



UN Major Group for
Children and Youth
the space for children and youth in the United Nations

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UN MGCY and YOUNGO Submission to the Human Rights Council 1st Intersessional Meeting for Dialogue and Cooperation on Human Rights and the Agenda 2030 by OHCHR: *Empowering People and Ensuring Inclusiveness and Equality*, Wednesday, 16th January 2019

23 January, 2018

The UN Major Group on Children and Youth (UN MGCY) and the Children and Youth Constituency to the UNFCCC (YOUNGO) are pleased to make this submission to the organizers of the 1st and 2nd Intersessional Meeting on *Human Rights and the Agenda 2030: Empowering People and Ensuring Inclusiveness and Equality*.

We first and foremost use this opportunity to express our gratitude towards the OHCHR, for having invited us to the Intersessional Meeting, and for having shown flexibility regarding the accreditation requirements.

Having formally engaged in the Open Working Groups, Intergovernmental Negotiations, Summit to adopt the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and now involved in its implementation, monitoring, follow-up and review, including at the High Level Political Forum, the theme of these consultations are of priority to our constituency. While progress has been made in some areas, it remains too slow and off track to meet the aspirations outlined in the 2030 Agenda. Working towards targets and deliverables is a shared responsibility and mutual accountability is needed. In line with the positive discussions that took place during the 1st intersessional meeting, we encourage a continued high-level of ambition, while bearing in mind that when anyone is left behind, we are all left behind.

While we recognize unique challenges faced by different segments of society and marginalized groups, in the following submission we focus on barriers, challenges, and steps towards meaningful youth empowerment and engagement in the OHCHR. We highlight that children and youth have a crucial role to play as both beneficiaries and practitioners in the promotion and protection of human rights, especially in the context of the implementation, monitoring, follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda. In the following three paragraphs, we give some contextual information on youth engagement within UN and UNFCCC.

UN MGCY: *The United Nations General Assembly officially and formally mandated the “Major Group for Children and Youth” (UN MGCY) as a self organised space for children and youth to contribute to and engage in the cycle of policy design, implementation, follow-up and review for various processes at the United Nations that are intergovernmental or take place within specialised UN Agencies. UN MGCY has been a key player in global policy formulation since it was created in 1992, as part of Agenda 21. Now, it engages formally in over 22 UN processes. Therein, it acts as a bridge between children and youth on the one side, and the UN system on the other side, while ensuring that their right to meaningful participation is put in practice. The current membership includes 6500+ youth entities in over 170 countries and territories. (www.unmgcy.org)*

YOUNGO: *Formally recognized in 2009, YOUNGO serves as the official voice of young people from across the globe in the climate negotiations under the UNFCCC. It is a volunteer run, flat, and consensus-based structure, comprising a membership of 200+ youth-led, or youth-focussed NGOs,*



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which are all working in the field of climate change and environment sustainability. Therefore, it is an umbrella network (often referenced as the “International Youth Climate Movement”) with independent decision making processes, secretariat, and over 20 policy working groups focused on elements of the climate change negotiations, as well as single elements thereof, such as human rights. YOUNGO engages with and is providing guidance for other UN agencies, programs and mechanism. These are namely UNDP, UNESCO, WHO, UNEP-CTCN, and FAO. In the meetings of these agencies, YOUNGO is giving policy inputs from a youth perspective on climate change related topics.

We therefore very much appreciate the opportunity to engage with OHCHR on human rights and the links to the 2030 Agenda. In this submission, we briefly outline the pertinent barriers and challenges to meaningful youth empowerment and engagement, as well as propose several steps aimed at ensuring inclusiveness and equality. We hope these will be considered in preparations for the 2nd Intersessional meeting, providing a concrete entry points for young people to raise key concerns and make substantive contributions.

With much appreciation and thanks, submitted by:

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1. Barriers to Meaningful and Institutional Youth Engagement that Jeopardize 'Leaving no one Behind'

In reference to the UN MGCY “Principles and Barriers for Meaningful Youth Participation”¹, we highlight some of the most pertinent, recurring and systemic challenges faced by young people and youth-led entities during their course of engagement and/or intended meaningful engagement, especially in multilateral spaces like the UN. These barriers, which can manifest across multiple organizational levels, prevent young people from being empowered, included and equal in the process.

No Resources

Currently the UN has no dedicated resources to facilitate youth engagement, either for core funding, or for an *ad hoc* basis. An ironic example includes the fact that, even the lowest salary in the UN is higher than its ‘youth engagement budget’. In addition, more resources are being raised and used for participation models that further perpetuate individualisation and non-collective youth agendas. Due to the non-availability of resources, young people who are not living in vicinity of the UN’s meeting venue, usually have a hard time to get the funds to get there.

→ **Specifically to the Human Rights Council’s 1st Intersessional Meeting for Dialogue and Cooperation on Human Rights:** *No funding and mobilization resources for youth from middle- or low-income settings were provided due to time constraints. All youth traveled and attended the meeting on their own costs. Hence, only youth who were either living near Geneva or on-site for other reasons did attend.*

Individualisation

There is a growing trend of proactively enabling and promoting the participation of individual young people picked by the engaging UN entity or otherwise in various avenues while displacing and eroding resources away from thematic engagement, constituency (formal and/or informal) based mechanisms and rights based practices. This is problematic, due to some of the following reasons:

- This creates a democratic deficit and undermines the established process of using representative engagement models that use feedback loops to connect a constituency of young people with formal deliberations;
- Single individuals lack the insights that they could get if they were elected/selected by other young people who have a stake in the deliberations;
- ‘Adult gatekeepers’ can much more easily control the narrative and the agenda that is about to be sold as “the youth point of view”;
- Concerned agencies obtain an easy way to tick the box of having engaged youth, without providing youth an avenue for meaningful engagement;

¹<https://bit.ly/2CID55x>



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- The individual is more obliged to the 'establishment' and the UN entity as opposed to a constituency of young people;
- The principles of the UN are based on collectivism and this individualism opposes the UN's own principles.

→ **Specifically to the Human Rights Council's 1st Intersessional Meeting for Dialogue and Cooperation on Human Rights:** *There was no youth speaker during the whole meeting, while the importance of children and youth was mentioned several times. Furthermore, selected youth representatives were not allowed to make short oral statements during the meeting as both ECOSOC-accredited NGO nomination letters were not formally correctly submitted.*

Regressive Normative Framing

The narrative on youth as a socio-demographic grouping is increasingly moving away from obtaining the realisation of their human rights within their respective states, and in the international community. In the public discourse, they are increasingly seen as being a good economic investment, and serving as inputs to an extractive economic system. This puts aside the fact that young people are first and foremost human beings, before acting as consumers, serving as target audiences, and providing a voters base.

→ **Specifically to the Human Rights Council's 1st Intersessional Meeting for Dialogue and Cooperation on Human Rights:** *Young people are also vigilant when it comes to language and deliberate inclusion/exclusion of important topics. For example, we have noticed certain member states omitting "sustainable" when talking about how 'development' is the priority in their country. Young people demand real sustainable development, unsustainable development is putting the burden on the future and holds the risks of protracted issues and future emergencies that undermine progress that integrates the three dimensions of sustainable development. Moreso, indigenous youths who face the worst example of human rights denial need to have their voices heard at OHCHR sessions.*

Changing Engagement Landscape for Non-State Actors

There is a push in many avenues in the UN system (in large part by the UN) to reduce the avenues of engagement to only 'business, civil society and academia', as opposed to much broader and more inclusive mechanisms for stakeholder engagement such as the *Major Groups and Other Stakeholders*. This pushes youth into general civil society, takes away constituency status and eliminates designated rights-based spaces.

→ **Specifically to the Human Rights Council's 1st Intersessional Meeting for Dialogue and Cooperation on Human Rights:** *We greatly appreciate the active steps the OHCHR has taken towards eliminating these barriers, as any NGO is able to speak on their behalf.*



2. Suggested Steps to Overcome Barriers to Meaningful and Institutional Youth Engagement and Participation

- Ensure well-resourced and supportive spaces for meaningful engagement of rights holders, especially marginalized segments of society (e.g. budgetary allocation, consultations, access to official documents, input into summary reports etc.), throughout the preparatory process, as well as meetings and follow-up
- Provide opportunities to engage in the formal program (e.g. panels), while ensuring balance of stakeholder groups, region, age, gender, and sexual orientation
- Formalize and institutionalize youth participation in OHCHR processes according to the UN MGCY principles (UN MGCY “Principles and Barriers for Meaningful Youth Participation”: Self-Organised, Legally Mandated Rights-Based, Designated, Well Resourced, Accountable) we will be willing to offer support in helping OHCHR establish a self-organized youth space
- Support youths who live under repressive governments with suppressed voices, OHCHR should consider amplifying voices of youths in such countries

Closing

We appreciate the opportunity to engage in the meeting and remain committed to engaging in further dialogue on ways participation of young people and other rights holders can be achieved in a way that is empowering, inclusive, and equal. This submission aims to be a constructive reflection and analysis of youth engagement in the UN based on our prior experiences. We look forward to continued discussion and remain available to discuss with you in further details.