



Catalyzing increased momentum for peace in South Sudan, the United Nations Secretary-General's Envoy on Youth, Ms. Jayathma Wickramanayake, launches a Peacebuilding Fund-supported project to strengthen the participation of young women in local and national peace processes, 27 January 2020. Source: Peacebuilding Fund, South Sudan.

INTERNATIONAL DAY OF PEACE -- 21 SEPTEMBER 2021

The Centrality of Youth-Inclusive Peace Processes

20 September 2021

Introduction

The world will remember 2020 as the year humanity was forced to accept a “new normal”, with a global pandemic dominating our lives and exacerbating many existing challenges and inequalities. For the youth, peace and security (YPS) agenda, however, it was also a year of silver linings: the first report of the Secretary-General on youth, peace and security (https://www.youth4peace.info/system/files/2020-03/S_2020_167_E.pdf) was published during a virtual debate of the United Nations Security Council; a third resolution ([https://undocs.org/en/S/RES/2535\(2020\)](https://undocs.org/en/S/RES/2535(2020))) on youth, peace and security was

About the author

The Office of the Secretary-General's Envoy on Youth and the United Nations System Staff College

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adopted by the Council; and a series of intergovernmental, inter-agency and youth-led events marked the five-year anniversary of Security Council resolution 2250 (2015) ([https://undocs.org/S/RES/2250\(2015\)](https://undocs.org/S/RES/2250(2015))) on YPS. These events included the 2020 Torino Forum for Sustaining Peace (<https://www.unssc.org/2020-torino-forum-sustaining-peace/>), organized by the United Nations System Staff College (<https://www.unssc.org/2020-torino-forum-sustaining-peace/>) in partnership with the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Although COVID-19 undoubtedly disrupted plans across the board, partnerships between young people and multiple actors such as the United Nations, regional institutions, Member States and civil society continued to grow.

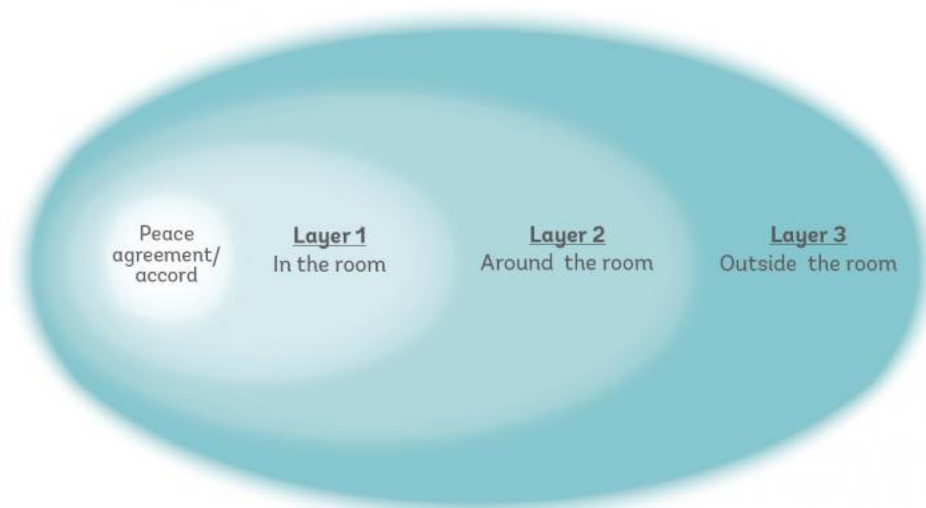
As the world continues to experience a turbulent period amid the ongoing pandemic, building sustainable and peaceful communities could not be more important—a point underscored in the call by United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres for a global ceasefire (<https://www.un.org/en/globalceasefire>) last year. Young people are at the heart of these efforts, and have willfully demonstrated that a global pandemic will not hold them back. Yet, while their resilience and peacebuilding work should make them important stakeholders in peace and political processes, youth leaders are still too often seen as tokenistic participants who either sit at the margins of or are categorically excluded from processes aimed at transforming conflicts.

Why Are Youth-Inclusive Peace Processes Central?

In 2019, the global policy paper “We Are Here: An Integrated Approach to Youth-Inclusive Peace Processes” (<https://www.youth4peace.info/system/files/2019-07/Global%20Policy%20Paper%20Youth%20Participation%20in%20Peace%20Processes.pdf>) was published, co-authored by Irena Grizelj and Ali Altiok. At the core of the global policy paper and its 17 recommendations lies the idea of an integrated and multilayered approach to youth-inclusive peace processes, derived directly from the perspective of young people’s own experiences. Traditionally, participants in a peace process aim for “a seat at the negotiation table” to gain power, but the policy paper argues that young people influence these processes in, around and outside negotiation rooms. Unlike other actors, young people’s ability to influence peace processes does not correlate with their proximity to the negotiation table, and often their agency and leadership make them critical players who enhance the legitimacy and durability of peace agreements. When young people engage and interconnect within all three layers of negotiations—inside, around and outside the room—they have more positive influence in the development of agreements than if they are simply provided a seat at the table. The policy paper is the first piece of research that sought to explicitly consolidate and document where and how young people shape peace processes.

So, what does this mean in practice? Let’s take a look at some creative examples of how young leaders have engaged within these different layers.

Mapping young people’s engagement in peace processes:



A diagram showing how young people see their engagement in peace processes. This representation does not suggest a hierarchical relationship between layers in terms of youth power and influence over peace negotiations and agreement. Source: “We Are Here: An Integrated Approach to Youth-Inclusive Peace Processes”, p. 16.

Despite the fact that young people are rarely represented or given the opportunity to participate at formal negotiation tables in peace processes, there are still some examples where they have successfully influenced such processes. For example, in 2010, talks were held between the Government of the Philippines and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front, a separatist organization based in the southern part of that country. Young people were at the forefront of discussions at the peace table, preparing technical briefing papers and leading advocacy campaigns.

Similarly, in Cyprus, young people engaged within all three layers of the negotiation room. With the help of supporting actors outside and inside the room, these young activists led educational interventions aimed at tackling prejudice, bridging divides and transforming narratives.

The protection of young people's fundamental rights, including their physical safety and civic spaces, is a prerequisite for their meaningful participation inside, around and outside the negotiation room. It is therefore critical to build civic trust and social cohesion, ensure the rule of law and prevent abuse of power by security personnel. It is equally important to actively consider gender dynamics in peace processes and advocate for a gender-sensitive approach to youth-inclusive peace processes.

What Is the Way Forward?

During this six-year journey following the adoption of Security Council resolution 2250 (2015), much progress has been made in advancing the youth, peace and security agenda. Not only have we seen the adoption of three key Council resolutions on YPS¹, but we have also witnessed an increase in youth-led global advocacy on the YPS agenda. However, country-level implementation is essential for the agenda to have a meaningful impact in young people's lives.

To increase recognition, investment and coordination of meaningful youth engagement in peacemaking, a five-year strategy on youth-inclusive peace processes is currently being developed through a multi-stakeholder partnership between the United Nations, civil society, young activists and youth organizations. The strategy builds on the "We Are Here" policy paper and aims to create a dynamic, forward-looking and transformational framework that connects the international, regional and local levels by promoting and investing in meaningful youth participation in peace processes across all three layers.

Moreover, in the spring of 2021, the United Nations System Staff College, in partnership with the Folke Bernadotte Academy in Stockholm, Sweden, piloted its first-ever youth, peace and security online course, tailored to both a youth and United Nations audience. The course, whose objective was to increase meaningful youth engagement in peace and security by equipping United Nations staff with the skills necessary to effectively implement the youth, peace and security agenda in their operational context, will be launched in full in the fall of 2021. Stay tuned for our upcoming announcement via social media on how to get involved.

Note:

¹S/RES/2250 (2015) ([https://undocs.org/S/RES/2250\(2015\)](https://undocs.org/S/RES/2250(2015))); S/RES/2419 (2018) ([https://undocs.org/S/RES/2419\(2018\)](https://undocs.org/S/RES/2419(2018))); S/RES/2535 (2020) ([https://undocs.org/en/S/RES/2535\(2020\)](https://undocs.org/en/S/RES/2535(2020))).

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Despite the clear evidence that investing in disaster risk reduction (DRR) brings great benefits, only a small fraction of international cooperation is being channeled to support such efforts.

how-covid-19-advanced-our-mental-health-priorities)

There is no health without mental health, and we must address physical and mental wellness in equal measure.

twenty-fifth-anniversary-international-tribunal-law-sea)

Our oceans have never played a more significant spheres of human life and endeavour as they do only through sound governance of the oceans that continue to reap the benefits of this common good preserving it for generations to come.

(<https://www.addtoany.com/share?url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.un.org%2Fen%2Fen-chronicle%2Fcentrality-youth-inclusive-peace-processes&title=The%20Centrality%20of%20Youth-Inclusive%20Peace%20Processes%20%7C%20United%20Nations>)
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DOCUMENTS AND PUBLICATIONS

- Yearbook of the United Nations (<https://unyearbook.un.org/>)
- Basic Facts About the United Nations (https://www.un-ilibrary.org/united-nations/basic-facts-about-the-united-nations-42nd-edition_2faf3279-en)
- Journal of the United Nations (<https://journal.un.org>)
- Meetings Coverage and Press Releases (<https://www.un.org/press/en>)
- United Nations Official Document System (ODS) (<https://documents.un.org/prod/ods.nsf/home.xsp>)
- Africa Renewal (<https://www.un.org/africarenewal/>)

LIBRARIES AND ARCHIVES

- Dag Hammarskjöld Library (<https://library.un.org/>)
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- 17 Goals to Transform Our World (<https://www.un.org/sustair>)
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- United Nations Academic Impact (<https://academicimpact.un.org/>)
- Protecting Human Rights (<https://www.ohchr.org/EN/>)
- Maintaining International Peace and Security (<https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/>)
- The Office of the Secretary-General on Youth (<https://www.un.org/youthen>)
- United Nations Careers (<https://careers.un.org/lbw/>)

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