

EU Conference on Youth, Peace and Security

Brussels, 23-24 May 2018



PROMOTING YOUTH IN PEACEBUILDING

implementing UNSCR 2250

#youth4peace



SUMMARY REPORT

Acknowledgements

The EU Conference on Youth, Peace and Security has been realised in partnership between the European External Action Service, the European Parliament, the European Commission, the United Nations Development Programme, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation, the United Nations Peacebuilding Support Office, the United Nations Population Fund, the Anna Lindh Foundation, the European Partnership for Children and Youth in Peacebuilding¹ and the European Youth Forum.

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¹ Save the Children, Search for Common Ground, United Network of Young Peacebuilders, World Vision International

Executive Summary

The EU Conference on Youth, Peace and Security created an inclusive and interactive space for all stakeholders to exchange and to make recommendations for the EU on promoting young people in peacebuilding, in partnership with the UN, other multilateral players, civil society, and young peacebuilders from across the world.

There is a broad consensus across the EU institutions about harnessing the potential of the biggest global youth population for conflict prevention and sustaining peace. This calls for concrete actions to recognise, support and strengthen the work of the young change makers and leaders of today and tomorrow, and for including them in decision making.

The peacebuilding partnership between the EU and young people should be built on shared responsibility and a shared sense of initiative. It is both for the EU and for young people to do more and contribute more to peacebuilding. Investment in youth-led peacebuilding needs to go hand in hand with young people organising and mobilising themselves to build a strong case for resourcing their actions.

Reaching out to and including the more marginalised and isolated young people in peacebuilding is a shared concern. In fact, youth can play a very important role in accessing the most vulnerable and exposed parts of society. This relates to the broader issue of working with, empowering and funding civil society and grassroots youth organisations and movements. The capacities of EU Delegations to work with young peacebuilders in partner countries should be put to better use. However, it will remain indispensable that civil society acts as interface and multiplier to engage young people on the fringes of society and allow for scaling up their conflict prevention and peacebuilding initiatives.

Meaningful youth inclusion puts a premium on more targeted and more specialised ways for institutions to work together with young people on concrete issues, including peace and security. The EU networks and communities of young peacebuilders² represent important ways to forge dialogue between young people, which was highlighted by several stakeholders.

There is also a need to better exhaust and document the peacebuilding impact of EU programmes and initiatives targeted specifically on young people, such as Erasmus.

Through an interactive dialogue with young people, the HR/VP defined four main deliverables from the Conference:

- continue to create open spaces for young people to come together, build long-term relationships and directly engage the EU;
- expand the EU communities of young peacebuilders with youth from Asia and Latin-America;
- work on translating some of the proposals put forward by young people into projects by the EU, or by partners' governments or local authorities;
- promote funding for youth work at all levels and pilot a youth consultation on thematic and country-specific EU policies.

² Former AU-EU Youth fellows and 4th Africa-EU Youth Summit participants; Eastern Partnership Young European Ambassadors network; participants of the European regional consultation on Youth, Peace and Security (25-27 September 2017); European Parliament's Young Political Leaders Programme; Extremely Together Network; "La Voix des Jeunes du Sahel" network; NET-MED Youth – UNESCO Project; One Young World Peace Ambassadors network; Young Mediterranean Voices Plus – ALF network

Introduction

The first-ever EU Conference on Youth, Peace and Security took place on 23-24 May 2018 in Brussels, co-hosted by the European Parliament and the European External Action Service, and co-organised with the European Commission, the UN and civil society. The Conference brought together young peacebuilders from and working with the EU, representatives from EU Institutions, EU Member States, UN entities, the Council of Europe, the OSCE and civil society partners.

The overarching goals of the Conference were to further reinforce momentum in the EU implementation of the Youth, Peace and Security agenda, foster EU policy on Youth, Peace and Security, promote EU-UN cooperation on youth in peacebuilding, while enhancing the visibility of the Youth, Peace and Security agenda.

Through plenary sessions and thematic panel discussions, the Conference created a level playing field for interactive dialogue to address key external and internal aspects of Youth, Peace and Security from a European perspective.

Participants of the Conference included a diverse group of 73 young peacebuilders, coming from 27 EU Member States and 29 partners countries, already engaged in EU networks and communities of young peacebuilders or in the networks of civil society partners, as well as decision makers, policy experts and practitioners from the institutions and stakeholders involved.

This report has been drafted by the European External Action Service, in consultation with all organising partners and participants of the Conference.

Opening Session

In his keynote speech, **Mr. Antonio Tajani the President of the European Parliament** emphasised that youth represents enormous potential for change and positive action. He underlined that youth are already the leaders of today, and they deserve a place at the table. He also affirmed that the European Parliament takes youth inclusion very seriously, and that it will remain at the forefront of engaging directly with young people through high-level events and especially through the Young Political Leaders Programme. In the words of President Tajani: "*Young people are agents of innovation, development and change and, as such, are natural and essential contributors to conflict prevention and peacebuilding around the world*".

Ms. Heidi Hautala, Vice-President of the European Parliament, who chaired the opening session, recalled that UNSCR 2250 was the first to acknowledge at the global level the power of youth-led peacebuilding and conflict-prevention interventions to build peaceful communities and underpin democratic and inclusive governance. She acknowledged that young people are already among the key actors in peacebuilding, strengthening peace, human rights and the rule of law. She highlighted the role of the European Parliament to engage directly with young people, to promote the idea of democracy and the value of dialogue and ownership of the future direction of their societies.

Ms. Lora Borissova, the Head of Cabinet of the EU Commissioner for Digital Economy and Society described the Commission's work on shaping our digital future. She highlighted the opportunities offered by digital technology to connect people and reinforce shared values of openness and tolerance. She cited concrete steps taken by the Commission, including the ending of roaming charges. New measures to address the digital skills gap and improve the STEM education of young people will help promote peacebuilding, including counter-radicalisation.

Mr. Oscar Fernandez-Taranco, the UN Assistant Secretary-General for Peacebuilding Support stressed that Youth, Peace and Security (YPS) was central to the 2030 Agenda as well as to the sustaining peace agenda. YPS marks a profound and substantial shift in the way we approach peace and security. It calls for youth inclusion in practice, not only in words, and for prioritising the political participation of young people and the building of partnerships. He underlined the need to support and scale up the work of young peacebuilders.

Ms. Ivana Tufegdžic, fYROM, EP Young Political Leaders, shared her personal story as a Member of Parliament through the prism of last year's political crisis in fYROM, which included attacks in the Parliament. She recounted her involvement in the student movement which emerged in 2014, describing it as a multi-ethnic peaceful movement, which succeeded in making a tectonic shift in society through projecting young people's progressive vision on the country. In addition to domestic measures to build consensus on youth policies and progress on reconciliation, the Parliament initiated the formation of networks of youth caucuses of Western Balkans Parliaments, supported by the European Parliament, following

the example of the Regional Youth Cooperation Office. On the initiative of the National Youth Council of Macedonia, the Parliament will start a process on the ratification of UNSCR 2250.

Mr. Dereje Wordofa, UNFPA Deputy Executive Director, identified YPS as central to the work of UNFPA. He asserted that the young generation is a major force for change, and their well-being and meaningful participation is fundamental to achieving a just and peaceful world. Across the world, we can see young people working to serve the population and build resilience in their communities. Therefore, investing in young people means investing in humanity, and UNFPA remains committed to working for and with them. As the Progress Study on YPS demonstrated, the large global population of young people represents an asset to build and sustain peace.

Ms. Nour Kaabi, Tunisia, NET-MED Youth – UNESCO Project, spoke about the importance of reaching out to more isolated youth who do not usually have access to spaces like this Conference. She pointed out the importance of reviving young people's hope in the future, against the global phenomenon of depression, self-harm and radicalisation. She urged for the creation of real spaces for young people to learn, experiment and participate in public life. She argued for meaningful youth participation as opposed to merely "ticking the box", youth empowerment to build skills for participation, diverse youth inclusion in order to avoid fragmentation and for the facilitation of south-south and north-south mobility. In this regard, she shared innovative experiences implemented under the EU-funded NET-MED Youth – UNESCO Project, including models for youth's public participation at local level, efforts to improve their representation in the media, and to enable transnational experience sharing.

Mr. Oyewole Simon Oginni, Nigeria, Former AU-EU Youth Fellow, underscored that it is overdue to place increased focus on youth peacebuilding. He insisted on the paradigm shift from portraying youth as the problem to recognising them as the solution, as it was reflected in the AU-EU Youth Plug-in Initiative. He introduced the AU-EU Youth Agenda³ with concrete youth-led recommendations as a "programme for all of us". These recommendations, including concrete initiatives on peace and security, were presented to State leaders during the 5th AU-Summit in November 2017, which brought a new perspective into the youth discourse.

In the interaction, **Ms. Kaabi** further elaborated on the question of representativeness, and the inclusion of youth who are not involved in youth organisations, which she considered a dilemma at national and international level. An idea to respond to this question would be to start building up capacities for participation and representation at the community level, including the civil society, and from there progress to higher levels.

Elaborating on UN peacebuilding interventions in fragile situations, **Mr. Fernandez-Taranco** related that a major challenge for the UN today is to rebalance investment from crisis response towards investment into prevention. He illustrated this with a recent UN cross-border initiative between Chad, Cameroon and North-Nigeria (the area most at risk from Boko Haram) to mobilise young people in defining priorities together with security forces

³ <http://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/31805/au-eu-ypii-youth-agenda-english.pdf>

regarding security in the villages around Lake Chad and regarding access to the resources of Lake Chad.

Thematic Panel Discussion I⁴

Youth inclusion for conflict prevention and sustaining peace

Mr. Amnon Morag, Israel, EP Young Political Leaders, described the experience of the Israeli-Palestinian peace process as older generations having failed to bring peace, which younger generations will have to achieve.

Ms. Soraya Post, Member of the European Parliament, emphasised the importance of including the voices of youth and underrepresented populations into conflict prevention and mediation. She reminded of the intersectionality of the youth population, along the lines of ethnicity, gender etc, which called for an intersectional EU approach to youth peacebuilding.

Mr. Christian Leffler, Deputy Secretary-General of the European External Action Service, introduced the newly-adopted EU Council conclusions on the role of young people in building a secure, cohesive and harmonious society in Europe. These conclusions reflect the EU's approach whereby YPS is relevant both internally and externally, and similar challenges are seen in both domains: working for youth inclusion, partnership, awareness. The most challenging task is to reach out to the most vulnerable and exposed parts of society, in which youth can play a very important role.

Mr. MacDonald K. Munyoro, Zimbabwe, EP Young Political Leaders, argued for the EU and the UN to push for the direct political participation of youth against the background of most young people failing to find political space. He recounted a successful experiment in Zimbabwe where an open dialogue process with youth led to the creation of a regular cross-party youth platform.

Mr. Oscar Fernandez-Taranco, UN Assistant Secretary-General for Peacebuilding Support, presented the notion of sustaining peace, which is extending the scope of peacebuilding to the whole peace and conflict continuum and engages all stakeholders, including young people. Sustaining peace is about recognising the demographic and democratic imperative of youth inclusion, as well as the violence of youth exclusion. The potential of investments under the UN Peacebuilding Fund was illustrated by a project in Liberia to support reconciliation through dialogue between the youth wings of political parties.

Ms. Hela Slim, France, Former AU-EU Youth Fellow, shared her experience with the AU-EU Youth Plug-in Initiative in the run-up to the 5th AU-Summit in November 2017. This interregional youth initiative uncovered common challenges across the two continents, including the shared priority of fighting terrorism and radicalisation, which requires a shift in the negative narrative around youth. The young people engaged in the initiative addressed the link between peace and security, education, entrepreneurship, climate change, and advocated for women's and marginalised youth's access to culture and education. The youth-led recommendations, presented to AU-EU state leaders, called for more coordination across policy fields and actions.

⁴ Thematic Panel Discussion I was facilitated by Ms. Gizem Kilinc, United Network of Young Peacebuilders

On the intersection of the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) and YPS agendas, **Mr. Leffler** referred to working on upstream conflict prevention and on reinforcing resilience, for which it is imperative to systematically integrate a gender and youth dimension, including in the most exposed regions. The EU's work in this regard was illustrated by a recently concluded three-year programme in Syria, which offered capacity building to 1200 Syrian civil society activists, including young people, who can become leaders in a future reconstruction and transition to democracy. **Ms. Post** held that WPS and YPS are about the same struggle for a more balanced distribution of power. She argued for the real inclusion of women and youth, rather than tokenistic inclusion with unequal opportunities to influence, which is often the case. She encouraged young people to be more insistent in light of how WPS is lagging behind in impact and receives low attention in the UNSC. **Mr. Taranco** considered a key lesson from the implementation of the WPS agenda that "talk is cheap". If we are serious about it, money needs to follow the declared priorities. A success story in this regard is the UN Peacebuilding Fund's "Gender and Youth Promotion Initiative", a dedicated window of funding to promote the inclusion and leadership of women and youth in peacebuilding. This year's call for proposals is open to support actions in a number of conflict-affected and fragile countries.

Meaningful youth inclusion, as opposed to a tokenistic approach, emerged as an important subject during the interaction with the audience. Comments were made regarding youth's desire to be included on account of the contribution they bring rather than their age. Moreover, youth want to be part of the action, not only being listened to. It was argued that youth should be assigned concrete added-value functions in peace processes, where the leadership would also recognise its interest. **Mr. Morag** pointed out the discrepancy in his own country between young people leading on high-tech innovation in the military, but having no space next to older generations in the peacebuilding sector.

The interaction also touched upon the question of resourcing youth-led peacebuilding, with participants arguing for more financial and technical support by the EU, including under the next long-term EU budget, the Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF). **Ms. Post** made proposals to prioritise EU investment into democratisation and diplomacy over investment into military capacities, as well as to invest into political education, which she considered key to sustaining peace. This chimed in with a recommendation made from the floor on EU support to partner countries for peace education in secondary schools. **Mr. Leffler** recalled that dedicating resources needs to go hand in hand with earning those resources. In the same vein, **Mr. Taranco** urged young people to mobilise and demand political power-sharing to build a strong case for resourcing.

As regards moving from policy to practice, **Ms. Slim** shared the lesson from the EU Youth Plug-in Initiative on the need to help young people realise that they have a role to play, which may not be obvious to all of them. **Mr. Fernandez-Taranco** suggested that implementing the recommendations of the Progress Study on YPS is the best formula for the way forward. **Mr. Munyoro** encouraged young people to take public office and to step up, citing a recent example from his own country of a youth petition to the Parliament to review the age limit requirements for elected officials.

Thematic Panel Discussion II⁵

Young people innovating for peace

Ms. Anna-Katharina Deininger, OSCE CiO Special Representative and OSG Focal Point on Youth and Security, introduced the work in the OSCE on preparing a youth mainstreaming strategy, to make sure that the perspectives of young people are reflected in all stages of programmatic and policy level work (formulation, implementation, monitoring). This reflects the important contributions that young people make in all three dimensions of the OSCE's work: human, environmental and political and security. She recalled the outcomes of the OSCE Conference on Youth and Security in Malaga, where youth made specific recommendations for cooperation on issues such as hate speech, the environment and peace and security. She introduced innovative approaches implemented by the OSCE, e.g. through creating youth advisory groups and through youth entrepreneurship projects, which bring together young change makers with businesses and institutions who can support their project ideas. She emphasised that partnership between the international community, national institutions and young people and their organisations means a sharing of responsibility and initiative.

Mr. Levan Kutashvili, Georgia, Eastern Partnership Young European Ambassadors, shared his personal story from being internally displaced following the conflict between Russia and Georgia in 2008 to becoming a Young European Ambassador (YEA), which allowed him to raise awareness in Georgian society about the EU as an important actor in peacebuilding. As part of the YEA programme, he communicates with young people face to face everyday (especially youth in IDP camps), and extensively uses social media, which was seen to play a huge role in reaching young people's minds. He shared an example of a recent activity, where YEAs from Georgia and the EU spoke with school pupils in his former high school at the Tserovani IDP settlement, introducing the EU and the opportunities it offers to young people in Georgia, and imparting key EU values such as respect for human dignity, democracy, equality, liberty and human rights.

Ms. Nana Fassouma Lawali, Niger, La Voix des Jeunes du Sahel, spoke about the situation of young people in her own country, with scarce opportunities for education and jobs. Often young people have no voice, and leaders do not listen to their concerns. This results in tensions and frustrations, which leads to young people risking their lives when migrating or joining violent extremist groups. As a good practice example, the La Voix des Jeunes du Sahel project succeeded in connecting youth and authorities, which helped to decrease pressures and is conducive to peace. She highlighted the importance of culture for peace: creating cultural centres as meeting places where youth can meet and develop creatively.

Ms. Barbara Pesce-Monteiro, Director, UN/UNDP Representation Office in Brussels, described an evolution in the UN over the past years, which saw a move from talking about young people to including young people in the conversation and in creating solutions. There is a growing trend of multilateral institutions engaging young people, and this holds true to

⁵ Thematic Panel Discussion II was facilitated by Ms. Mari Stromsvag, European Youth Forum

the EU-UN partnership, including actions on the ground. In the countries where UNDP is working, it witnesses the extraordinary resilience and leadership of young people and their drive for social progress and change. UNDP has been engaging with youth in global, regional and national programmes, to include and connect young people for social innovation, networking, intercultural dialogue, entrepreneurship and technological progress in the context of sustainable development. Taking Colombia as an example, UNDP helped scale up young people's initiatives, which fed into the peace process. This was also an example of mobilising marginalised and most exposed youth, who are often the source of real solutions, rather than focusing only on the privileged and technologically savvy. Another good example from UNDP is the inclusion of indicators of young people's involvement in peacebuilding in view of proper monitoring. UNDP will remain part of the conversation on YPS and work towards the UN system delivering as one and in partnership with the EU.

Ms. Lamya Marafi, Egypt, ikteshaaf, Search For Common Ground, presented the work of her organisation ikteshaaf on civic education for students, which she argued should focus on possibilities, not on obstacles. She suggested thinking about global citizenship education, rather than one focused on national citizenship, as global issues are interconnected (e.g. the case of refugees). She emphasised the power of citizens, as exemplified by the Egyptian revolution. She considered that post-conflict countries have the highest opportunities and possibilities to give power to young people to become civic leaders, e.g. the International Student Identity Card which grew out of the students' peace movement in Europe post World War II. For change to continue, she saw the need for more open and public spaces for young people to innovate, mentorship programmes, safe spaces for entrepreneurs to work on ideas and businesses (profit and non-profit) plus exchanges with peers from other regions.

In the ensuing interaction, **Mr. Kutashvili** described how he sees Georgian youth being inspired by the EU as a source of opportunities and values.

As regards youth political participation, **Ms. Deininger** referred to the work of the OSCE ODIHR, which addresses intersectional discrimination (political participation of young people with disabilities, of Roma youth, etc.). She reminded of the different avenues for formal and informal political participation, and underlined the importance of a conducive environment: enough information to make decisions, capacities to become vocal and speak out.

Ms. Marafi gave an example for technology in the service of intercultural exchange: since 2003, SOLIYA (www.soliya.net) has facilitated exchanges between students from MENA and EU countries – on topics related to international relations and perceptions about the others. She explained that she was a facilitator in these exchanges and gained many cultural insights through discussions on civic values, democracy, violence, conflict, etc.

Thematic Panel Discussion III⁶

Empowering young people to prevent/counter violent extremism

Ms. Sara Alhouni, Libya, Young Mediterranean Voices Plus – ALF, stressed the importance of freedom of speech and the importance of youth to be able to express their views while being active citizens. She also highlighted the importance of civic education to prevent violent extremism and the role that programmes such as Young Mediterranean Voices can play to empower young people's critical thinking skills.

Mr. Ayed Ahmad, Palestine, EP Young Political Leaders, talked about the experience of the Israeli-Palestinian peace process and the necessity to bring moderate voices in the dialogue, especially grassroots youth who are part of local networks and have an influence on their communities.

Mr. Bjørn Ihler, Norway, Extremely Together Network, presented his work in countering violent extremism, which brought him to talk to many former members of extremist and radical groups and to listen to their personal stories. He talked about the importance of visual arts in showing different worlds and presenting personal stories, which are much more powerful than reducing people to mere statistics. *"It is important to see others as human beings because by doing so, we create spaces for communication."*

Ms. Nana Toure, Mali, Africa-EU Summit participant, stressed the need to work on the root causes of extremism, reminding that insecurities, economic or environmental, expose young people to manipulation and to joining violent groups which can give them a sense of security. Nowadays, the focus is mostly on the fight against terrorism, but we need a vision for the future, something the youth can build on. She argued for participatory democracy where youth is allowed to express their views and to be involved in the political dialogue, avoiding a feeling of exclusion. Extremism is not only affecting youth but society at large, and broader and more inclusive processes are needed. She highlighted the evolution of new technologies that can be used to promote extremist thoughts and should be tackled seriously by the authorities. This concern was also raised by Mr. Magnusson and Mr. Eugen.

Mr. Magnus Magnusson, UNESCO, Director for Partnerships and Outreach Sector for Social and Human Sciences, stressed the need to allow young people to access the decision making process and include them in the discussion. *"Youth have positive resilience in the face of conflicts and bring positive change on which we need to build "*. He highlighted concrete initiatives UNESCO is implementing on the ground, for example through the EU-funded NET-MED Youth – UNESCO Project, and the UNESCO/UNOCT "PVE through youth empowerment in Jordan, Libya, Morocco and Tunisia" project (co-funded by Canada). These projects focus on youth engagement, education, culture, fostering youth resilience, development of critical thinking, communication skills and media and information literacy.

⁶ Thematic Panel Discussion III was facilitated by Mr. Elyes Guermazi, Tunisia NET-MED Youth – UNESCO Project

The aim is to empower young peacebuilders by providing them with access to opportunities that assist youth in becoming central actors in preventing, reporting, and responding to radicalisation and extremist narratives.

Mr. Eugen Freund, Member of the European Parliament talked about youth's identity struggle, saying that youngsters need a sense of ownership, to feel that they can lead. It remains very important to harness the role of social media in the prevention of extremism. The rapid development of technology and artificial intelligence also require more attention since they could become an important tool for youth empowerment and conflict prevention, if correctly used. Mr Freund also took the opportunity to underline the need for reforming the UN institutions, which is necessary for the organisation to face today's complex challenges.

Thematic Panel Discussion IV⁷

Protecting the human rights of youth

Ms. Arlett Faifer, Romania, World Vision, spoke of the fact that children are the most affected by conflicts, and living in a war zone is the worst vulnerability a child can have. Limited access to education, health services, food and to a happy childhood have an enormous impact on children's development, the worst example being child-soldiers. Ms. Faifer spoke about her own experience as a peacebuilder through the Children Consultative Committee from World Vision Romania. She coordinated several activities in five counties in Romania, addressed to children, but also to parents, teachers and local authorities. The goal was to make sure everyone fully understood that violence is not a solution and it has long-term consequences. More than 3000 children benefited by these activities. *"They all have to understand that it is up to every one of us to get involved and to participate in the community development process"*. Children and young people must be involved in the decision making process, be consulted and permanently kept informed about the decisions taken.

Mr. Clive Rumbold, Deputy Head of Division for the Western Balkans, European External Action Service, stressed that young people must be able to fully take part in the society, be protected from violence, abuse and neglect, and also have their economic rights fulfilled. He reminded that stability is a precondition for the enjoyment of human rights by everyone, while instability and conflict have a heavy toll especially on young people, affecting their access to many rights, including health and education. Addressing conflict and instability therefore also means helping to build societies that can protect human rights. Describing the EU's approach towards the Western Balkans, he stated that the EU aims to help ensure the necessary conditions for young people to learn, to travel freely (e.g. through visa liberalisation), to study in Europe, as well as to support the state structures responsible for protecting human rights through the European integration process. The very rigorous, long-term follow up on human rights structures in the framework of the accession process shows the importance that the EU places on fundamental rights. Today's Western Balkans youth benefits not only from the reforms on the European path, but could potentially be the first generation to benefit from EU accession, especially in terms of increased stability and prosperity.

Mr. Roger Djeraro Dioundane, Chad, La Voix des Jeunes du Sahel, talked about the situation in Chad and the Sahel region, and the impact it had on human rights. Young people are the majority of the population and at the same time they are among the most vulnerable groups subjected to human rights violations. It is challenging, but essential to address marginalised groups. However, youth are also the ones standing up and advocating for human rights, making sure that the language and discourse around human rights are mainstreamed with the population at large. Moreover, young people often put in place self-started initiatives, such as creating centres informing girls about sexual and reproductive health and

⁷ Thematic Panel Discussion IV was facilitated by Ms. Matilda Flemming, Search For Common Ground

rights or creating platforms with peer-to-peer training programmes to combat school dropout. For example, Mr. Diondande was part of an initiative that makes sure the basic needs and rights of prisoners are being met.

Mr. Rui Gomes, Head of Division for Education and Training, Youth Department, Council of Europe, said that the Council of Europe's approach is to see young people as resources and partners. All situations of conflict violate the most fundamental human rights of young people. Some of them are more vulnerable to human rights violations than others and are prevented from developing their full autonomy as human beings. Some examples are young Roma, religious and national minorities, young refugees (especially unaccompanied minors), young women, young people with disabilities, youth living in poverty or in disadvantaged neighbourhoods. Young people that challenge prevailing discourses and norms are also more vulnerable or at risk to violations. He underlined that young people in conflict situations can also be caught in competing loyalties: they are expected to be loyal to their communities, faith or families, but also have the right to grow free from hatred. Extremism must be seen as a manipulation of young people, of them being used. Those young people that are not able to contribute to peace must not be forgotten, as very often they are the ones suffering or in difficult conditions.

Mr. Dereje Wordofa, UNFPA Deputy Executive Director, stressed that the human rights of young people are a very central dimension of the YPS agenda. Young people are often the ones who need to claim their rights the most, but enjoy them the least, because they are moving between two stages in life - childhood and adulthood - and facing transitions at multiple levels (health, education, employment, civil and political rights). The situation is even worse for young people who are forced out of their homes and migrate outside because of insecurity, violence and lack of education and employment opportunities in their own countries, as demonstrated by a study recently conducted by UNFPA to understand young migrants' experiences. We need to think about the human rights of young people in relation to peace and security under different facets: young people are victims of violence and conflict; young people are also active protection actors; and young people provide support structures for victims. A key priority is the protection of young peacebuilders, human rights defenders and youth organisations, to ensure young people do not face reprisal for engaging with human rights mechanisms.

Ms. Majd Beltaji, Palestine, NET-MED Youth – UNESCO Project, spoke about the need for increased data on youth in conflict, via age- and sex-disaggregated data, and argued for the adoption of a working definition of youth that accounts for their diversity and does not treat them as one homogenous group. Programmes and activities need to specify who they mean by “youth” and which demographic they are trying to reach. Ms. Beltaji mentioned the importance to provide youth with the skills to successfully transition to adulthood. She highlighted that conflict-affected children often experience interruptions in education and later may be too old to return to the formal education system. At the same time, these young people often lack the basic skills they need to secure jobs once the conflict has ended. She discussed how youth-led and youth-engaging interventions aimed at countering extremists' narratives, promoting tolerance and nonviolent conflict resolution, and building peace can

help draw on the innate resilience of communities and underpin the strengthening of democratic, inclusive governance. Ms. Beltaji also highlighted that during conflicts girls and women encounter threats of rape, sexual trafficking, exploitation, mutilation, and humiliation. Furthermore, young people with disabilities or health needs receive little help during conflicts. On top of this, warfare can cause further disabilities, both of the visible physical variety and of the invisible, cognitive and mental type. Finally, she explained that the lack of opportunities provided to young people as well as exclusion are main drivers for young people joining extremist groups. She considered that we should not only judge young people who have joined a terrorist group, but also ask ourselves what made them join.

Interactive dialogue⁸

Ms. Anita Mitic, Serbia, One Young World Peace Ambassadors, debriefed on thematic panel discussion II. She found that despite considerable work underway, something is still missing in the field of youth peacebuilding. She recalled that including youth voices needs to go beyond "youth issues". She referred to the "great experience of Erasmus", and argued for supporting more cultural exposure for young people in this context.

Mr. Hervé Somda, Burkina Faso, La Voix des Jeunes du Sahel, debriefed on thematic panel discussion III. He spoke about harnessing the potential of youth for conflict prevention, including through building youth capacities for P/CVE. Improving young people's access to decision making processes, making them feel involved in development would help avoid extremist violence. The power of storytelling in changing behaviours, and therefore preventing and transforming conflict, was underlined. The role of social media in P/CVE remains an important one to harness, and artificial intelligence also plays a key role. Addressing the identity crisis of young people was seen as a necessity. So was the provision of instruments by governments to young people for conflict prevention and transformation.

Ms. Neli Kirilova, Bulgaria, European regional consultation on YPS, debriefed on thematic panel discussion I. She started with the notion of going from global to regional to local in conflict prevention and sustaining peace, first by defining what kind and which level of conflict we want to tackle. Therefore, engaging youth in conflict prevention should be within a specific regional context, providing the same understanding within a given context of a conflict. Second, the engagement of young people across conflict divides was recommended through common education and culture sharing, which specifically helps to build understanding of how the other side sees the situation, promotes respect of the different opinion and willingness to solve it. Third, it was highlighted as crucial for sustaining peace to involve these young people, who already possess understanding and respect towards the other side of the conflict, in decision making at the level of their own government or at inter-governmental level. Once the capacity for conflict prevention and sustaining peace is created among youth, they should be engaged in the long-term as (future) policy-makers who possess the needed understanding and friendly contact networks. The inclusion of young people presupposes their commitment, but also providing the capacity to implement actions, which is often stopped by their own governments, for which international empowerment is needed.

Ms. Haya Bako, Jordan, Young Mediterranean Voices Plus – ALF, debriefed on thematic panel discussion IV. It was considered that damage inflicted on children was the worst possible damage. A huge part of the global youth population lives in conflict situations, and needs to receive special consideration. International organisations were advised to work with civil society organisations on the ground to have a better understanding of the needs of young people in the specific context. Stability was seen as a precondition for the protection of human rights, together with education and mobility. The LGBTI (youth) community was

⁸ The Interactive Dialogue was facilitated by Ms. Mercedes Garcia-Perez, Head of Division for Human Rights, European External Action Service

considered to face discrimination, both during conflicts and in other situations. Young people in Africa were seen to face particular challenges in the areas of education, health and mobility: they need particular help, including from each other.

Mr. Stavros Lambrinidis, EU Special Representative for Human Rights recalled that peacebuilding these days is about going back to the basics. Human right violations are both sources of conflict and critical areas to address to resolve conflict. Notwithstanding, in many places governments are closing off the space for human rights. Collectively, we need to refute the argument against human rights. If we want to fight terrorists, we have to promote what they hate the most: empowered women, freedom of expression, strong and independent state institutions. To the argument that "human rights are unpopular", his answer is that freedom of expression actually allows us to protect those with the least popular views, those who are the weakest. Defending human rights is also about defending those with whom we may not agree. Even in the most polarised environments, people are able to listen and bring change. Mr. Lambrinidis advised to put 'sustaining security' at the centre of peacebuilding. The engagement of young people is a fundamental part of this, including to address root causes, human rights violations and inequalities. A free civil society is a fundamental human right. An environment where human rights prevail is the kind of environment that prevents conflict, promotes stability, resilience and peace. Mr. Lambrinidis reminded everyone in the room that they can be human rights defenders through their own actions.

In the interaction, it was highlighted that freedom of speech requires opening channels for the underprivileged voices as well. A comment was made about how the human rights discourse, which is universal and deals with the absolute, needs to go side by side with the peace discourse, which is local and deals with the relative. It was suggested that the "unpopularity" of human rights may have to do with what is seen in some parts of the world as interventionism in the guise of human rights by countries which violate human rights themselves. Another point made on the "unpopularity" of human rights was that those minimising the importance of human rights should "*check their privileges, afforded exactly by human rights*". An example of creating long-term opportunities for intercultural exchange was brought from the Erasmus Mundus programme. The question was raised whether the Internet is really a tool to prevent conflict. It was pointed out that in some African countries, access to the Internet represents a problem for many young people either due to the lack of resources or due to government interference. The link was made with the Progress Study on YPS, which recorded that young people's rights are often curtailed in the name of counterterrorism, P/CVE. While restrictions on civic space disproportionately affect young people, many of them already act as human rights defenders. It was also argued that we should avoid taking for granted that young people are "*a force for good*". As terrorists and extremists invest in exploiting young people's vulnerabilities, we have to match this with investment in their resilience.

Responding to comments made, **Mr. Lambrinidis** pointed out that human rights are applied in a way that shows sensitivity to local culture and people. However, violating human rights, and humanitarian law in conflict, will not bring better peace. It rather makes peacebuilding more difficult. He underlined the value of creating spaces for discussion, sometimes inside,

sometimes outside the conflict context. The way to promote peace and security is to have real and difficult discussions. He cautioned against distinctions such as the West and the East, because human rights are the same wherever we look. Human rights have never been the subject of battles between regions or cultures, they are the subject of battles between the powerless and the powerful within the same region or political system. He emphasised that there is no place where human rights are never violated. The litmus test of protecting human rights is not perfection, but independent institutions that are empowered to call out violations. This is where dramatic differences are seen around the world. And this is where the EU is showing an example of accountability.

Concluding remarks

Ms. Elisabeth Guigou, President, Anna Lindh Foundation (ALF), introduced the ALF, which had been created at the initiative of Romano Prodi in 2005, with the purpose of promoting intercultural dialogue. The ALF essentially works with young people, interconnecting 5000 civil society associations in 42 member countries in the Northern- and Southern-Mediterranean. ALF has been committed to the implementation of UNSCR 2250 on YPS, and worked on this with all 42 member countries, insisting on considering youth as an asset rather than a burden or a threat. ALF also has a partnership with the League of Arab States, advocating the merits of UNSCR 2250. She introduced the ALF's Young Mediterranean Voices programme, which has involved 80.000 young people only in the Southern-Mediterranean, and it is currently being extended into a Euro-Mediterranean programme. ALF is also involved in the new Virtual Erasmus+ programme, presently put in place to foster virtual exchanges between young people on the two sides of the Mediterranean. The aim is to counter hate speech and develop an environment of positive exchange. ALF is also partnering with Facebook on providing young people with tools to counter radical narratives online. She reminded that virtual exchanges cannot replace real face-to-face contact, so we have to find ways of opening up mobility across borders.

Mr. Dilshan Annaraj, Sri Lanka, Associate Director for Peacebuilding Programming in World Vision, spoke on behalf of the European Partnership for Children and Youth in Peacebuilding. This partnership demonstrates how YPS stimulates alliances across civil society, including youth-led organisations such as the United Network of Young Peacebuilders. The challenge in implementing the YPS agenda is moving to the next level, from active listening to action. He underlined that children are also part of the conversation today, which shows the importance of starting peacebuilding at an early age for sustainable outcomes. He asserted that by now the evidence base for youth in peacebuilding has fallen into place, through UNSCR 2250, through the Progress Study on YPS and through the experience with WPS. Now is the time for action. He observed that young people face unique challenges in peacebuilding across different contexts, so the support we bring them needs to be context-specific as well. He expressed his hope for a long-term partnership with the EU.

Mr. Magnus Magnusson, UNESCO, Director for Partnerships and Outreach Sector for Social and Human Sciences, highlighted that this Conference brought together some of the true change-makers in the world. In the context of today's world, partnering with youth is the most prudent thing to do. He described the negative dogmas and the resulting policy panic long-restraining youth inclusion, in particular the perceptions of youth involvement in violent extremism. In reality, out of 3.6 billion people under 25 worldwide, less than 100.000 or 0.0027 percent have been involved with violent extremist groups. He underscored that it is time to provide youth with the support needed to transform their demographic dividend into a peace dividend. Young women and men have special attributes and need access to be change-makers in their communities. For this reason, UNESCO is working extensively in youth empowerment, particularly in the Arab States region, where youth constitute a huge strength in economic and social transformation. It conducts specific youth initiatives to encourage

non-formal learning, participation, voluntary activities, youth work, mobility and information as well as youth mainstreaming into policy processes in different fields. Priding itself in partnering with youth as key stakeholders, UNESCO implements all its projects through a participatory approach. The NET-MED Youth Project, realised in partnership between the EU and UNESO, supported the establishment of proactive youth networks in seven countries and trained over 4000 young women and men who are regularly consulted on public policies. The NET-MED Youth Project provided new mechanisms to enable young leaders and youth-led organisations to meaningfully participate in decision making in the social, political, economic, and cultural realms. In addition, Mr. Magnusson emphasised that it is essential to partner with youth to fully implement the 2030 Agenda and the international framework set by the UNSCR 2250.

Mr. Fabio Massimo Castaldo, Vice-President of the European Parliament, who chaired this session, emphasised that youth are already leading an important change today, especially in conflict and fragile contexts. This was demonstrated by concrete initiatives taken by young people all over the world. For example three young Colombians launched a campaign called ‘Letters of Reconciliation’, which motivates young Colombians to create a communication channel with the former guerrillas of the FARC, to help reconcile victims with perpetrators. A young man from Sierra Leone who was forced to flee his country during the civil war came back to found the Youth Partnership for Peace and Development, helping young people cope with the effects of war through reconciliation with former child/youth combatants in conflict zones. Mr. Castaldo insisted on a paradigm shift, recognising young people as social actors with their own ideas and visions for the future, able to drive a real change in our societies and being key actors in preventing and countering youth radicalisation. What we need is to empower youth to be “radical in the fight against radicalisation”. We need to create spaces where young people can freely express their voice and debate with peers and policy makers, thus influencing behaviors, ideas and policies. The EP Young Political Leaders program, of which Mr. Castaldo is the lead MEP, aims to create peaceful dialogue to further promote long-term confidence-building and cooperation between young leaders in third countries as well as with the European Parliament. It is an informal way to facilitate discussions on challenging regional issues, promoting political inclusion of young people and civil society. He also argued for providing young people with useful and concrete educational tools to fight violence, hatred and extremism. For all these reasons, Mr. Castaldo recalled the utmost importance of implementing the historic UNSCR 2250, which for the first time recognised young people as powerful drivers of change.

Closing Session⁹

Ms. Federica Mogherini, the High Representative / Vice-President (HR/VP), hosted the closing session of the Conference, which consisted in an interactive dialogue with the youth participants.

The HR/VP welcomed the participants by reaffirming that it was essential to include youth, both from formal and informal organisations, as active shapers of analyses, policies and projects. She underlined the importance of creating avenues to feed youth voices into real policy making with concrete ideas and projects, including on peace and security. The unique role of the EU in conflict prevention is mutually reinforcing with the unique role of youth in societies to promote peace and security. She recalled the power inherent in young people, and that working with young people is the best way to harness their constructive potential.

To start the conversation, ten youth participants¹⁰, whom the HR/VP has met on past occasions, provided updates on their work and shared their impressions from the first day of the programme. Regarding ‘youth inclusion for conflict prevention and sustaining peace’, an argument was made for meaningful youth inclusion, rather than tokenistic gestures. The role of EU Delegations to push for youth inclusion in peacebuilding at the local level was highlighted, and a recommendation proffered to create YPS advisory councils to feed into and monitor policies. On ‘young people innovating for peace’, some practices already adopted by the EU institutions have been reconfirmed by recommendations (e.g. improved use of social media, putting in place on-line inter-regional youth platforms). It was deemed important to create public spaces for youth to meet and innovate and to develop entrepreneurial skills. Direct contacts with high-level EU officials were seen as motivating for young people to engage more in peacebuilding. It was recommended for the EU to put YPS on the agenda with partner governments. On ‘preventing/countering violent extremism’, the significance of culture, arts, education and new technologies was highlighted. The need to fund and rely on better research and data collection on the situation of young people was underscored. As regards ‘protecting the human rights of youth’, a call was made to include young people in the planning and assessment of humanitarian response as well as to encourage them and build their capacity to protect, support and demand justice for each other. A mechanism to facilitate the mobility of young peacebuilders across regions, including Europe, was called for. The value of uniting the EU, the UN and youth in productive peacebuilding partnerships was emphasised. It was considered crucial to implement the YPS-related initiatives already in place. In the EU, the implementation of the YPS agenda by the Member States, including through National Action Plans, increased funding for the Erasmus programme and national support to youth-led projects were advocated for.

In the ensuing interaction, 22 more young participants took the floor, representing the full diversity of young peacebuilders in the room as well as civil society and multilateral partners involved in the conference. They expressed views and concerns and made further

⁹ The interactive dialogue with the HR/VP was facilitated by Ms. Gwenola Possémé-Rageau, Youth expert in Africa.

¹⁰ Associated with the Young Mediterranean Voices Plus initiative, the Eastern Partnership network, the La Voix des Jeunes du Sahel network, the AU-EU youth track, the EU-funded NET-MED Youth – UNESCO Project and the European Youth Forum

recommendations on all issues discussed in the first day of the programme. In particular, young participants called for direct engagement by the EU with civil society and grassroots youth in partners countries; EU action to protect at-risk youth externally, but also young refugees in the EU; unifying the efforts of multilateral actors in YPS, supporting the creation of national YPS partnerships, and sustaining engagement with young people who are already involved with the EU in peacebuilding; dedicated funding to promoting youth in peacebuilding under the new MFF; using the European diaspora to facilitate and channel interregional dialogue; consulting young people in the decision shaping phase; engaging children in peacebuilding; emphasising the peacebuilding impact of Erasmus, while finding ways to support locally-driven grassroots-level peacebuilding by young people.

Youth participants have provided positive feedback on the impact of the EU youth networks, with concrete examples of stimulating intergenerational partnerships, opening access to decision makers and making space for youth leadership. An important acknowledgment has been made that it was not only for the EU, but also for young people to do more and contribute more to peacebuilding.

Responding to youth participants, HR/VP reconfirmed her intention to continue working with partner countries and institutions to open up spaces for youth voices to be heard in different contexts, as well as to keep open direct channels of communication between the EU and youth, if possible including at the local level. HR/VP endorsed the suggestion to pilot a youth consultation scheme in EU policy processes, reflecting meaningful youth inclusion, rather than limiting it to so-called “youth issues”. HR/VP referred to the Commission’s proposal to double the funding for the Erasmus programme in the next MFF, which needs to go hand-in-hand with increased investment into grassroots youth networks and empowering young people at the local level. A topical illustration of empowering and including young people in conflict prevention and sustaining peace is the AU-EU youth track, with the commitment to youth-led initiatives (e.g. on culture and digital issues). The importance of following up on concrete initiatives has been discussed between the leadership of the two institutions in parallel with the conference at the AU-EU College to College Meeting on 23 May. HR/VP envisaged further work with the Member States and partners, in particular in the UN, to promote the implementation of the YPS agenda, e.g. during the next UNGA session. HR/VP envisaged a regular and sustainable youth engagement process by the EU, without falling into the pattern of “meeting after meeting” and prioritising youth-to-youth dialogue and future-oriented networking.

The HR/VP defined the following deliverables from the Conference, through this interactive dialogue as well as past meetings and initiatives on YPS:

- continue to create open spaces for young people to come together, build long-term relationships and directly engage the EU;
- expand this community with youth from Asia and Latin-America;
- work on translating some of the proposals put forward by young people into projects by the EU, or by partners’ governments or local authorities;

- promote funding for youth work at all levels and pilot a youth consultation on thematic and country-specific EU policies.

In addition to these main deliverables defined by the HR/VP, the Conference clearly illustrated the potential of reinforced coordination, coherence and cross-sectoral cooperation across the EU institutions on empowering young people and youth leadership on the YPS agenda. EU networks and communities of young peacebuilders, the active involvement of EU Delegations as well as partnership and cooperation with the UN, other multilateral partners and civil society would be natural components of a reinforced EU approach to promoting youth in peacebuilding. A renewed focus on key geographical areas and on thematic issues was clearly requested by the Conference's participants. This would require further developing ongoing EU programmes and envisaging new actions with young peacebuilders, especially on the ground. The launching of pilot initiatives and projects could prove productive in this regard.