



Human Rights Office

International Institute Maria Ausiliatrice - IIMA

NGO in special consultative status with the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations

16th Session of the HRC Advisory Committee
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Item 4 – Discussion on Reflection papers and Research proposals
Youth & Citizen Security
Speaker: Ms. Maria D'ONOFRIO

Oral Statement submitted by
IIMA – Istituto Internazionale Maria Ausiliatrice

And co-signed by

VIDES - International volunteerism Organization for Women, Education, Development

YOUTH EMPOWERMENT: A Human Rights Perspective

Thank you, Mr. President.

IIMA and VIDES International would like to welcome the report submitted by Ms. Reyes Prado and Mr. Coriolano, and fully support their concerns on the topic of Youth and Citizen Security.

As NGOs in Special Consultative Status with ECOSOC, particularly committed to the right to education of children and young people, in the past few years we have advocated within the UN to ensure that the rights of youth are placed high on the list of priorities. We therefore truly appreciate the attention that the Advisory Committee is devoting to the topic and would like to share some key points we gathered through consultation with young people, the organization of side events during the HRC sessions, and bilateral exchanges with Member States' Permanent Missions.

While efforts continue towards ensuring the human rights of many vulnerable groups, **young people are often left aside** in human rights based-policies. They are **not recognized as a key resource** and a driving force, but are rather **portrayed as problematic**, both locally and globally. As they are often perceived as the cause of such tension, they are **frequently treated as a threat to security and the socio-political status quo**.

On the other hand, **the young feel deprived of their fundamental rights and excluded from decision-making processes**. Frustration and disaffection among the youth have become more widespread worldwide, especially in terms of a **generalized distrust towards their own governments and institutions**. Why should they participate in a society in which their rights are not taken seriously? Why should a young person participate if not provided with conditions for the development of **active citizenship**? In fact, the interdependence of human rights also implies the interdependence of barriers to the exercise of rights. As a result, **young people often refuse to engage with traditional political and social institutions** and consequently are **more easily seduced by extreme politics**.¹

The international community has now agreed that **the contemporary youth deserve special attention**, due to the global challenges they face.

¹ UN Security Council Resolution 2250 (2015) recognizes that “the rise of radicalization to violence and violent extremism, especially among youth [...] can be conducive to terrorism” (See S/RES/2250 (2015), p. 2).



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The OHCHR Expert Meeting on the Human Rights of Youth, held in July 2013, recognized “*that young people do experience difficulties in the exercise of their rights by the virtue of being young and that there are gaps in the protection of the human rights of youth.*”

However, when it comes to coordinating efforts to build up concrete actions, some conflicting views still emerge:

I – Definition of youth

While the UN age-range of 15 to 24 years is often used for statistical purposes, this is not always consistent with the existing international legal framework, and in particular the Convention of the Rights of the Child.

Indeed, the **transition from childhood to youth** is particularly delicate and pertinent. As IIMA and VIDES, we support the definition from Security Council Resolution 2250 on December 2015 according to which the age threshold for youth is 18 years old.² Therefore, the **effective implementation of children’s rights up to 18 in accordance with the CRC is a requirement** for the full implementation of youth rights and the key condition to unlock youth’s potential to promote and protect the human rights of others.

II – Which approach to address the Human Rights of Youth

As highlighted in the Report of the Advisory Committee at its ninth session (Geneva, 6–10 August 2012)³, inadequate political and social participation, unemployment, lack of decent work, and barriers to access quality education have detrimental impacts on youth, but also on society at large.

Youth have the potential to significantly contribute to sustainable development and the realization of human rights if they have access to conducive conditions in order to foster positive changes.

IIMA and VIDES support the view that UN institutions and in particular, the Human Rights Council, should dwell on the topic of Human Rights of Youth, by adopting a global and comprehensive approach to this topic; any initiative effectively addressing social insecurity both generated and suffered by youth, should uphold a comprehensive human rights based approach.

Our goal should be the empowerment of young people in the exercise of all their rights. **Empowered youth will find ways to help make those rights a reality for the rest of society.** Specific initiatives within the HRC with the support of Member States are crucial to create new spaces for youth as key actors for the promotion of human rights for all.

In conclusion, IIMA and VIDES recommend to undertake all possible measures to **move forward the global youth agenda** through existing mechanisms and in particular in the framework of the Human Rights Council.

Thank you, Mr. President.

² UN Security Council Resolution 2250 (2015) notes that “the term youth is defined in the context of this resolution as persons of the age of 18-29 years old”. *Ibidem*, p. 1.

³ See A/HRC/AC/9/6.