actions or lack of actions by governments and other key stakeholders. Therefore, it is imperative that governments adopt and act on policies and actions today.

We express our hope that ministries responsible for youth, young people, representatives of governments, United Nations Agencies, youth-led organizations, non-governmental organizations and other development partners, reaffirm their commitment to youth mobilization and inclusion in Peace and Security and the urgency in engaging youth in peace processes.

Call for Action:

COVID-19 and Humanitarian Emergencies:

1. We call on all stakeholders to prevent further structural exclusion of youth as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. COVID 19 may exacerbate the preexisting structural exclusion experienced by youth. Counteracting this will require a concerted effort to promote equitable service provision and protection, including by:
 - a. Protecting the rights and safety of youth activists who may be digitally or physically targeted by state or non-state actors who are using the COVID-19 crises to restrict civic space; "UNSCR 2535"

- b. Promoting young people's access to sustainable livelihood opportunities as part of COVID-19 recovery, as well as their participation in developing fair and inclusive labor policies;
 - c. Engage young people from all backgrounds, bearing in mind different genders, ethnicities, economic status, and disability status.
2. Partner with young people who are responding to COVID-19 and leading recovery efforts:
 - a. Including youth, especially from racial or ethnic minority backgrounds, in designing COVID-19 response and recovery initiatives, such as through local health service advisory boards;
 - b. Highlighting the positive contribution of youth in pandemic response through media and communications, to help shift false perceptions of young people;
 - c. Supporting young people as key messengers of life-saving and accurate public health guidelines;
 - d. Engaging youth in top-level decision-making processes to ensure that COVID-19 does not derail hard-won progress, including in peace processes or security sector and criminal justice reforms;
 - e. Empowering youth-led initiatives to disengage peers from violent groups and narratives, especially digital, and ensure effective reintegration.
 3. Facilitate collaboration between youth groups and governments to create a strong prevention and response architecture for future crises: The current pandemic is revealing the importance of young people in holding communities together and making them resilient against crises, including through serving as essential workers in healthcare.

Protection

1. We call all stakeholders for a holistic protection of youth, refugees, internally displaced persons, and young peacebuilders, in conflict zones, including timely and systematic response to physical, political, economic, socio-cultural, and digital threats to security. (Based on 35 SG Report S/2020/167)
2. We call on governments to protect, promote fundamental freedoms and human rights of youth in both the physical and the digital spaces including the protection from predation and victimization online, as well as the right to freedom of expression and information without repression, monitoring and surveillance, and to bridge the digital divide for grassroots young people's digital participation through the provision of technology, education, and digital infrastructure.
3. Calling on all parties engaged in armed conflict to take special prevention measures to protect and prevent youth, especially young women, from sexual violence and abuse, slavery perpetuated by state and non-state actors in the context of armed conflict and humanitarian emergencies. (Based on resolution 1325)

Institutionalization and Operationalization:

1. Empowering youth to implement their own initiatives to handle crises will be a key component of creating stronger crisis prevention and response mechanisms. National and international stakeholders can support this effort by:
 - a. Establishing a global, collaborative, and multi-stakeholder, investment mechanism dedicated to funding youth-led disaster relief, peacebuilding, and protection efforts;
 - b. Restructuring bilateral foreign assistance to better support both formal and informal youth groups;
 - c. Institutionalizing policies and frameworks that strengthen youth participation in domestic peace and security affairs, such as through passing YPS "Youth, Peace and Security" National Strategies and Action Plans.
2. We call on governments to increase the participation of young people in decision-making at all levels in local, national, regional and international institutions and in mechanisms for the prevention and resolution of conflict.

Environment and Climate Change

1. We call on governments, NGOs and the Business sector to empower youth to address the causes and adapt to the impact of climate change in ways that ensure the security of themselves and their communities.

2. We call on governments, to remain ahead of emerging conflict exacerbated by environmental insecurity and the effects of climate change, swift action on international agreements such as the 2015 Paris agreement in critical;
3. We call on all stakeholders to include the voices and opinions of young people in climate change agreements and debates at local, national and international levels. Youth have a greater stake in the impacts of climate change and will be instrumental in developing solutions in the future;
4. We call for a mechanism that sets up recommendations on how policy organizations can strengthen their efforts to respond to these risks and how it will engage youth.

Sports for Peace

1. We call on athletes, supporters and global sports federations to enforce the relationships between players and the community by using sports as an effective tool to spread peace and security and prevent violence and fear among children and youth.
2. We call on humanitarian workers to integrate sports in their work with refugees in order to give a chance to young refugees and the marginalized to enhance their wellbeing, mental health, reinforce their self-confidence and self-esteem.
3. We call on all stakeholders, to support vulnerable children through sports and life skills in order to help build a more inclusive and egalitarian society.