

**Remarks by the UN Secretary General's Envoy on Youth
at the debate of the Security Council on Youth Peace and Security
27th April 2020**

We are in the midst of an unprecedented **global** challenge: the COVID19 pandemic has swept through our world leaving everyday life as we know it at a standstill.

Schools, businesses, markets, and bus stations deserted; entire cities transformed into ghost towns overnight.

While decision makers are trying to navigate uncharted waters, we have seen an image grow from the media, of the worlds' young people acting irresponsible and reckless, not understanding the gravity of the situation, putting the lives of others' in danger by going to beaches, pubs and parties.

As usual, we have seen a focus on the small minority of young people who disregarded guidelines and instructions risking their own health and the safety of others, completely sidelining the thousands of young people who were already fighting in the frontlines of the crisis.

Nowhere in the news did we hear about young peacebuilders in Kenya and Cameroon who immediately adapted their peacebuilding organizations and networks to prepare their communities to face COVID19.

The news didn't focus on the many young health-workers and medical students attending to patients in China and Italy.

The news didn't tell us about the Scouts, Girl Guides and red cross volunteers running awareness and handwashing campaigns in Haiti and Jordan.

The headlines didn't recognize young people 3D printing face masks and fundraising in support of charities here in the US.

Therefore, allow me to dedicate my statement today to all the young people who are putting their communities ahead of them-selves, within war zones, refugee camps, favelas and settlements showcasing grit and leadership that sometimes we fail to see in our own political leaders.

**President of the Security Council,
Excellencies
Secretary General
Fellow Young people**

Public discourse often portrays young people as an irresponsible, self-interested group. We quickly categorize young men as easily attracted to violence, and part of gangs and extremist groups. Young women always as victims of these scenarios.

But contrary to these popular narratives, if we care to take a closer look at the communities most affected, what conflicts, disasters and crises teach us over and over again, is that young people are not only the most resilient but also the most innovative and resourceful during turbulent times.

Born in to and growing up in an exceedingly interconnected world, young people understand very well that solidarity is the name of the game. They understand that just like the COVID-19 pandemic - conflict, violence, inequality and climate change, - do not stop at national boundaries. That none of us is safe, unless we all are.

Excellencies,

This year we mark the 5th anniversary of the adoption of the Security Council Resolution 2250. We are also marking 20 years of resolution 1325 on Women Peace and Security. With unprecedented global challenges surrounding us all, the United Nations is getting ready to celebrate its 75th birthday reflecting on its past but most importantly looking into its future.

This is an opportune moment to take stock of the Youth Peace and Security Agenda; its progress & wins and its challenges & gaps. I'm sure we all agree that the future of our communities, countries and entire world depend on building peaceful and resilient generations.

This is also a strategic moment to further increase synergies among these various agendas so young people in all their diversity can contribute as equal partners and stakeholders in deciding what kind of a future they will inherit.

Therefore, allow me to thank the Government of the Dominican Republic for its leadership in convening this Security Council Briefing.

I am pleased to join the Secretary General and two young peacebuilders, Olla from Yemen and Gatwal from South Sudan, as we reflect on the key messages and recommendations of the first-ever Secretary General's report on Youth Peace and Security.

This Report saw daylight at a vital time when the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic were emerging. In order to adjust to the current realities, innovative and new approaches to translate youth peace and security policy into practice are needed.

While the Report documents important practices, lessons, and commitments that have emerged from the implementation of the YPS Agenda, a clear strategy co-led by young people and member states, especially at the country level is needed.

Since 2015, the Secretary General's reports presented to the security council have increasingly discussed the situation of young people, with an increase from 21 percent of reports in 2016 to 39 per cent in 2019. However, we still have a lot to do in mainstreaming and embedding Youth Peace and Security across UN efforts. As an example, out of 253 resolutions adopted by the Security Council since 2015, only 16 percent include meaningful references to youth.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am pleased to note that the Secretary General's report on Youth Peace and Security is grounded in the five pillars of the Resolution 2250 and draws from the strategic and comprehensive recommendations formulated in "*The Missing Peace; Independent Progress Study on Youth Peace and Security*" presented to this Council in April 2018.

Based on the report, my key recommendations today echo the voices of young people who I have interacted with during my country missions around the world, and those who participated in the survey I carried out online, just before this briefing, as well as in the wider consultations carried out by UN partners, member states and civil society in preparation of the Secretary General's report.

Firstly, young people believe that there is a need to create more meaningful partnerships between youth, civil society organizations, and government institutions that work on the YPS Agenda.

To date, there are no National Action Plans on YPS. But I am pleased to note that in some countries these are in the process of development. For a national roadmap to be successful, a participatory, transparent, and youth led process and adequate resources are needed.

Since resolution 2250 was adopted, we have seen an increase in the creation of national coalitions on youth, peace and security. I encourage all Member States to establish multi-stakeholder mechanisms to meaningfully engage youth in planning and decision-making on peacebuilding and post-conflict reconstruction, as well as in discussions on resource allocations.

Secondly, meaningful participation of all young people towards building sustainable peace should be ensured.

Participation is recognized as a human right in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. All young people have the **right to participate** in the conduct of public affairs and thus are entitled to rights and freedoms.

Such participation encompasses a wide range of actions, from formal participation in political, electoral or peace processes to informal participation at the community level and in digital spaces. Enabling spaces should be created for young people, where they are seen and respected as citizens with equal rights, equal voices and equal influence.

Although inclusion has shown to positively impact the sustainability of peace agreements, young people continue to be excluded from decisions that directly impact their present and future prospects for peace. The key outcome from the first International Symposium on Youth Participation in Peace Processes, hosted in Helsinki in March 2019, demonstrated that young people will either inherit a peace agreement's long-term benefits or long-term consequences.

Therefore, I call on all Member States to create meaningful opportunities for young people to participate both informally and formally in peace processes. As the Policy Paper "We are here" I presented to the council last year recognizes, this can be inside, around and beyond negotiation rooms.

Finally, young people believe that strong mechanisms should be developed to protect young activists and peace builders.

Young activists are facing various threats from state and non-state actors for building peace in their communities, and reprisals for cooperating with the United Nations. These threats include physical, legal, political, sociocultural, digital and financial threats. In the times of COVID-19, with lockdowns, curfews and increased surveillance offline and online, civic space has continued to shrink world-wide risking progress to stall.

To date, no data is systematically collected on human rights violations of young peacebuilders and human rights defenders throughout the world, and in most cases, these violations remain undocumented or uninvestigated.

Therefore, I call on Member States support to facilitate an inclusive, safe, enabling and gender-responsive environment in which young peacebuilders and young human rights defenders are recognized and provided with adequate support and protection to carry out their work independently and without undue interference.

Excellencies,

What do we see as the collective way forward?

As you are aware, operationalizing the Youth Peace and Security Agenda requires coordination, coherence and integration, as well as political will and commitment. These recommendations cannot be implemented without sufficient **funding** and **accountability** from the UN-system, and its member states.

Flexible and easily accessible funding for youth-led and youth-focused organizations and for the United Nations and other civil society partners, is urgently needed to further advance the YPS Agenda.

I strongly recommend the Council to consider regular and systematic reporting on the implementation of Resolutions 2250 and 2419 to ensure sustainability and continuity of these important agendas. Tracking progress is vital to ensure accountability.

Shifting to a meaningful, partnership-based approach, especially with civil society and youth-led organizations is critical not only for this agenda, but for youth

engagement and participation in all aspects of life, as outlined in the UN Youth Strategy; Youth2030.

In conclusion excellency, if the UN and the Security Council fail to translate agreed Resolutions into action; in a nutshell if this agenda is not brought down from a global policy level to a regional and country level with programmatic action; young people will lose opportunities to meaningfully participate and **their trust** in institutions and multilateralism will further erode.

We cannot afford to lose the trust of young people, the greatest asset and greatest hope we have for a better future.

Therefore, I urge the Council to put young people at the heart of its efforts to bring global peace and security. Young people are ready and up for the challenge. The question is – are national, regional and international actors ready to bridge the inter-generational divide?

Thank you.