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| **Global Forum on Youth, Peace and Security**  **Jordan, 21-22 August 2015** |

**BACKGROUND**

Today’s generation of young people (10-24 year old), at 1.8 billion, is the largest the world has ever known. The growth in youth population is particularly prominent in developing countries in sub-Saharan Africa, South Asia, and in the Middle East and North Africa. While a predominantly young population offers a country an unprecedented opportunity for innovation, development and economic growth, today’s young people live with a growing threat and reality of violence and armed conflict

More than 1.5 billion people live in fragile and conflict-affected states, or in country where levels of criminal violence are very high. While the numbers of interstate and civil wars have declined in the last quarter of a century, wars are still waged and many more countries are still grappling with multiple and often interlinked and cyclical forms of violence – political violence, criminal gangs, organized crime, terrorist attacks, etc. This violence extracts enormous and long-lasting human, social and economic costs (*World Development Report 2011*).

The discourse on such conflict over the past decade, including on recent extremist violence in Nigeria, Iraq, Syria, France and other countries, has highlighted the role of young people – particularly young men, but also increasingly young women – as members of terrorist and extremist groups, leading to a popular depiction of young people as a threat to global security and stability. Yet, young men have always been the “rank and file” of both regular and irregular armies – this is not new. Worldwide, young women make up 10-30% of armed forces and armed groups. And to the contrary, research shows that the vast majority of young people have nothing at all to do with violence, with only a minority of young people turning to violence in any context.

Nonetheless, the patterns and growing incidence of violence, extremism and instability globally challenge the world community to look for more innovative solutions: approaches that will better contribute to the resilience of communities and the inclusiveness of societies, and will respond to the demographic and democratic imperatives to offer meaningful avenues for young people to shape the future of their countries. Focusing attention and investments only on the small proportion of young men and women who commit violence risks neglect of the majority who don't and certainly fails to engage strategically those who might.

A growing body of evidence from the field as well as academic research[[1]](#footnote-2) are showing that in reality the vast majority of young people can play active and valuable roles as agents of positive and constructive change. In fact many already do, but such contribution is often unseen or simply overlooked – a challenge compounded by the general lack of sex- and age-disaggregated data collection and analysis in numerous countries, making young people’s situation and contribution often invisible. Young men’s and young women’s participation in peacebuilding is a largely untapped resource. Their actual contribution and further potential, as a key to durable and inclusive peace, stability and economic prosperity, should be valued, recognised, and supported, including by the international community. Youth-led and youth-engaging interventions aimed at countering extremists’ narratives, promoting tolerance and non-violent conflict resolution and building peace can help draw on the innate resilience of communities and underpin the strengthening of democratic, inclusive governance.

Recent efforts by civil society organizations (including youth-led organizations), international non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and the United Nations have helped raise awareness of these issues and of the need for and benefits of increased coordination and collaboration of actors actively engaged in supporting youth participation in peacebuilding. An inter-agency group on youth and peacebuilding, including over 60 UN entities, international NGOs, civil society organizations and donors, has been leading the efforts to deepen collective attention to the positive role young people can play for international peace and security. [*Guiding Principles on Young People’s Participation in Peacebuilding*](https://www.sfcg.org/guidingprinciples/) were formulated to support the needed substantive shift in approach. Overall, however, these efforts are incipient. International and national dialogue about youth development may be on the increase, including in the context of the post-2015 development agenda, as is the global dialogue on countering violent extremism, preventing conflict and peacebuilding. But these two streams of policy consideration – youth development on one side, countering extremism/ conflict prevention / peacebuilding on the other – are more often conducted in parallel, being disconnected from each other and occurring with little reference to each other. Yet, partnering with young people will be the key to building sustainable and inclusive peace.

**VISION**

The Global Forum to be hosted by the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan under the Patronage of His Royal Highness Crown Prince Al Hussein bin Abdullah II is envisaged as **a turning point towards a new international agenda on youth, peace and security**. Stemming from the thematic debate organized by the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan during its presidency of the Security Council in April 2015, it will build on on-going efforts by a multiplicity of actors to decisively step-up global attention to young people’s contribution to peace and chart a common agenda. For the first gathering of this kind, young people, youth-led organizations, non-governmental organizations, governments and UN entities will come together to agree on a **common vision and roadmap to partner with young people in preventing conflict, countering violent extremism and building lasting peace.**

**EXPECTED OUTCOMES**

1. At the policy level, a **Declaration** presenting a common vision and roadmap towards a strengthened policy framework in support of young people’s roles in preventing and transforming conflict, countering violent extremism and building peace. Building on the *Guiding Principles for Young People’s Participation in Peacebuilding*, this Declaration will be used in the months following the Forum to engage high-level decision-makers towards the adoption of a new international framework.
2. An enhanced coalition of existing youth networks, youth-led organizations and young leaders into a **Civil Society Consortium on Youth, Peace and Security** that will lobby Member States and decision-makers, on the basis of the Declaration, to elevate discussions to the Security Council and other high-level fora. The Forum should also lead to the identification of concrete avenues to support young people working on conflict prevention and transformation, on countering violent extremism and on peacebuilding to help them expand current interventions, projects and programmes – in order to decisively enhance the support provided locally, nationally and internationally to young people and their networks.
3. An **expanded evidence-base** demonstrating the positive contribution of young people to conflict prevention and transformation and peacebuilding, by offering a platform to share policy models, programmatic experiences and stories of community and individual resilience and resistance to violence and incitement to hatred. This will ultimately contribute to **improved programming quality** of interventions as well as greater accountability from donors and international organizations towards young people.
4. Launch of a **global multimedia and communication campaign** aimed at highlighting the extraordinary efforts of young people who are shaping their communities constructively despite the violence and risks they face.

**FORMAT**

The Forum will last for two days and will be sequenced in two, interconnected segments: a high-level policy segment (Day 1) during which participants will discuss key policy recommendations towards a new international agenda on youth, peace and security to be captured in a final Declaration; followed by a technical segment, dedicated to exchange of experiences and best programmatic practices (Day 2).

The driving principle for the full duration of this Forum will be to create the space for meaningful **intergenerational dialogue:** it will create the conditions for common understanding and respect between generations and increase dialogue and cooperation between young people and adults to work together to prevent and resolve violence, extremism and conflict locally, regionally and internationally. 100 participants in the Global Forum will be young people (age 15-30). For all town hall discussions, panels and working groups throughout the Forum, half of the speakers will be young people (including for the roles of chairs, moderators, rapporteurs, etc.)

**KEY TOPICS**

The Forum will cover a wide range of topics related to countering violent extremism, conflict prevention, violence reduction and peacebuilding, in order to reflect on young people’s contribution to these fields. The non-exhaustive list of key themes to be addressed includes:

* **Putting Young People at the Centre**
  + **Young people’s participation: an untapped resource for political stability and economic prosperity**

*Including young people in conflict prevention, violence reduction and peacebuilding initiatives is imperative at all levels – from the grassroots to the global. Governments, civil society and the international community are increasing efforts and coordination – but much more needs to be done.*

* + **Young people’s resilience: stories from conflict-affected zones**

*Young people from all regions of the world will share their personal stories of resistance to hatred, violence and conflict and the work they have undertaken to support tolerance, inclusiveness and peace in their communities.*

* + **Youth leadership, engagement and organizing**

*In violence- and conflict-affected situations, youth activism, organizations and associations play a vital role in building social cohesion. However, formal institutions and organizations tend to access to more privileged, educated, urban youth. Supporting grassroots youth groups that are not formally structured can be challenging, and yet policy-makers and civil society need to partner with hard-to-reach, marginalized youth. How can the right partnerships be built, and how can very grassroots groups be supported when they are not set up to respond to donors’ or international actor’s working methods, or when the context?*

* + **Young women shaping peace**

*The narratives on the role of young people in peacebuilding and the programmes developed in response tend to be very schematically gendered and to de facto focus on young men. Yet young women are in the frontlines demanding democracy, expanding the rule of law, holding governments accountable, and actively shaping the course of conflict and peace. Peacebuilding policy and practice need engage young women much more systematically and strategically.*

* **Speech and Counter Speech**

How can we counter war/conflict narratives that attract young people with their easy solutions and simplified world view? How do we make the narrative of peace attractive?

* + **Religion/inter-religious speech and counter speech**

*Religion and faith often play a central role in the lives of young people. Throughout history, youth have drawn on spiritual inspiration to contribute to their families, communities and societies. But religion can also sometime play a divisive role. Religion-based and inter-faith initiatives by young people are contributing to community cohesion and mutual understanding.*

* + **The role of young people in countering violent extremism**

*It is essential to reflect on the push and pull factors at play in young women and men’s involvement in both violence and resistance to violence, and find ways to nurture and amplify factors that keep more young people involved as constructive and responsible citizens. These factors are context-specific and may be complex. Simplistic generalized explanations fuel inadequate policies and ineffective programmes. Promising initiatives link at-risk youth with responsible influencers and leaders in their communities.*

* + **Media and Communication**

*Young people are adept at utilizing technology and different media platforms in ways that can both foments instability and promotes non-violence. For instance, the use of cell phones, radio, television and social media particularly down to the community level to try and mitigate causes of violence, and how on-line networks address attitudes about issues like diversity, identity, etc., are major areas of enquiry.*

* **The Role of State and the International Community** 
  + **Investing in youth capacities for peace and stability**

*It is the responsibility of the State and of the international community to make the right investments which will enable young people to contribute to peace, by ensuring that they have meaningful avenues to engage in political life and can access quality education and vocational training and economic opportunities. Government donors, multilateral agencies and private foundations will highlight how they can invest in youth as partners in peacebuilding rather than only as victims of conflict or troublemakers that need correction and assistance. This session will also discuss how young people can join forces and speak with one voice when approaching policy-makers and donors.*

* + **Post-conflict planning and financing**

*Key national, multisectoral development plans, such as Poverty Reduction Strategies, Peacebuilding Priority Plans, New Deal Compacts, recovery plans, social cohesion policies, have major implications both for the participation of young people in their development, and for their impact on the lives of young people in conflict- and violence-affected contexts. How are young people included in the preparations and consultations leading to these plans?*

* + **Governance and participation**

*Young people’s participation in political processes and public administration is essential to shape how government and communities can increase social cohesion and prevent conflict. Young people have an important role to play in holding institutions accountable to the people.*

**An exhibition space / cultural program** will run throughout the Forum and will exclusively feature art and other forms of expression by young people from conflict-affected and post-conflict countries. An internet / social media platform will also be developed.

**Background documentation** willbe made available to participants in advance of the Forum, including:

* Guiding Principles on Young People’s Participation in Peacebuilding
* Practice Note on Young People’s Participation in Peacebuilding
* Thematic discussion papers including key references and proposal for policy, programmatic and research recommendations

**ORGANIZATION**

The Global Forum will be hosted by the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan under the Patronage of His Royal Highness Crown Prince Al Hussein bin Abdullah II, and co-organized by the United Nations represented, on behalf of the Inter-Agency Network on Youth Development (IANYD), by OSGEY, PBSO, UNFPA and UNDP, in partnership with Search for Common Ground and the United Network of Young Peacebuilders.

The co-organizing UN entities and civil society partners will represent the IANYD Working Group on Youth participation in Peacebuilding, which is co-chaired by PBSO and Search for Common Ground. This Working Group will be the primary platform to consult and engage a wider constituency of organizations working on youth and peacebuilding in the preparation and follow-up to this Forum. The broad Inter-Agency Network on Youth Development, bringing together 42 United Nations entities, will be instrumental in securing the United Nations’ engagement in and follow up to this Forum.

**PARTICIPANTS**

200 to 400 participants from all regions of the world, including:

* Senior representatives from Member States
* UN entities (OSGEY, PBSO, UNFPA, UNDP, UN Alliance of Civilisations, UNICEF, etc.)
* International NGOs
* 100 young people, primarily representing youth organizations and youth groups, who will be selected through an open call for application.
* Foundations and donor agencies
* Academics
* Media

**PROPOSED DATES:**

21-22 August 2015, Amman

**PROPOSED FINANCIAL ARRANGEMENTS:**

The expected number of participants in the Global Forum will be 200 to 400 participants.

The host country will cover the international travel costs and accommodation for 150 participants. The partnering United Nations agencies will cover the travel costs and accommodation for 50 experts and resource persons from the UN system and other partner organizations. 100 participants are expected to join locally (no travel/accommodation costs). Up to another 100 participants could attend if fully funding their participation (travel, accommodation).

The host country will cover the local transportation for all participants.

The host government might wish to hire a specialised event-planning agency for the handling of the logistical arrangement, particularly the travel arrangements.

**CONTRIBUTION FROM THE UN SYSTEM AND CIVIL SOCIETY:**

The co-organizing UN entities and civil society partners will provide the necessary technical and substantive support, in line with their mandates, including the design of the event and specific sessions, identifying speakers and participants, online promotion and coordination with the rest of the UN system, international NGOs and civil society organizations. The IANYD Working Group on Youth and Peacebuilding will ensure the follow-up on the Forum outcomes.

1. See for example research by Marc Sommer, Jason Hart, Siobhan McEvoy-Levy and Gary Barker. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)