



# Security Council

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## Youth and peace and security

### Report of the Secretary-General

#### I. Introduction

1. The present report is submitted pursuant to resolution [2419 \(2018\)](#), in which the Security Council requested me to submit a report on the implementation of resolutions [2419 \(2018\)](#) and [2250 \(2015\)](#).

2. The present report is the first one on youth and peace and security since the Security Council adopted resolution [2250 \(2015\)](#), in which the essential role of young people in preventing and resolving conflicts and in sustaining peace was recognized. That recognition has gained further momentum in the years since and was reaffirmed in Council resolution [2419 \(2018\)](#) and in a statement by the President of the Council made in December 2019 ([S/PRST/2019/15](#)).

3. The publication of the present report coincides with significant milestones: the review of the United Nations peacebuilding architecture, the 20th anniversary of Council resolution [1325 \(2000\)](#) on women and peace and security, the launch of a decade of action for the Sustainable Development Goals, the 25th anniversary of the Platform for Action of the Fourth World Conference on Women and the 75th anniversary of the United Nations. The observance of those milestones offers a prime opportunity to highlight the invaluable role of young people. Indeed, the United Nations is marking its anniversary with a series of dialogues held worldwide, aimed in particular at amplifying the voices and perspectives of young people in shaping the future of the world.

4. Young people provide a solid foundation on which to build. Their talents are diverse, they yearn to engage and even those who live in difficult circumstances are generally optimistic. In 2020, there are 1.85 billion young women and men 10 to 24 years of age in the world,<sup>1</sup> 90 per cent of whom live in developing countries. One in four young people is affected by violence or armed conflict ([A/72/761-S/2018/86](#), para. 8). Young people around the world are striving for peace, justice, inclusion, gender equality and human rights. Their aspirations, views and demands need to be heard. Their potential must be harnessed and their plight addressed.

5. Young people face significant challenges stemming from globalization, violence, demographic shifts, inequalities, new technologies, forced displacement, shrinking civic space, changing labour markets and climate change. The situation

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<sup>1</sup> *World Population Prospects 2019* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.20.XIII.8).



fuels declining confidence in political establishments and institutions and is felt especially keenly by young people in two ways: a participation gap, a result of which young people find themselves left out of decision-making, and an opportunity gap, manifested most clearly by steeply rising youth unemployment.

6. The marginalization of young people foments political distrust and hopelessness, challenges systems and structures and adds to national, regional and global insecurity. When such a cycle takes hold, it is all too easy for extremist groups to exploit the frustration and anger that stems from exclusion.

7. At the same time, false and harmful characterizations of young people as threats have to be avoided. As stressed in the study entitled “The missing peace: independent progress study on youth and peace and security” (A/72/761-S/2018/86), published in 2018 under the coordination of the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and the Peacebuilding Support Office, most young people are resilient and peaceful. Young people represent a vast source of innovation, ideas and solutions. Connected to one other like never before, they are driving social progress, renewing environmental activism and inspiring political change. It is critical that the international community support young people in fulfilling their full potential as a positive force for building peaceful and just societies.

8. That objective is at the core of the youth and peace and security agenda (General Assembly resolution [72/146](#), para. 21) and informs the vision of Youth 2030: The United Nations Strategy on Youth, which was launched in 2018. To translate the Strategy’s promise into tangible change, the Secretary-General’s Envoy on Youth, working with senior management of the United Nations, advocates for youth engagement throughout the pillars of the Organization – sustainable development, human rights and peace and security – as well as humanitarian action.

9. In the present report, the five pillars outlined in resolution [2250 \(2015\)](#), are addressed: participation, protection, prevention, disengagement and reintegration, and partnerships. The report covers trends and progress in implementing the youth and peace and security agenda from the adoption of resolution [2250 \(2015\)](#), in December 2015, through December 2019. The report is informed by analysis and data provided by the United Nations system, Member States and regional and civil society organizations, including organizations that are led by and focused on young people.

10. Two clear findings emerge from the analysis. The first is the growing recognition of young people’s essential role in peace and security. It is encouraging to see many instances in which Governments, United Nations entities, civil society actors and others are stepping up to meet the requirements of resolution [2250 \(2015\)](#). The second is that core challenges remain, including structural barriers limiting the participation of young people and their capacity to influence decision-making; violations of their human rights; and insufficient investment in facilitating their inclusion, in particular through education.

11. The present report is therefore a call for accelerated implementation. To create a peaceful, sustainable and prosperous world for all, young people need to be involved and conditions that enable them to unleash their full potential must be created. Institutions must be inclusive of young people and adequately represent, engage and address their needs and expectations.

12. A new age of participation by young people requires mechanisms for continuous and meaningful participation in making decisions, shaping policies, adopting strategies and implementing actions.

## II. Youth and peace and security: assessing progress since 2015

### A. Participation

13. In the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, it is recognized that everyone has the right to participate in the conduct of public affairs and thus experience and enjoy the wide range of rights and freedoms that is guaranteed in the Universal Declaration. Participation therein should be active, free and meaningful.<sup>2</sup>

14. While progress on including young people in public life has been made over the reporting period, however, meaningful youth participation in the maintenance of peace and security remains a challenge. Such participation encompasses a wide range of actions, from formal participation in political, electoral or peace processes to informal participation at the community level and in digital spaces. More needs to be done to create an enabling environment for young people in which they are seen and respected as citizens with equal rights, equal voices and equal influence. All young women and men, regardless of their nationality, ethnicity, caste, class, religion, gender, sexual orientation or political affiliation, possess the fundamental right to participate in public life and make a contribution to the peace, development and prosperity of their society. They can act as advocates for peace, including in the prevention and resolution of conflict, whether by exerting influence through public debate and dialogue with decision makers at the local, national and international levels, by echoing messages of peace or addressing misinformation campaigns through social media or when directly involved and engaged in processes.

15. Many young peacebuilders report that their participation is not welcomed by the public or those in positions of power, pointing to an overall disregard for their work and, in some instances, their human rights. This is especially true for young women, who face multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination and marginalization. Young people across the globe describe experiences of exclusion that are deeply rooted in their mistrust of Governments and the multilateral system, as well as those institutions' mistrust of them ([A/72/761-S/2018/86](#), paras. 33 and 34).

#### Participation in peace processes

16. In the past two decades, hundreds of peace agreements<sup>3</sup> have been signed throughout the world. Although broader inclusion has been shown to have a positive impact on the sustainability of the agreements, young people continue to be excluded from decisions that will have a direct impact on the present and future prospects for peace. As highlighted in a key finding in the summary report of the first International Symposium on Youth Participation in Peace Processes, held in Helsinki on 5 and 6 March 2019, young people will inherit an agreement's long-term benefits or its long-term consequences.

17. The question of how effectively young people are engaged in peacebuilding ultimately shapes their perception of the legitimacy of peace processes.<sup>4</sup> Young people contribute to peace processes in multiple ways, from monitoring ceasefires to

<sup>2</sup> Enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, art. 21; the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, art. 25; and the Convention on the Rights of the Child, art. 12.

<sup>3</sup> Online databases that store peace agreements have varied in their count of signed agreements since around 2000. For example, United Nations Peacemaker provides 457 peace agreements, the Political Settlements Research Programme comprises 1,518 peace agreements and the Language of Peace contains some 1,000 peace agreements.

<sup>4</sup> Siobhán McEvoy-Levy, ed., *Troublemakers or Peacebuilders? Youth and Post-Accord Peace Building* (Notre Dame, Indiana, University of Notre Dame Press, 2006).

resolving local-level disputes, building relationships across social divisions and shaping peace agreements. Research on the participation of young people in peace processes has demonstrated that, while the inclusion of young people as signatories inside the negotiation room is key, their presence alone does not always guarantee that youth-specific needs will be addressed. Furthermore, young people's influence does not always correlate with proximity to the negotiation table. For example, youth participation around the room or activism outside the room through peaceful demonstrations or online campaigns can sometimes be more influential than anticipated.<sup>5</sup> Young people from the South Sudan Civil Society Forum, for example, used the power of social media to assert their rights as observers of the South Sudan High Level Revitalization Forum, making their views known to participating parties through the online campaign #SouthSudanIsWatching.<sup>6</sup>

18. When young people are meaningfully included in all phases of the peace process, the benefits are clear. In Colombia, young leaders played a critical role throughout the peace process. Their participation led to the recognition of the need for a differentiated approach for youth in several provisions of the peace agreement of 2016. In the Philippines, interreligious dialogues organized by the Young Women for Peace and Leadership programme of the Global Network of Women Peacebuilders in conflict-affected communities of the Bangsamoro autonomous region helped to address the limited local understanding of the peace agreement and build local ownership of the Bangsamoro Organic Law.

19. United Nations field missions are also engaging increasingly in the overall effort to include young people in peace processes, including the Joint Galkayo Youth Committee's engagement in reconciliation initiatives in Somalia. The Special Envoy for the Horn of Africa has supported youth engagement in peace efforts within the region and with partners such as the African Union and the Intergovernmental Authority on Development.

20. There is scope for peace and security stakeholders to become more creative and make the most of technology in reaching out to young people globally. Digital technologies, and social media in particular, offer new opportunities for mediators to engage with and include the perspectives of young people. It is important that mediators create inclusive platforms and thus ensure that no new patterns of exclusion, barriers to access or algorithmic biases are produced. Online consultation mechanisms can also raise unmanageable expectations, often amplified by social media interactions, and may limit the participation of young people to superficial forms of inclusion.<sup>7</sup>

### **Participation in humanitarian contexts**

21. Since 2015, the humanitarian system has made progress in recognizing the centrality of working for and with young people. The World Humanitarian Summit, held in Istanbul, Turkey, in May 2016, emphasized the urgency of safeguarding the rights of young people, including in particular the right to obtain access to secondary education and sexual and reproductive health services and information, as well as to be engaged as an integral part of the humanitarian response effort. The summit marked the launch of the Compact for Young People in Humanitarian Action, led by UNFPA and the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies. In the past five years, the humanitarian community has focused more intensely on the

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<sup>5</sup> Ali Altiok and Irena Grizelj, "We are here: an integrated approach to youth-inclusive peace processes", April 2019.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> United Nations, Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs and Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue, "Digital technologies and mediation in armed conflict", March 2019.

particular needs of young people, including education, vocational training, participation and the creation of safe spaces in which refugees can engage in sports, music and social innovation challenges.

22. New tools are equipping humanitarian actors to engage with young people in all phases of the humanitarian cycle and strengthen gender- and age-sensitive humanitarian programming, such as the forthcoming inter-agency Guidelines for Working with and for Young People in Humanitarian Settings, led by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the Norwegian Refugee Council, and the revised Gender with Age Marker of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee. The Committee has also launched its Guidelines on Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities in Humanitarian Action, in which essential actions to effectively identify and respond to the needs and rights of persons with disabilities are set out. Owing to the intersectionality of their disability and their age, as well as possibly their gender, ethnicity, location, race and other factors, young persons with disabilities face greater marginalization and discrimination.

23. It has been demonstrated that direct engagement can help to enhance perspectives and strengthen outcomes. For instance, through the Global Youth Advisory Council of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, the direct engagement of refugee young people in global discussions, such as the global compact on refugees and the Global Refugee Forum, has helped to shape growing recognition of the importance of youth participation in humanitarian contexts and secured pledges from Member States to enhance their support for refugee young people. The 2019 Oslo international conference on ending sexual and gender-based violence in humanitarian crises has helped to give greater prominence to the role of women and girls as powerful agents of change in their communities.

24. The above-mentioned examples signal a growing recognition that young people's engagement in humanitarian preparedness, response and recovery is not only important, but enhances the effectiveness and impact of humanitarian action.

### **Participation in governance and political processes**

25. Young people's meaningful participation and representation in political processes contribute to successful peacebuilding, yet their formal participation therein remains extremely low. Declining levels of turnout on the part of young voters globally reflect systemic challenges and growing dissatisfaction and mistrust towards democratic structures. In a survey published in 2016, it was shown that only 43 per cent of persons 25 years of age and under had reported voting in national elections, which is 20 percentage points lower than the figure for persons more than 26 years of age.<sup>8</sup>

26. Young people are rarely found in parliaments, public administration and decision-making bodies.<sup>9</sup> In 2017, 2.2 per cent of the world's parliamentarians were under 30 years of age, and 0.9 per cent of parliamentarians are women under 30 years of age.<sup>10</sup> Young women commonly experience misogyny, and their participation is hindered by discriminatory social norms and laws. Patterns of intimidation, harassment and violence against women who exercise their political rights deter young women from entering political and public life (see [A/73/301](#)).

<sup>8</sup> Abdurashid Solijonov, *Voter Turnout Trends around the World* (Stockholm, International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, 2016).

<sup>9</sup> See <https://aceproject.org/ace-en/topics/yt/yt10/yt210/young-people-in-political-decision-making>.

<sup>10</sup> Inter-Parliamentary Union, *Youth Participation in Parliaments: 2018* (Geneva, 2018).

27. Specific measures<sup>11</sup> taken to remove structural barriers to youth representation and ensure meaningful participation in political processes and institutions include adopting temporary measures, such as age and gender quotas; aligning voting and eligibility ages; ensuring greater access to financing mechanisms; and supporting capacity-building for young politicians and inter-party youth groups. The effectiveness of the measures depends on the country context and political will and often requires multifaceted approaches.

28. The participation of young people requires unrestricted civic space and breaking with practices of tokenism whereby, for example, political leaders instrumentalize youth for political ends. Initiatives implemented by United Nations field missions in Afghanistan, Cyprus, Iraq, Liberia and elsewhere have fostered intergenerational dialogue between young people and political actors. In the Central African Republic, Liberia, Libya, Mali and Somalia, United Nations missions established mechanisms that enabled young people to contribute to the development of national security strategies (A/72/761-S/2018/86).

29. However, it is insufficient to simply listen to young people and provide them with a seat at the table. Young people have to be provided with the scope to both design and implement holistic policies and programmes that address their specific needs, uphold their rights and acknowledge their diversity and the challenges that they face. In conflict-affected settings in particular, youth participation should be mainstreamed into all institutions.

### **Informal participation**

30. Young people also embrace informal spaces of participation, such as grass-roots peacebuilding engagement, activism and peaceful protests, which can make critical contributions to peace.<sup>12</sup>

31. For example, in Madagascar, the youth-led movement Agir Solidairement engages university students in peacebuilding initiatives to overcome the barriers that affect the ability of young people to engage in the political and economic spheres. In Myanmar, a Peacebuilding Fund project implemented by UNFPA and UNICEF supports the capacity of youth leaders from various ethnic backgrounds, many of whom have launched peacebuilding initiatives within their communities and have participated in both formal and informal peace dialogues. In Mali, the Agency for Cooperation and Research in Development has implemented a Peacebuilding Fund project to strengthen the capacity of young people to contribute meaningfully to the implementation of the peace agreement and increase the access and participation of young women and men to the agreement's various implementing bodies.

32. Ensuring that young people can fulfil their right to participate formally and informally, offline and online, at all levels, is essential for achieving peace. In 2019, there were significant protests, many of which were youth-led, through which new ways of organizing political, economic and social systems were called for. While change led by young people is a historical reality (ibid., para. 32), the scope, geographic coverage, organizational mode and universality of the current wave of social and political mobilization are significant. The demands of young people are rooted in their sense of exclusion from decisions that affect their lives and their future, such as with regard to climate change. By extension, research has shown that the

<sup>11</sup> Ruth Beeckmans and others, *Youth Participation in Electoral Processes: Handbook for Electoral Management Bodies* (United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and European Commission, 2017).

<sup>12</sup> Sub-Working Group on Youth Participation in Peacebuilding of the United Nations Inter-Agency Network on Youth Development, "Guiding Principles on Young People's Participation in Peacebuilding", 2014.

participation of women at the forefront of protest movements is highly correlated with non-violence.<sup>13</sup>

33. Digital spaces provide innovative participation opportunities for dialogue, accountability and transparency in decision-making, including in conflict-affected contexts. Millions of young people use the Internet to promote peace and security through initiatives such as crisis mapping, crowdsourcing platforms, peace gaming, technology-driven first responder programmes and geographic information system-based security applications.<sup>14</sup> At the same time, inequalities with regard to access to technology remain widespread.<sup>15</sup> The Internet and social media can also pose risks to young people, including when personal and sensitive data are used to control information and breach privacy, spread misinformation and violent extremist ideologies and threaten and attack young activists.

## B. Protection

34. Young women and men who leave their homes owing to conflict and violence usually lose everything from their basic livelihoods to access to education and health services. In many instances, they also lose the protection of their families and communities, which places them at greater risk. Protecting all young people, in particular young refugees and internally displaced persons, has to be a priority for all actors. The protection pillar of Security Council resolution [2250 \(2015\)](#) is a central tenet of the youth and peace and security agenda.

35. Young people face a multitude of special protection threats and challenges. In particular, reports of continuing threats and human rights violations against young peacebuilders and human rights defenders are of grave concern. For example, in the report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights on youth and human rights, mandated by the Human Rights Council, the discrimination and challenges that young people face in gaining access to civil, political, social, economic and cultural rights is documented ([A/HRC/39/33](#)). Young activists face harassment and attacks and limitations on their freedom of movement, assembly, association and expression.<sup>16</sup> In some country situations, young activists who work closely with the United Nations have reported that they or their family members experienced retaliation and even detention for speaking out. The work of human rights defenders is essential to all efforts towards peace and sustainable development. It is critical to remain vigilant regarding the issue and to adopt a “do no harm” approach. While the vast majority of cases remain undocumented or not investigated, given the nature of contemporary armed conflict, it is the responsibility of Member States to guarantee a safe and conducive environment for all those who defend human rights.<sup>17</sup> Threats, attacks, acts of intimidation and hate speech should be thoroughly and impartially investigated and perpetrators brought to justice.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Erica Chenoweth, “Women’s participation and the fate of nonviolent campaigns: a report on the women in resistance (WiRe) data set”, October 2019.

<sup>14</sup> Raouf Farrah, John de Boer and Robert Muggah, “Digitally-enabled peace and security: reflections for the youth, peace and security agenda”, November 2017.

<sup>15</sup> *Human Development Report 2019: Beyond Income, Beyond Averages, Beyond Today – Inequalities in Human Development in the 21st Century* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.20.III.B.1), p. 35.

<sup>16</sup> [A/HRC/42/30](#); António Guterres, Secretary-General, United Nations, “Youth standing up for human rights”, statement made on Human Rights Day, 10 December 2019.

<sup>17</sup> Human Rights Council resolution [42/28](#) and General Assembly resolution [74/146](#).

<sup>18</sup> International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. See General Assembly resolution 2200 A (XXI), annex.

36. Ensuring a safe, enabling and gender-responsive environment is also essential for the active participation and engagement of young people. For young women, age and gender discrimination intersect, rendering them particularly vulnerable – and even more so those from marginalized ethnic and religious groups. The exclusion of young women from political decision-making and educational and economic opportunities further increases their vulnerability to discrimination, sexual violence, sexual exploitation, trafficking and child marriage. The prevention of sexual and gender-based violence requires the advancement of gender equality before, during and after conflict, as well as the full and effective participation of young women in political, economic and social life, in addition to their access to health services, responsive justice and security institutions. In many contexts throughout the world, United Nations activities geared towards young refugees are focused on adopting non-violent conflict resolution, increasing their self-esteem and strengthening their integration into the local community.

### C. Prevention

37. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is a cornerstone of long-term prevention. As conflicts continue to cause widespread human suffering, prevention strategies have to underpin all actions across the peace continuum. Long-term prevention efforts must address the underlying drivers of conflict. Inequalities, discrimination, exclusion and persistent human rights violations are factors driving many of today's conflicts and are directly connected to the lives of young people.<sup>19</sup> Inequalities accumulate through life and persist across generations.<sup>20</sup> While extreme deprivations are declining, a new generation of inequalities is emerging, reflecting deep power imbalances. Thus, long-term prevention efforts have to address the underlying drivers of conflict. Investing in young people and transforming systems of exclusion into those of inclusion represent a central component of the 2030 Agenda commitment to ensuring that no one is left behind and a core responsibility of Member States.

38. Education represents a key pathway to shaping the prospects and opportunities of young people and serves as a powerful social engine for peace and resilience. However, a global learning crisis threatens to undermine long-term prospects for both development and social cohesion, in particular in conflict-affected settings.<sup>21</sup> Efforts to close the education gap and guarantee education worldwide, even during conflict, have to be redoubled. Action is also necessary to promote a culture of peace as societies become more interconnected through migration and the rise of new technologies and conflicts thereby become more complex. Several initiatives are under way to support young leaders to promote peace, conflict resolution, social cohesion and interreligious dialogue. The global citizen education framework of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), for example, supports learners of all ages to become active promoters of more peaceful, tolerant, inclusive, secure and sustainable societies.

39. The economic inclusion of young people is another area that necessitates urgent attention and action.<sup>22</sup> Unequal access to economic resources is linked to broader structural inequalities with regard to access to power and resources, limiting young people's economic opportunities and dividing societies.<sup>23</sup> It remains imperative to

<sup>19</sup> United Nations and World Bank Group, *Pathways for Peace: Inclusive Approaches to Preventing Violent Conflict* (Washington, D.C., World Bank Group, 2018), p. 109.

<sup>20</sup> *Human Development Report 2019*, p. 3.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. iii, 1 and 85.

<sup>22</sup> United Nations and World Bank Group, *Pathways for Peace*, p. 62.

<sup>23</sup> *Human Development Report 2019*, p. 19.

support the access of young people to meaningful employment, including through investment in the education-to-employment transition, vocational training and strong youth employment policies, adapted to local contexts and responsive to the needs and aspirations of young people. Such support requires far-reaching collaborative action, such as the recently launched Generation Unlimited partnership, which is aimed at the continuum of education, training and employment, and the Global Initiative on Decent Jobs for Youth, which, under the leadership of the International Labour Organization and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), places an emphasis on empowering young people in conflict-affected settings.<sup>24</sup> Above all, in matters of peace and security, economic and livelihood opportunities must be considered as part of a larger strategy for the economic, social and political inclusion of young people ([A/72/761-S/2018/86](#), para. 42).

40. Responding to the inequalities and exclusion that young people face requires enabling a stronger youth voice in the development of national and local policies. The policies should encompass all issues in which young people have a stake, such as education, employment and health, including sexual and reproductive health and rights. By way of example, the Department of Economic and Social Affairs and UNDP are engaging young people in defining youth policies with a strong focus on sustaining peace in Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire and Togo.

## D. Partnerships

41. Building partnerships with a wide array of partners is central to prevention and an important contribution to strengthening multilateralism. In resolution [2250 \(2015\)](#), the importance of partnerships between youth-led organizations and Member States, United Nations entities, regional organizations and civil society was signalled. The inclusive model of partnership used by the Global Coalition on Youth, Peace and Security is one such example. Created in 2012 as the Working Group on Youth and Peacebuilding, the renamed Global Coalition serves as a platform for defining guiding principles for the engagement of young people in peacebuilding and for advocating for the adoption and implementation of resolution [2250 \(2015\)](#). The platform facilitates multi-stakeholder partnerships between civil society organizations that are led by and focused on young people and Member States and the United Nations system.

42. Initiatives to connect young peacebuilders around the world remain key to amplifying efforts and exchanging experiences. In 2018, the United Network of Young Peacebuilders, a global group of 116 youth organizations in 55 countries, reached nearly 10 million young people to support their participation in peace and security initiatives. Regional youth organizations and networks, such as the Pan-African Youth Network for a Culture of Peace, the European Youth Forum, the Asian Youth Peace Network and the Commonwealth Youth Peace Ambassadors Network, regularly engage with national and regional actors on peace and security issues.

43. In crisis-affected situations, United Nations country teams are working with the World Bank Group through joint data, analysis and programme design. Joint analysis in Tajikistan and Tunisia has been focused on youth and peace and security, while the United Nations and the World Bank Group are engaged in complementary youth employment programmes in Mali to enhance the economic stake of young people in society. Deeper United Nations-World Bank Group partnerships and synergies in fragile contexts can ensure that programmes related to employment, community

<sup>24</sup> Efforts are aligned with International Labour Organization recommendation No. 205 on employment and decent work for peace and resilience, 2017.

violence reduction and local governance include the perspectives of young people, support their aspirations and enhance their social, political and economic stake in society.

44. The African Union has institutionalized its work on youth and peace and security through annual open sessions of its Peace and Security Council since 2018. The Peace and Security Council mandated the development of the Continental Framework on Youth, Peace and Security, as well as a study on the roles and contributions of youth to peace and security in Africa, developed through a participatory process, including regional consultations in Abuja, Asmara, Gaborone, Libreville and Tunis. The African Union Commission appointed its first Youth Envoy, as well as five regional African Youth Ambassadors for Peace, to promote young people's participation in peace and security issues across the continent. The Youth for Peace Africa programme was launched in 2018 to prioritize the role of young people as contributors to the flagship African Union initiative Silencing the Guns by 2020, providing strategic opportunities to further expand the critical partnership between the African Union and the United Nations on the engagement of young people in peace.

45. Increasingly, European Union institutions have focused on harnessing the potential of young people in conflict prevention and sustaining peace. In May 2018, the Council of the European Union adopted conclusions on the role of young people in building a secure, cohesive and harmonious society in Europe. The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) has emphasized the role of young people in peace and security efforts in its recent Ministerial Council declarations, as well as by appointing Special Representatives of the OSCE Chairperson-in-Office on Youth and Security and by supporting youth-led networks and providing platforms for intergenerational dialogue in Central Asia, Eastern Europe and the Western Balkans.

46. Increasingly, the United Nations has supported efforts to provide space for the participation of young people at the regional level. The Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs and the Government of Mongolia organized a regional dialogue on youth and peace and security in north-east Asia, held in Ulaanbaatar in June 2019, establishing a regional youth network on issues related to peace and security and creating the conditions for more inclusive regional political discussions. The United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel and the Economic Community of West African States organized the first annual youth forum for peace and security in West Africa and the Sahel, held in Ouagadougou in December 2018.

## **E. Disengagement and reintegration**

47. In resolution [2250 \(2015\)](#) those involved in planning for disarmament, demobilization and reintegration are encouraged to consider the needs of young women and men affected by armed conflict. Far from being passive beneficiaries, former youth combatants should contribute to the design, planning and implementation of disarmament, demobilization and reintegration processes to ensure that their interests and aspirations are represented (*ibid.*, para. 43). In the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Mali and the Sudan, as of December 2019, more than 6,500 former combatants, mostly young people, have benefited from such programmes supported by peacekeeping missions.

48. More holistic, bottom-up and youth-inclusive approaches to disarmament, demobilization and reintegration have been adopted by United Nations field missions through community violence reduction programmes in communities where young people account for more than 50 per cent of the population. In the Central African

Republic, the Mission has established committees to ensure that local authorities, traditional leaders and the representatives of young people and women have a direct say in the design of projects. Greater efforts are needed to support organizations working on disengagement and reintegration outside the formal disarmament, demobilization and reintegration processes, in particular those led by young people. In Cameroon, for example, the youth-led organization Local Youth Corner is focused on the rehabilitation and reintegration of young violent offenders and supports local communities and the Government in accepting former offenders.

49. Greater attention has also been paid to the inclusion of young women in disarmament, demobilization and reintegration processes, such as through the use of gender quotas and targeted needs assessments by the United Nations Mission for Justice Support in Haiti and the African Union-United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur. However, too often, the experiences and needs of young women continue to not be addressed by disarmament, demobilization and reintegration programmes, and further work is needed to engage young women meaningfully in the design, implementation and planning of such programmes.

50. Many United Nations field missions support national Governments in strengthening services dedicated to juvenile justice and corrections. That support includes efforts to increase the access of young people to justice by ensuring that investigations and judicial proceedings are youth-sensitive and that the detention of juveniles meets international standards. In Afghanistan, Darfur, Haiti, Libya and South Sudan, the justice and corrections components of United Nations missions have supported rehabilitation and reintegration measures for young people and young offenders. United Nations police have supported national police counterparts to prevent and address various forms of serious and organized crime, such as illegal trafficking and illicit natural resource extraction, that have a disproportionate impact on young people.

51. Current efforts to address violent extremism often fail to acknowledge the underlying factors that drive conflict and resonate directly with young people, such as political exclusion, local conflicts over resources, corruption or discrimination against certain ethnic or religious groups.<sup>25</sup>

52. Protecting the human rights of young people requires also ensuring that responses to violent extremism do not stigmatize or instrumentalize youth but, rather, harness young women and men as agents of change in preventing terrorism and such extremism. In a UNDP report, a broad range of successful youth-led initiatives that address the root causes of violent extremism is identified.<sup>26</sup> Enabling young people's digital literacy and ability to identify fake news and resist divisive or exclusionary rhetoric and hate speech is critical. The Youth Engagement and Empowerment programme of the Office of Counter-Terrorism is aimed at reinforcing the positive contributions of youth to the prevention of violent extremism and strengthening the resilience of young people. Additional resources are required to increase the level of investment in a whole-of-society approach to the prevention of violent extremism and promote context-sensitive and gender-responsive policies and programmes that respect, protect and promote the rights of young people, foster their resilience and systematically integrate their meaningful participation.

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<sup>25</sup> Siobhan O'Neil and Kato Van Broeckhoven, eds., *Cradled by Conflict: Child Involvement in Armed Groups in Contemporary Conflicts* (New York, United Nations University, 2018).

<sup>26</sup> UNDP, *Frontlines: Young People at the Forefront of Preventing and Responding to Violent Extremism* (New York, 2019).

## **F. Institutionalization of the youth and peace and security agenda**

53. Since 2015, the engagement of young women and men has been recognized increasingly by Member States, the United Nations system and partners as central to inclusive and sustainable development and peacebuilding efforts. However, awareness still needs to be translated into concrete actions, including national-level measures, institutional priorities and dedicated funding and accountability measures, to ensure that all actors can deliver on the substantive pillars of resolutions [2250 \(2015\)](#) and [2419 \(2018\)](#).

### **Youth and peace and security in the Security Council and other intergovernmental forums**

54. Through resolution [2250 \(2015\)](#), a new path was opened to Security Council engagement in the role and circumstances of young women and men in the maintenance of peace and security. The Council has held several dedicated discussions on youth and peace and security since 2015, including an open debate in April 2018, on the occasion of the presentation of “The missing peace”. The debate led to the adoption of the second resolution on youth and peace and security, resolution [2419 \(2018\)](#), in June 2018, and in July 2019, the Council assessed the implementation of the youth and peace and security agenda.

55. The Security Council has had interactions with young people during nearly half of its country visits. A number of active United Nations field missions are explicitly requested by the Council to support the participation of young people, either by engaging with them directly or supporting national authorities in facilitating youth participation. Increasingly, since December 2015, reports of the Secretary-General presented to the Council have addressed the situation of young people.

56. In October 2019, a debate on peace and security in Africa entitled “Mobilizing the Youth towards Silencing the Guns by 2020” led to the adoption of a statement made by the President of the Security Council ([S/PRST/2019/15](#)), in which it was reaffirmed that a large youth population presented a unique demographic dividend that could contribute to lasting peace and economic prosperity. The African Union Special Envoy on Youth and young peacebuilders from civil society were among the briefers. Increasingly, the Council has sought the views of young people in thematic discussions on issues such as climate change and the women and peace and security agenda, as well as in country-specific discussions on Afghanistan and the Syrian Arab Republic.

57. Other intergovernmental forums have addressed the issue from various angles. In December 2019, the General Assembly adopted resolution [74/64](#), in which young people were encouraged to more actively engage in discussions on disarmament and non-proliferation. The President of the seventy-third session of the Assembly declared the youth and peace and security agenda to be one of her thematic priorities and on several occasions during her tenure, including at the Economic and Social Council Youth Forum held in April 2019, engaged in dialogue with young peacebuilders. Similarly, since 2015, the Peacebuilding Commission has provided young peacebuilders with a platform to present their work and policy recommendations through country-specific meetings, visits and dedicated thematic discussions, most recently in November 2019, at the initiative of El Salvador and under the chairmanship of Colombia. Inspired by the work of young peacebuilders in the Gambia and Kyrgyzstan, the Commission committed itself to exploring ways of further supporting youth peacebuilding initiatives.

### **Youth and peace and security and Member States**

58. The efforts of Member States to support the implementation of the youth and peace and security agenda comprise all five pillars of resolution [2250 \(2015\)](#), from the promotion of the political participation of young people to human rights mechanisms, educational reforms and employment policies, among others. Nonetheless, translating youth and peace and security into broader policy frameworks is key to ensuring strategic and coordinated action at the national level.

59. Increased recognition by national authorities of local and national peace efforts undertaken by young women and men can help to ensure that policy decisions are informed by the contributions of young people. National parliaments can play an important role in ensuring the implementation of the youth and peace and security agenda by adopting relevant legislation, commissioning national road maps for youth and peace and security, allocating financial resources and supporting inclusive youth participation.

60. Colombia, Finland, the Gambia, Nigeria and the Philippines are in the process of developing national road maps for youth and peace and security. In Finland, an action plan is being drafted in collaboration with a network of youth organizations that could serve as a blueprint for the development of action plans by other Member States. National action plans on women and peace and security, when developed through a participatory process and adequately resourced, have proven to be essential frameworks for country-level action.

61. Resolution [2250 \(2015\)](#) prompted the creation of national coalitions on youth and peace and security in several countries to facilitate the engagement of multiple stakeholders. Cameroon, Finland, Jordan, Nigeria and Sri Lanka have active coalitions, often at the initiative of youth-led and volunteer organizations and with support from the national authorities. Similar efforts to build national coalitions are ongoing in Afghanistan, Burundi, the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, India, Iraq, Lebanon, Myanmar, the Niger, Tunisia and Yemen.

62. A “group of champions” of youth, peace and security, formed in 2017 under the leadership of Jordan and Norway, has helped to garner the political buy-in of Member States for the agenda.

### **Youth and peace and security in the United Nations system**

63. The United Nations Youth Strategy, launched in September 2018, provides an internal road map for the Organization. While holistic in nature, given that it comprises five thematic priorities, it includes a specific priority on peacebuilding and resilience-building, directly aligned with resolutions [2250 \(2015\)](#) and [2419 \(2018\)](#). Under the Youth Strategy, the United Nations is committed to recognizing and supporting the positive contributions of young people to development, peace and security; social justice; the prevention of violence; disaster and risk reduction; and humanitarian and climate action.

64. Under the Youth Strategy, the United Nations is also committed to strengthening measures on the accountability of senior management regarding youth-related commitments and goals. Senior managers are responsible for ensuring that objectives related to young people and peace and security are fully integrated into all strategies, policies, budget allocations and funding requests specific to their entities.

65. As of December 2019, there were 14 youth focal points in the 22 active special political missions, including 1 full-time youth adviser in Somalia, and 3 such focal points in the 13 peacekeeping operations. Peace and development advisers, deployed in 49 countries and settings in 2019, can provide important guidance to United

Nations country teams on enhancing youth participation in conflict analysis, conflict-sensitive programming and conflict prevention efforts. Youth focal points on United Nations country teams are important human resources at the field level to spearhead the implementation of the youth and peace and security agenda across pillars. At the global level, a joint secretariat on youth and peace and security established by the Peacebuilding Support Office and UNFPA has been critical in facilitating the coordination of the youth and peace and security agenda throughout the humanitarian-development-peacebuilding nexus. Action must be taken to ensure that internal expertise on youth and peace and security within the United Nations is adequately positioned at the local, country, regional and global levels.

### Resourcing

66. Inadequate resourcing remains a central challenge to the implementation of resolutions [2250 \(2015\)](#) and [2419 \(2018\)](#). The lack of resources is a profound impediment to the realization of the peacebuilding and sustaining peace approach and of the 2030 Agenda because youth and peace and security is an accelerator of those global commitments. The few important initiatives that have been put in place by individuals, funds and donors cannot address the important funding needs identified in “The missing peace”, in which it was documented that 50 per cent of youth peacebuilding organizations operate on less than \$5,000 a year. In the report, a target of \$1.8 billion allocated to actions related to youth and peace and security was proposed ([A/72/761-S/2018/86](#), paras. 23 and 60 (a)).

67. Meeting the funding challenge requires the mobilization of additional and new resources, as well as a shift in focus towards preventive interventions tackling both the drivers of violence and the root causes of conflict. It would also require the capacity to track bilateral aid in support of young people in conflict-affected contexts. For the United Nations system, the Youth Strategy is a commitment to the development of a youth marker to track progress and ensure that programming contributes to the empowerment of young people and intergenerational equity. Efforts to track funding allocations quantitatively must be associated with qualitative assessments of programmes that identify investments in the positive contributions of young people to peace.

68. The Peacebuilding Fund has taken proactive measures to support young people’s critical contributions to peacebuilding at the local and national levels through the annual Youth Promotion Initiative. Between 2016 and 2019, the Fund invested a total of \$57.2 million through the Initiative, increasing funding from \$2.7 million in 2016 to \$20.4 million in 2019. A total of 40 per cent of all Initiative funds have been allocated directly to civil society partners. To date, the Initiative remains the largest funding measure in support of the implementation of resolutions [2250 \(2015\)](#) and [2419 \(2018\)](#). Examples of the Fund’s investments in young people include Burundi, where a Fund-financed project resulted in the creation, under the Ministry of Interior, of a 36-member inter-party youth group that is elaborating a strategy to increase youth participation. In Kyrgyzstan, the organization Search for Common Ground has implemented a Peacebuilding Fund project using a youth-led approach to mitigate the factors that lead to radicalization and to increase collaboration between young people and older persons in local decision-making.

69. A number of initiatives support the peacebuilding work of youth-led organizations. Donors and partners can explore innovative approaches to support the capacity and leadership of young people, such as the Youth 360 initiative of Search for Common Ground, which combines access to financial, human and technical resources for formal and informal youth groups.

### III. A call to invest in youth and peace and security

70. In the present report, it is demonstrated that progress has been made in supporting young people in the context of peace and security since the adoption of Security Council resolution 2250 (2015). Young women and men have influenced peace processes and humanitarian response efforts. They have engaged with decision makers on peace and security issues in local- to national-level policy discussions. They have demanded a multilateral system that engages them meaningfully, and they have demonstrated their potential to forge alliances and be partners to count on in sustaining peace and fostering development in a world faced with multiple challenges.

71. However, while there has been significant progress with regard to inclusivity, a more systematic approach to implementing resolutions 2250 (2015) and 2419 (2018) is urgently needed.

72. With the launch of the Decade of Action for the sustainable development goals, it is time for all actors to step up their efforts on youth and peace and security. The comprehensive and strategic recommendations formulated in “The missing peace” provide guidance thereon, including three mutually reinforcing strategies: investing in the capacities, agency and leadership of young people; addressing the structural barriers limiting meaningful youth inclusion and participation; and prioritizing collaborative action by working with young people as equal and essential partners for peace (*ibid.*, para. 59).

73. In order to accelerate the implementation of those overarching recommendations, and as the fifth anniversary of resolution 2250 (2015) draws near, I wish to highlight a number of specific recommendations to Member States, regional organizations, United Nations entities and other actors.

#### **Actions to be taken by the Security Council**

74. In acknowledging the progress made thus far, I invite the Security Council to consider taking the following actions:

- (a) Specifically encouraging the meaningful participation of young people in peace and security efforts, including as relevant within mission mandates;
- (b) Systematically engaging with diverse groups of young people and representatives of youth organizations during the country visits that it undertakes;
- (c) Expanding and systematizing the participation of young people as briefers in its country-specific and thematic discussions.

#### **Actions to be taken by Member States and regional organizations**

75. Recognizing that the youth and peace and security agenda is the responsibility of all Member States, I invite Member States and regional organizations to consider taking the following actions:

- (a) Developing dedicated local, national and regional road maps for youth and peace and security;
- (b) Enhancing the meaningful participation of young women and men in peace processes and throughout negotiations of peace agreements;
- (c) Increasing funding for the implementation of the youth and peace and security agenda, including accessible resourcing for organizations led by and focused on young people;

(d) In conformity with international law, taking specific measures to ensure the protection of civilians, including young people, in particular young human rights defenders and peacebuilders, during and after armed conflict.

**Actions to be taken by the United Nations**

76. To accelerate the efforts of Member States, the United Nations could take the following actions:

(a) Ensuring the integration of the youth and peace and security agenda into the Organization's strategic and planning documents, conflict analyses, frameworks, initiatives and guidance tools at the global, regional and national levels;

(b) Establishing a network of youth and peace and security focal points at the country, regional and headquarters levels and building on existing human resources to ensure dedicated capacities with regard to youth and peace and security;

(c) Allocating appropriate resources, as feasible, to the accelerated implementation of the youth and peace and security agenda, including funding for capacity-building efforts and programmatic interventions;

(d) Developing dedicated guidance on the protection of young people, including those who engage with the Organization in the context of peace and security, as part of a new common protection agenda for the United Nations system.

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