**RADA**

My name is Lavon Marozau and I represent both RADA - the Belarusian National Youth Council and the European Youth Forum’s Expert Group on Youth Rights.

Youth rights continue to be violated both in my country, Belarus, and all over Europe. Despite the many international human rights law instruments available, these are clearly not sufficient to ensure the protection and respect of youth rights.

As RADA, we have engaged with the Universal Periodic Review, and we have reached out to Special Procedures multiple times. However, there are several barriers to our engagement: human rights mechanisms are very complex, it’s extremely difficult for youth organisations to participate as lack of technical knowledge and financial support are hard to overcome. It has become a vicious cycle where we are being asked to engage more to mainstream youth rights, but we are not being supported to do so.

Young people are rights holders, we call on UN Member States and institutional stakeholders to take bold measures to better protect our rights. This means giving much more attention to youth in existing mechanisms, but also coming up with new instruments, in consultation with young people and youth organisations. These could include a convention and a special procedure on the human rights of young people, or at the very least international standards on youth rights.

Events like today are an important opportunity to discuss challenges, but they need to be followed by concrete steps to improve the rights of young people. This is urgently needed, especially as we’ve seen how over the past year we’ve had to deal with a new socio-economic crisis that is affecting young people disproportionately, and with attempts by several governments to bend the rule of law and ignore their human rights obligations.

My organisation has been at the forefront of the fight for human rights and democracy in Belarus, and many other youth organisations are doing the same. We work every day to make sure that youth rights are high up in the political agenda. But we can’t do this alone: when our national governments do all they can to restrict our freedoms and shrink civic space, then it’s even more important that international organisations like the UN stand with us and implement measures to increase the respect, protection, and fulfillment of youth rights.