

Applying a Youth-Centered Approach to Enhance the Contribution of Transitional Justice to SDG 16

Input on behalf of Interpeace

Key Takeaways and Recommendations

- To enhance the transitional justice contribution to SDG 16 – peace based on access to justice and inclusive institutions – a vital component should be the better integration of YPS and in particular a commitment to the inclusion of diverse youth stakeholders in the design, implementation, and evaluation of transitional justice measures. This will also strengthen the implementation of the YPS agenda, and the contribution of the YPS agenda to SDG 16.
- Given the hitherto uneven attention to youth in UN reports and resolutions related to transitional justice, it is critical to include an explicit reference to the importance of designating a role for diverse youth and youth organizations in the design, implementation, and assessment of transitional justice processes.
- The report should promote and designate this inclusive approach to young women and men in transitional justice on the basis of both its intergenerational and transgenerational value to the prevention and guarantees of non-recurrence of violent conflict, as well as the more immediate benefits to transitional justice processes and outcomes – including civic trust – for youth constituencies.
- The Report should recommend that the Special Rapporteur on Truth, Justice, Reparation and Guarantees of non-Recurrence, undertakes, or commissions a thematic report – based on consultations with youth, youth-led organizations, and transitional justice practitioner experts – on the role and inclusion of youth in transitional justice processes.
- On the basis of operative paragraph 12 of General Assembly Resolution 2282, recognizing ‘that effective peacebuilding must involve the entire United Nations system’; as well as UN Security Council Resolution 2535; the UN Secretary General’s Call to Action for Human Rights; the ‘Our Common Agenda’ report; and the various UN documents recognizing the need for an interpillar approach to sustaining peace; OHCHR should coordinate with youth stakeholders across the UN system, such as the Office of the Secretary General’s Envoy on Youth, as well as designated YPS focal points, to enhance the UN’s contribution to inclusive and impactful transitional justice processes.

For Further Information

Introduction

This submission, on behalf of Interpeace, provides a brief analysis and recommendations – as well as policy support – for the intersection of transitional justice approaches and the Youth, Peace and Security (YPS) Agenda. It argues that this will optimize the contribution of both fields to sustaining peace and the prevention of violent conflict, including through enhancing access to justice and building civic trust based upon more inclusive and accountable institutions. In short, this note motivates that prioritization and investment in the contribution of youth-centered transitional justice approaches and offers an innovative and vital means for meeting the objectives of SDG 16. To support this contention, this analysis is accompanied by a more detailed policy brief authored by a youth and transitional justice practitioner offering both technical expertise and personal reflections

on this topic. The accompanying paper is a commissioned submission, and the views do not claim to represent those of the Interpeace Board or the organization's office bearers.

The YPS Agenda and Sustaining Peace

Since its inception, the YPS agenda has been anchored in the objective of sustaining peace: 'The prevention of violent conflict is perhaps the central pillar of UN Security Council Resolution 2250. From this perspective, investing in YPS has at its core the goal of building and sustaining peace'.¹ Over and above this assertion, youth-led and youth-based peacebuilding is transversal *in practice*, with young people working across the development, humanitarian, peacebuilding and justice/human rights arenas. This work also straddles and spans interventions across all phases of the peace and conflict continuum – from early intervention approaches, to post-conflict reconciliation – recognizing that sustaining peace is about preventing not just the recurrence of conflict in societies in transition or emerging from conflict, but preventing the outbreak, continuation, escalation, recurrence and even transmutation and impacts of patterns of violent conflict.² In all these respects, through its central prevention pillar, the YPS approach engages directly with the aspirations of SDG 16 from a youth perspective and offers a dynamic and unique contribution to the sustaining peace agenda. The 'rights realization gap' experienced by young women and men, as well as the trust deficits in the relationships between youth and their State institutions – particularly criminal justice and security systems – are well documented by young people themselves in the YPS Progress Study: *The Missing Peace*.³ The lived experiences of exclusion and injustice by young people, must be front and center in building durable peace.

Progress Along Parallel Tracks

While both youth engagement and transitional justice have been separately recognized as critical to sustainable peace, the benefits of linking these have not been adequately explored. Furthermore, youth remain an under-recognized demographic constituency in transitional justice literature and processes.

While acknowledging that: 'where serious and massive human violations have been committed, sustainable development and peace require... a forward-looking vision in which the past does not repeat itself', for its part, the Report of the Working Group on Transitional Justice and SDG 16+ only makes passing reference to youth. It does so by positioning young people as one of the key stakeholder groups to be 'allowed the political space and provided the technical support needed to meaningfully advocate for, shape and participate in transitional justice processes' to ensure a context-driven transitional justice process – noting that 'if transitional justice is to contribute to sustainable development, it must be context-specific'⁴. Youth are therefore addressed as a generic subset of the promotion of TJ mechanisms that 'promote participatory transitional justice processes that enable

¹ The Missing Peace: Independent Progress Study on Youth, Peace, and Security, (2018), available from <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/3846611?ln=en>

² Ibid., pp.45-51.

⁴ 'On Solid Ground: Building Sustainable Peace and Development After Massive Human Rights Violations', Report of the Working Group on Transitional Justice and SDG16+, (May 2019, International Centre for Transitional Justice), available at: https://www.ictj.org/sites/default/files/ICTJ_Report_WG-TJ-SDG16+_2019_Web.pdf

civil society, victims, marginalized and vulnerable populations, women, children and youth, and rural and indigenous communities to meaningfully participate from the outset'.⁵

Similarly, the UN Human Rights Council-commissioned joint study on the contribution of transitional justice to prevention, only references the role of youth implicitly, when it notes the preventive potential of education in helping reaffirm people's understanding of themselves as rights holders, while State institutions are called upon to promote a human rights-centered approach to education and to 'embed critical thinking in youth education'.⁶

While the Human Rights Council Resolution 42/17 entitled 'Human Rights and Transitional Justice' makes no explicit reference to youth, it does recognize the need for holistic transitional justice processes, and '[r]eaffirms the important role of women in the prevention, mediation, and the resolution of conflicts, in peacebuilding and in development efforts, and stresses the importance of their equal participation and full involvement in the design, establishment and implementation of comprehensive transitional justice strategies'.⁷ Similar attention could be given to the importance of recognizing a comprehensive and multifaceted role for young people in transitional justice.

UN General Assembly Resolution 70/262⁸ and UNSC 2282⁹ on Sustaining Peace both acknowledge the role of young people in peacebuilding, as well as the importance of transitional justice to the sustaining peace agenda. They reaffirm 'the important role youth can play in the prevention and resolution of conflicts and as a key aspect of the sustainability, inclusiveness and success of peacekeeping and peacebuilding efforts'. These resolutions also acknowledge that a comprehensive approach to transitional justice is 'critical to consolidation of peace and stability...and preventing countries from lapsing or relapsing into conflict'. But at no point do these foundational resolutions actually link these two roles as vital to sustaining peace or the realization of the goals of SDG 16.¹⁰

To the extent that all these documents and policy instruments signal the importance of both transitional justice and of youth-centered approaches to the sustaining peace agenda and that of SDG 16, they do so by representing these as largely dual or parallel tracks.

⁵ Ibid., pp.2-3.

⁶ UN Human Rights Council, [Joint Study of the Special Rapporteur on the Promotion of Truth, Justice, Reparation and Guarantees of Non-recurrence and the Special Advisor to the Secretary-General on the Prevention of Genocide](https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/1637317?ln=en) (A/HRC/37/65, March 1, 2018), available here: <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/1637317?ln=en>

⁷ UN Human Rights Council Resolution 42/17, *Human rights and transitional justice*, A/HRC/RES/42/17 (7 October 2019), available from <https://undocs.org/en/a/hrc/res/42/17>

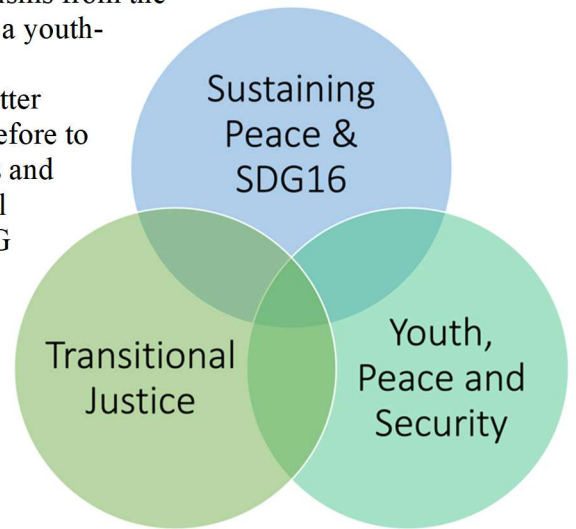
⁸ UN General Assembly, 'Review of the United Nations peacebuilding architecture', A/RES/70/262 (12 May 2016), available from: <https://undocs.org/A/RES/70/262>

⁹ UN Security Council, Resolution 2282, S/RES/2282 (27 April 2016), available from: [https://undocs.org/S/RES/2282\(2016\)](https://undocs.org/S/RES/2282(2016))

Transitional Justice and YPS – The Common Ground and an Intersectional Approach

It is our strong view that engaging transitional justice mechanisms from the perspective of the YPS framework and viewing them through a youth-centric lens, rather than treating them as parallel but separate approaches, has the potential to ensure that these processes better contribute to sustainable and transformational peace, and therefore to the aims of SDG 16. The intersectionality of these approaches and experiences, promises to significantly optimize their impactful contribution to sustaining peace and realizing the aims of SDG 16.

Among other advantages, a youth-centric transitional justice approach would directly engage with a demographic group that is disproportionately affected by violence (both as victims and as perpetrators), and with which transitional justice mechanisms and approaches are therefore primarily concerned. However, it is critical that the transitional justice discourse does not fall into the trap of stigmatizing and stereotyping young people as merely victims or perpetrators of violence,¹¹ but rather acknowledges and engages ‘young people’s lived, intersectional experiences of injustice’, including their broader political, socio-economic, cultural, and gender-based exclusion.



In addition, youth-centered transitional justice could harness the unique innovation of young people, while promising distinctive vehicles for the prevention of violent conflict through transitional justice-based accountability, institutional reform, memorialization, and reparation, that also has the potential benefits of addressing transgenerational transmission of trauma, grievance, or other consequences of unresolved past violations. This can also enhance the legitimacy and durability of peace and reconciliation processes with which transitional justice is often closely associated, through the buy-in and co-ownership of the next generation of adults.

While commentators such as Ladisch have recognized that young people are often overlooked in the design, implementation and evaluation of transitional justice processes that directly affect them, she notes that ‘transitional justice practitioners must shift their thinking as well, and develop a more deliberate approach to working with youth and consider them a central component of transitional justice, not a side topic or an afterthought’.¹² The Special Rapporteur for Truth, Justice, Reparation and Guarantees of Non-Recurrence has similarly recognized that while young people are often affected by violations, youth organizations ‘have not been frequent interlocutors in transitional justice discussions, despite the fact that they may have a lot to contribute to them’.¹³ The UN’s Independent Progress Study on YPS: *The Missing Peace*, explicitly identified a ‘unique role’ that young women and men can play in transitional justice.¹⁴

¹¹ See, the YPS Progress Study: *The Missing Peace* Op cit., pp.17-19.

¹² Ladisch, Virginie. ‘A Catalyst for Change Engaging Youth in Transitional Justice’. International Centre for Transitional Justice (2018), available from <https://www.ictj.org/sites/default/files/ICTJ-Briefing-Youth-TJ-2018.pdf>

¹³ UN General Assembly, Report by Special Rapporteur on Truth, Justice, Reparation, Guarantees of Non-Recurrence (25 October 2016) A/71/56, available from <https://undocs.org/en/A/71/567>

¹⁴ See, the YPS Progress Study: *The Missing Peace*

The YPS agenda, established in multilateral policy and practice through the ground-breaking UN Security Council (UNSC) Resolution 2250 (2015), and consolidated through UNSCRs 2419 (2018) and 2535 (2020), has consistently supported the engagement of youth in endeavors that strongly resonate or are identified with transitional justice. In particular, the five pillars of the inaugural UNSCR 2250 that underpin the YPS agenda (participation, protection, partnerships, reintegration, and prevention), all lend themselves to a strong symbiotic relationship with transitional justice approaches and goals. This is strongly asserted in the ‘Policy Brief’ accompanying this submission and will not be fully replicated here. But, in short, we support the assertion that inadequate attention has been given to the integration of YPS and transitional justice approaches and the resultant reciprocal benefits to both fields¹⁵ In essence, the brief argues that each of the five pillars of YPS articulated in UNSCR 2250 resonate powerfully with the goals and methods of transitional justice, particularly in the shared commitment to sustaining peace and to the prevention of future violent conflict. The participation pillar, at its core is about a commitment to inclusion. The protection pillar is both about physical protection, but ultimately about the protection of civic space, the building of civic trust between young people and institutions, and the protection pillar is framed as inseparable from prevention. The pillar on partnerships incentivizes the very engagement with youth and youth-led organizations that will bring youth voice, agency, and leadership to bear in transitional justice processes. The pillar on disengagement and reintegration, a sphere of engagement with clear links to young people, speaks to a practice area that has already been centrally engaged in transitional justice scholarship and policy, but which has enormous amounts to gain from a youth-centric approach. Finally, it has already been noted that the prevention pillar in the YPS lexicon is the central chapeau that binds the other spheres of intervention together, thereby welding the YPS agenda to that of sustaining peace and to SDG 16.¹⁶

The transitional justice and YPS agendas already share several areas of potential connection. One common interface is with inclusive peace processes, since measures for ‘dealing with the past’ and transitional justice mechanisms are increasingly built into political agreements and settlements. By the same token, a key component of the implementation of the YPS policy agenda, has been attentiveness to the ‘meaningful inclusion’ of young women and men in peace processes.¹⁷ Both are arguably central to the legitimacy and durability of peace processes.

The UN system as a whole has also gradually become more attuned to young people (with initiatives such as Youth 2030, and in particular its Priority on Peace and Resilience Building¹⁸), and the most recent UNSC resolution 2535 (2020) called for the full implementation of the YPS agenda across the UN.¹⁹ There are many opportunities for potential linkages between these youth focal points and the constellation of UN actors and agencies supporting transitional justice processes, all of which could support the practical process and offer guidance for applying a youth-centered approach to optimize and enhance the contribution of transitional justice to sustaining peace.

¹⁵ Parrin, Anjli, ‘Policy Brief: Advancing Peace Through a Youth-Centred Approach to Transitional Justice’ (February 2022), Outside the Box: Amplifying Youth voices on YPS policy and Practice, available from <https://www.interpeace.org/outside-the-box-amplifying-youth-voices-and-views-on-yps-policy-and-practice/advancing-peace-through-a-youth-centered-approach-to-transitional-justice/>

¹⁶ UN Security Council, Resolution 2250, 7573rd meeting, December 9, 2015 (SC/12149), available from [https://undocs.org/en/S/RES/2250\(2015\)](https://undocs.org/en/S/RES/2250(2015))

¹⁷ Altiok, Ali and Irena Grizelj, ‘We are Here: An Integrated Approach to Youth Inclusive Peace Processes’ (April 2019), available here: <https://www.un.org/youthenvoy/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/Global-Policy-Paper-Youth-Participation-in-Peace-Processes.pdf>

¹⁸ UN Office of the Secretary-General’s Envoy on Youth, ‘Youth 2030: the UN Youth Strategy’ <https://www.unyouth2030.com/>

¹⁹ Simpson, Graeme and Ali Altiok, ‘A Brief Analysis of New UN Security Council Resolution 2535 on Youth, Peace and Security’ (August, 2020), available here: <https://www.interpeace.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/200805-Brief-Assessment-of-UNSC-Resolution-2535-Final-version-clean-version-R8699.pdf>

Introducing: Advancing Peace Through a Youth-Centered Approach to Transitional Justice

This submission would like to highlight a policy brief by a young Kenyan transitional justice practitioner, Anjli Parrin, entitled Advancing Peace Through a Youth-Centered Approach to Transitional Justice, which has been published through the Interpeace web portal: [Outside the Box: Amplifying youth voices and views on YPS policy and practice](#) and can be accessed [here](#).²⁰ This policy brief makes the case, through detailed examples, that ‘young people have an indispensable role to play in pushing for lasting reform in conflict and post-conflict societies; ensuring the credibility of, and advancing and sustaining peace efforts; and preventing the recurrence of violence and transgenerational conflict’. She makes the case that the inclusion of youth and the use of the YPS agenda to enhance transitional justice processes can contribute to building a peace that is sustainable, intergenerational, seen as legitimate, and that seeks to transform and create more inclusive institutions and societies.

²⁰ Parrin, Anjli, ‘Policy Brief: Advancing Peace Through a Youth-Centred Approach to Transitional Justice’ (February 2022), Outside the Box: Amplifying Youth voices on YPS policy and Practice, available from <https://www.interpeace.org/outside-the-box-amplifying-youth-voices-and-views-on-yps-policy-and-practice/advancing-peace-through-a-youth-centered-approach-to-transitional-justice/>