

RELEASE IN FULL

Global Forum on
Youth, Peace and SecurityGlobal 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 Arab States. 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 countries where levels of criminal violence are very high. Over 51 million people are forcibly displaced as a result of persecution, conflict, generalized violence, or human rights violations¹. 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 – terrorism, political violence, criminal gangs, organized crime, etc. This violence extracts enormous and long-lasting human, social and economic costs (*World Development Report 2011*).

The discourse on such conflicts over the past decade, including on recent violent extremism in different parts of the world, has unfortunately reflected the role of young people – particularly young men, but also increasingly young women who make up 10-30% of armed forces and armed groups worldwide – as members of terrorist and extremist groups, leading to a popular depiction of young people as a threat to global security and stability. Yet, research shows that the vast majority of young people have nothing at all to do with violence, and only a minority of young people turn to violence in any context. And throughout history, young men have always been the "rank and file" of both regular and irregular armies – this is nothing new.

Nonetheless, global patterns and growing incidence of violence, extremism and instability challenge the world community to look for more innovative solutions and 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.

¹UNHCR, *Global Trends 2013*



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A growing body of field evidence and academic research² shows 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. Young men's and young women's participation in peacebuilding is a largely untapped resource. Their actual contribution and further potential should be valued, recognised, and supported by all actors, including the international community, as a key to durable and inclusive peace, stability and economic prosperity. 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 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 were formulated to support the necessary substantive shift in approach. Overall, however, these efforts are incipient and not yet reflected in public policies. International and national dialogue about youth development may be on the rise, including in the context of the post-2015 development agenda, as is the global dialogue on peacebuilding, countering violent extremism, and preventing conflict. But these two streams of policy consideration – youth development on one side, peacebuilding/ countering extremism/ preventing conflict on the other – are more often conducted in parallel, disconnected from each other and occurring with little mutual reference. Nevertheless, 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, the Forum will build on continuing 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 to prevent conflict, counter violent extremism and build lasting peace.

² See for example research by Marc Sommers, Jason Huri, Siobhan McEvoy-Lavy and Gary Barker



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EXPECTED OUTCOMES

- 1) At the policy level, the "Amman Declaration on Youth, Peace and Security", which will present young people's 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. This Amman Declaration will be entirely developed by young people, building on the Guiding Principles for Young People's Participation in Peacebuilding. The "Amman Declaration on Youth, Peace and Security" 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 to lobby Member States and decision-makers, on the basis of the "Amman Declaration on Youth, Peace and Security", 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. The Forum will also help consolidate youth organizations' partnership with existing coordination platforms such as the Working Group on Youth & Peacebuilding and the Global Partnership for Children and Youth in Peacebuilding, as way to deepen the relationships between youth civil society organizations and other stakeholders.
- 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, better informed youth friendly policies as well as greater accountability from donors and international organizations towards young people.
- 4) The launch of a global multimedia and communication campaign (#youth4peace) aimed at highlighting the important efforts of young people who are shaping their communities constructively despite the violence and risks they face; creating a space for youth to share opinions on the role of youth in countering violent extremism and promoting peace; and curating an online global conversation on the role of youth in peacebuilding conflict transformation and countering violent extremism.

FORMAT

The Forum will gather a mix of high-level participants and technical-level participants who will engage through an array of panels, round tables and breakout sessions. 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



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violence, extremism and conflict locally, regionally and internationally. Between 150 and 200 participants in the Global Forum will be young people (age 15-35). Young people will be represented as speakers, moderators, rapporteurs, etc. throughout all plenary discussions, panels and working groups.

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 three key overarching themes to be addressed, each with a select set of sub-topics, include:

1. Young People's Participation: An Untapped Resource for Peace and Security

o 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, peace in their communities and peaceful coexistence with other communities.

o Youth leadership, engagement and organizing

In violence- and conflict-affected situations, youth activism, and youth organizations and associations play a vital role in building social cohesion. However, formal institutions and organizations tend to only be accessible to more privileged, educated, and 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 grassroots groups be supported when they are not set up to respond to donors' or international actors' working methods?

o 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 also in the frontlines demanding participation and democracy, expanding the rule of law, holding governments accountable, and actively shaping the course of conflict and peace. Peacebuilding policy and practice need to engage young women much more systematically and strategically.

2. 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?

o Religion/inter-religious/culture-related 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. Religion-based and inter-faith initiatives by young people can contribute to community cohesion and mutual understanding.

o 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



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factors that keep more young people involved as constructive and responsible citizens. These factors are context-specific and may be complex. Simplistic, generalized, and out-of-context explanations fuel inadequate policies and ineffective programmes. But promising initiatives can link at-risk youth with responsible influencers and leaders in their communities.

- o **Media and Communication**

Young people are adept at utilizing technology and different media platforms in ways that can both foment instability and promote non-violence.

3. The Role of State and the International Community

- o **Investing in youth capacities for peace and stability**

It is the responsibility of States 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 social and 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.

- o **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 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 will be made available to participants in advance of the Forum, including the Guiding Principles on Young People's Participation in Peacebuilding and the Practice Note on Young People's Participation in Peacebuilding.

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 the Office of the Secretary-General Envoy on Youth (OSGEY), the United Nations Peacebuilding Support Office (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



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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

400 to 500 participants from all regions of the world, including

- Senior representatives from Member States
- Young people, primarily representing youth organizations and youth groups
- UN entities
- INGOs
- Foundations and donor agencies
- Academics
- Média

DATES:

21-22 August 2015, Amman

FINANCIAL ARRANGEMENTS:

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 200 participants could attend if fully self-funding their participation (travel, accommodation)

The host country will cover local transportation for all participants.

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, INGOs and civil society organizations. The IANYD Working Group on Youth and Peacebuilding will ensure follow-up on the Forum outcomes.

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

Please check www.youth4peace.info for updated information on the Forum