United Nations Population Fund

**Intersessional Seminar on youth and human rights- afternoon panel on youth rights mainstreaming**

**12.04.2021**

Thank you, Madame Moderator,

* It is an honour to be invited to this panel to discuss the mainstreaming of youth rights in the work of human rights mechanisms.
* The rights of youth are central to UNFPA’s vision and to the mandate of the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) from 1994. UNFPA works to ensure that every pregnancy is wanted, every delivery is safe **and every young people’s potential is fulfilled.**
* 25 years after the ICPD, at the Nairobi Summit, the rights of youth were a central topic in reviewing global efforts to implement the ICPD agenda and in charting a way forward. Governments and other stakeholders made national commitments (at least 52% of government commitments) to fulfill youth rights, including measures in relation to the right to health, SRHR, the right to education, the right to work and the right to free, active and informed participation in decisions affecting young people.
* Aligned with the SGs strategy on youth, UNFPA’ s youth strategy*, my body, my life, my world*, 2019) , promotes under the ‘my world’ pillar, the meaningful participation of adolescents and young people in decision making and dialogue, including their engagement in social and political processes, humanitarian action, peace building and accountability mechanism.
* A recent study I developed for UNFPA’ research programme, and soon to be published by the UN University for Peace, reveals that youth participation in human rights mechanisms is uneven; as it is the low number of youth related recommendations issued by these mechanisms.
* In the period from 2007 to 2019, human rights recommendations (UPR and TBs) addressing adolescents and youth represented only a 1.8% of the total. Comparatively, recommendations referring to women or children represented a 14%, each.
* Many reasons can be evoked to explain this relative minor attention. One factor is the absence of an international human rights instrument on the specific rights of youth, unlike the case with women (CEDAW) and children (CRC). Moreover, young people are often subsumed under women’s and children’s rights, which results in recommendations lacking detail on their specific needs and aspirations.
* **(Slide 1)** In terms of content, a close look at recommendations shows a relative greater attention to: Protection (1448 recommendations or 51% of the total), Education (1069 or 38%) and Health issues (988 or 35%). Much less attention has been given to empowerment (370 or 13%) and employment related measures (354 or 12%).
* **(slide 2)** Regarding TBs, an overwhelming majority of recommendations have been issued by CRC (61%), which explains the predominant emphasis on child protection and education. CEDAW is second with 18% of recommendations. CESCR comes in third with 10% of recommendations, which is surprisingly low given the relevance of economic and social rights for a successful transition from adolescence to adult life. It is problematic that mechanisms directly concerned about youth empowerment and employment have issued very limited recommendations on these issues: CCPR only 2 recommendations specifically related to the political rights of youth; and CMW has no recommendations on the employment of youth migrants.

**Concluding Recommendations:**

* While the protection of adolescent and youth should continue to be a priority of the Human Rights system, the unbalanced representation of protection vs. empowerment sends the wrong message that they are either vulnerable or invisible as change agents. Treaty Body members, States championing youth rights in the UPR process, and stakeholders providing information to human rights mechanisms need to be mindful of these unbalances.
* Youth rights need to be mainstreamed across the work of all TBs beyond CRC by:
  + Broadening the engagement with youth organisations and reviewing working modalities and processes to be more youth friendly;
  + Including youth rights-related questions in the formulation of the ‘Lists of Issues’ guiding State parties’ reporting and reviews; and
  + Supporting youth-led organisations and groups with information on the work of human rights mechanisms as well as resources and capacities to enhance their advocacy skills.
* It is important to take into account the **intersection between age and gender**. Quite often the specific realities of young women and girls; the barriers to participation they face; and their concrete aspirations tend to be less visible within youth rights’ agendas and strategies. CEDAW is well placed to infuse a strong gender perspective, but this task should not be exclusive to CEDAW. other human rights mechanisms need to do their part. Similarly, youth and women’s rights organizations should expand their engagement to other Human Rights mechanisms beyond CEDAW and CRC.
* The large number of youth related commitments made by states and youth organizations at the Nairobi Summit on ICPD25 can serve as a useful resource to inform and guide UPR and TB reviews. Since 2020, for instance the UPR is issuing an increasing number of youth related recommendations inspired by the Nairobi Summit Commitments.
* In terms of **intergovernmental processes**, more efforts could be undertaken to mainstreaming the rights of youth in the work of the Human Rights Council. The resolution on the rights of youth is a critical step in keeping the Council seized on this important matter. In addition, the rights of youth need to be mainstreamed across the entire HRC’s work agenda, both on thematic and country issues. Some possibilities could be considered by member states such as:
  + The establishment of a youth forum similar to the one organized under the auspices of ECOSOC in New York with a view to promoting a youth perspective into the different topics covered by the Human Rights Council;
  + The establishment of an annual dialogue on inter-generational inclusion and human rights to discuss normative and policy gaps, facilitating factors and opportunities to realize the rights of youth and the rights of older persons;
  + The COVID 19 pandemic has created new challenges, but also new opportunities to support the virtual participation of youth, including of young women and girls, in the Human Rights Council. However, many youth organizations and activists do not have accredited ECOSOC status. This is an opportunity for the Council to define work modalities by which their voices can be taken into account.
* UNFPA stands ready to support youth engagement in human rights mechanisms to ensure that that their voice make a difference in the promotion and protection of human rights.