



POLICY PAPER ON A FURTHER YOUTH COMMITMENT TO PROMOTE PEACE AND NON-VIOLENCE

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1. Introduction

Peace and non-violence are among the core values of the European Youth Forum (YFJ), stemming from the organisation's current and the past priorities as well as from the spirit of its Statutes. The YFJ understands peace as a broader definition than the sole absence of violence and war, encompassing all factors – internal, social and environmental- which contribute to the free and full enjoyment of existence.

The YFJ has contributed to fostering peace dialogues in conflict and post conflict zones: with work in South-East Europe and the Mediterranean being the most visible outreach areas. Youth Work Development in these regions has been a tool for peace, conflict management and prevention, and post-conflict reconciliation. Projects like the Peace Cruise in 1999¹ and the Balkan Youth Project in early 2000² piloted these tools for dialogue and peace. Study visits to conflict zones in the Middle East, in Western Sahara and the Caucasus also paved the way for the recognition of the crucial role for youth organisations in times of armed conflict. The YFJ also participated actively in the promotion of the first and the second "All Different, All Equal" campaign and is part of a strong youth component within the United Nation's Alliance of Civilisations Initiative.

Peace and non-violence are values that cannot be taken for granted in today's Europe. Indeed, there is still potential for violent social tension within our societies and for armed conflict to take place just beyond the EU's borders.

Promoting peace and non-violence should be understood as a manifold concept and in this sense should be framed within the paradigm related of human security³ on the one hand it refers to the rejection of armed violence, on the other hand it also includes many other values such as the respect and promotion of diversity, fundamental rights, solidarity, environmental sustainability and global justice. Embracing peace entails therefore counteracting what undermines these values such as the rise of extremist ideologies, hate speech, discrimination, prejudices and stereotypes, intolerance, violence, poverty and the scarcity of/unequal access to natural resources. It also implies being aware of global challenges and a willingness to address them.

On the occasion of the end of the International Decade for a Culture of Peace⁴ and Non-violence for the Children of the World (2001-2010), launched by the

¹ For more details see www.peacecruise.com.

² For more information see 2005-11-07 Balkan Youth Project Final Narrative Report.

³ The paradigm of human security stems from the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Human Development Report (1994). In this context, human security refers to an approach of security based upon the individual and the communities rather than on territories. The human security dimension is very broad and comprises threats related to armed violence, food security, environmental disasters and the right to development. See UNDP human development report 1994 <http://hdr.undp.org/en/reports/global/hdr1994/chapters>.

⁴ The United Nations defines culture of peace as "a set of values, attitudes, modes of behaviour and ways of life that reject violence and prevent conflicts by tackling their root causes to solve problems through dialogue and negotiation among individuals, groups and nations". See UN

UNESCO in 2000⁵, this policy paper aims at defining the role of youth organisations and young people in the promotion of non-violence and peace. To this purpose, it identifies some **contexts** in which young people and youth organisations can further commit to building a culture of peace and some useful **tools** they can base their efforts upon.

While the promotion of peace differs depending upon the environment in which one operates, the global dimension should always be taken into account; hence, young Europeans should bear in mind the existing global inequalities and their consequences, such as poverty, migration, scarcity of natural resources, climate change and address them when engaging in this field⁶.

2. Identifying and counteracting various forms of violence

2.1. Armed violence

Notwithstanding legitimate defence needs - militaristic ideologies, the arms trade and mandatory military service, are contrary to peaceful values. The YFJ believes that in order to put forward values necessary to effectively promote a genuine culture of peace:

- Young people should enjoy the fundamental right of conscientious objection, stemming from existing human rights standards such as article 9 of the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and fundamental freedoms, without any limitations;⁷
- Armed forces should be organised by national governments according to the principle of voluntary enlistment. This requires the presence of a set of standards to ensure fair, honest and transparent recruitment practices;
- Institutional stakeholders should engage further in the fight against the recruitment of child soldiers by abiding to the existing standards⁸. To this aim, European youth organisations as well as other civil society organisations are well placed to advocate for further implementation of these principles in the existing framework of the European Common Foreign and Security Policy;
- Governments should support the global Arms Trade Treaty which is necessary to put global arms trade under control⁹.

Resolutions [A/RES/52/13](#) : Culture of Peace and [A/RES/53/243](#), Declaration and Programme of Action on a Culture of Peace).

⁵ For more information on the Decade, see <http://www3.unesco.org/iycp/>.

⁶ For further information see 0007-08 Policy Paper on Global Education: a global vision on education-an education on global citizenship

⁷ See 0945-07 YFJ resolution on conscientious objection

⁸ Including the EU guidelines on Children and Armed Conflict, the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict, the Security Council Resolution S/RES/1882 (2009) and the mandate of the Special Representative of the UN Secretary General for Children and Armed Conflict.

⁹ See 1038-08 YFJ Resolution on an Arms Trade Treaty

2.2. Extremist ideologies

Fundamental values of the promotion of peace and non-violence are opposed to any form of extremism including extremist ideologies, hate speech and hate crime, discrimination and other forms of intolerance.

Although freedom of speech and the outcome of democratic elections need to be respected, the danger represented by extremist ideologies should be acknowledged and tackled as being in opposition to cultural diversity and violating the fundamental rights of vulnerable groups. Such ideologies have been exposed in the recent past as pathways towards conflict and violence¹⁰.

- A reflection on the rise of far-right parties and other extremist groups at both national and European levels needs to be made. Similarly, there needs to be a greater understanding of the reasons behind their successful targeting of young people.
- Effective measures should be put in place in fields such as non-formal education, media monitoring, training journalists, raising awareness to counter the spreading of populist ideologies based upon stereotyping specific groups such as migrants, Roma or other ethnic minorities, LGBT people etc.

2.3 Hate speech and hate crime

Hate speech undermines the very values on which a genuine culture of peace is based upon and can lead to violence, hatred and conflict. Hate crime based on racism, sexism, homophobia, transphobia, romaphobia, anti-semitism and islamophobia as well as on any other form of intolerance and discrimination also represents a major challenge to promoting peace.

- Young people and youth organisations need to further commit to prevent hate crime by raising the awareness of the civil society, by fighting against stereotypes and prejudice and by advocating for the introduction of better legislative standards¹¹.
- Notwithstanding the importance of promoting freedom of speech¹², which is a cornerstone in democratic societies, measures against hate speech should be adopted and effectively implemented at both a regional and national level on the basis of the legal restrictions to

¹⁰ For a further insight into this see 0059-09 European Youth Forum position on the Durban Conference Review, paragraph 2

¹¹ For this purpose the guidelines developed by the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) on hate crimes should be a reference.
<http://www.osce.org/item/36671.html>

¹² Limits to the freedom of speech, allowed under international human rights law, should serve a legitimate aim and should be necessary and proportionate to achieve it. In particular the European Court of Human Rights case-law constitutes the guidance to assess the legitimacy of any limit posed to the freedom of expression. For further information see document 0059-09 YFJ Position on the Durban Conference Review, par. 2

freedom of speech allowed under the European Convention for the Protection of Human Right and Fundamental Freedoms.

2.4. Other forms of violence

Forms of violence other than armed violence also need to be tackled. In this context, major efforts are still needed to fight against domestic violence, homophobic violence, human trafficking, contemporary forms of slavery, female genital mutilation and other practices harmful to health, which particularly target children, girls and women¹³.

- A genuine culture of peace cannot be achieved without a strong commitment from civil society, civil society organisations and institutional stakeholders to fight against gender-based stereotypes and prejudices in Europe as well as in other continents.
- In this context, the YFJ reiterates the calls made upon institutional stakeholders and national governments to effectively tackle these issues¹⁴ and commit to update and follow up the guidelines included in the Policy Paper on Achieving Equality between Women and Men.

3. Tools for promoting non-violence in Europe

The YFJ believes that the fight against extremism and other forms of intolerance encompasses several dimensions:

- *Education* plays an important role as it contributes to fostering critical thinking and to providing people with competencies that enable them to put into question the visions promoted by extremist groups. Campaigning and awareness-raising are also important in order to support and promote diversity¹⁵ Existing efforts and initiatives in the fields of global education, intercultural and inter-religious dialogue and formal peace curricula need also to be strengthened, given the key contribution of these tools to promoting a culture of peace¹⁶. Further support to and recognition of non-formal education is necessary also in

¹³ See 0685-07 Policy Paper on Achieving Equality between Women and Men and paragraph 4.1.3 and 4.2.3 of the YFJ Policy Paper on Violence

¹⁴ See paragraph 5.2 of the 0558-06 YFJ Policy paper on violence.

¹⁵ To this aim European Campaigns such as “All different-all equal” need to be supported by institutional stakeholders. For further information on the activities undertaken by youth organisations in the framework of the “All different-all equal” campaign see the YFJ publication [European Youth Campaign for Diversity, Human Rights and Participation](#)

¹⁶ In this context, [the Council of Europe White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue](#) needs to be fully implemented and initiatives such as the UN Alliance of Civilisation (www.unaoc.org), and in particular its Youth Solidarity Fund, fully supported. For further information on actions aimed at promoting global education see 0007-08 Policy Paper on Global Education: a global vision on education- an education for global citizenship.

order to develop its full potential in fighting against stereotypes and prejudices and in promoting diversity¹⁷.

- History shows us that extremist ideologies are more easily spread in times of vulnerability such as during economic crisis, unemployment, military conflicts. Social inclusion and the enjoyment of fundamental rights are a powerful preventive tool against extremist ideologies, which are often based upon the disenchantment of certain groups and the manipulation of uncertainty and fears. Promoting a culture of peace cannot indeed be effective if not accompanied by *policies aimed at promoting equal opportunities and social inclusion for all*.
- The YFJ congratulates the commitment put forward by the European Commission¹⁸ to ensure the dispositions of the European Youth Pact in the field of employment remain top priorities of the EU Member States. The YFJ also supports the ILO Decent Work Agenda and recognises its Country Programmes as central efforts to reduce poverty and achieve equitable, inclusive and sustainable development which ultimately underpin peace in communities and the society.
- Setting up leisure time activities for young people is also central in this debate as to mitigate the impact multiple forms of violence can have on disadvantaged urban young people. Youth organisations have a key role in this regard as their working methodologies develop projects and activities for young people to socialise in a peer-to-peer learning environment that promotes fair-play attitudes, respect for diversity, self-esteem and cultural expression competences.
- *Coalitions* among youth organisations, other civil society organisations, moderate political parties, governments and other institutional stakeholders are also key in fighting against the values put forward by extremist ideologies¹⁹. Furthermore it is key that these stakeholders work together in order to develop the critical thinking of young people and of the civil society in general against propaganda, manipulation and attempts at propagating stereotypes and prejudices. Youth participation is a key instrument to promote democratic values as well as a dynamic civil society in which governments and other entities should foster developments.
- Media should strive to fight against stereotypes and prejudices, design and implement guidelines aimed at providing adequate coverage of

¹⁷ For further information on the criteria ensuring quality of non formal education see document 0009-08 Policy Paper on Non-Formal Education: a framework for indicating and assuring quality

¹⁸ See the European Commission's Communication on an EU Strategy for Youth (COM (2009)200 final, 27.04.2009).

¹⁹ To this aim, initiatives such as the Charter of European Political Parties for a non-racist society should be encouraged and supported by youth organisations and further political commitment should be taken to fight against all types of discriminatory ideologies.

equality and non discrimination issues, contribute to raising the awareness of journalist on equality and non discrimination issues, condemn hate speech put forward by journalists and other public figures, and act as a watchdog against racism, discrimination and other forms of intolerance. To this aim the commitments undertaken by the Council of Europe in this field, such as the resolution and action plan on cultural diversity and media pluralism in times of globalisation, adopted by the 7th European Ministerial Conference on Mass Media Policy and the recommendations stemming out from the study funded by the European Commission on media and diversity need to be implemented.

4. Tools for conflict prevention and peace-building

Raising awareness of the values of peace and non-violence is essential for the prevention of social turmoil, conflict between communities, extremism, political manipulation and armed conflicts and should be at the core of any conflict prevention and conflict transformation effort.

Young people and youth organisations are privileged actors in the promotion of a peace culture in post-conflict environments as they are able to create bridges between communities and social groups based upon the principle of “humanity for all”. Promoting peace in the context of a conflict requires a strong commitment to the values of peace and non-violence, active involvement of the entire society and tight cooperation among different actors such as civil society, civil society organisations, national governments and international organisations.

The YFJ believes that, in the effort to achieve a culture of peace, the following points need to be adequately addressed in order to design and implement effective conflict prevention and peace-building strategies:

- A key element is *education*, including its formal, non-formal and informal components. As highlighted by the experience of youth organisations, specifically their educational work (including intercultural and inter-religious dialogue²⁰) is crucial both in times of peace and in phases of conflict or conflict latency. Youth organisations are key providers of non-formal education opportunities and have a strong impact on raising civil society’s awareness of a culture of peace²¹.

Youth exchanges also play a crucial role in building a culture of peace. By getting to know people from other cultures, mutual friendships arise and prejudices often disappear. Young people involved in exchanges develop intercultural competences, which enable them to build bridges between cultures and to become competent actors in intercultural dialogue, a key tool in promoting peace. Therefore, intercultural encounters and exchanges should be promoted.

²⁰ See the YFJ toolkit [Living Faiths Together](#)

²¹ See the recommendations stemming out from the YFJ seminar “ Youth Exchanges: Key players in promoting intercultural and inter-religious dialogue” (0924-08 report of the event) and 1089-08 Exchanges for all Action plan

- Young people and youth organisations can play a central role in the process of conflict prevention, peace building and post-conflict reconciliation, this has already been acknowledged²² by international organisations and civil society actors engaging in conflict prevention and peace building²³. The European Youth Forum has for several years lobbied for the recognition of the important role of youth organisations in post-conflict zones in the biannual UN General Assembly resolution on youth. It is time for the Member States to put their debate within the UN General Assembly aside and strengthen the role of civil society in general as well as providing particular support to youth organisations.
- The efforts undertaken by European youth organisations as well as by youth organisations and platforms in other continents in the field of development cooperation, global education, conflict prevention and peace-building need to be supported politically and financially. Cooperation between European youth platforms and other regional youth platforms in programmes and projects aimed at building a culture of peace, at promoting the Millennium Development Goals and at fulfilling fundamental rights need to be enhanced and non-formal education should be considered as a core tool to this aim;
- The needs of young people must be carefully assessed by any actor involved in peace-building and conflict prevention, and in consultation with young people themselves. In particular, young people must be consulted via transparent consultation mechanisms, taking into consideration how a specific conflict situation is affecting or has affected different groups of young people, in particular girls, young women and young people with fewer opportunities. To this aim, governments and other institutional stakeholders have to design and implement outreach strategies aimed at involving these specific groups in peace building and conflict prevention initiatives;
- Youth organisations are well placed to act as a watchdog on policies implemented by institutional stakeholders in the fields of development cooperation, conflict prevention and peace-building. Young people as citizens and youth organisations as part of civil society share the responsibility of holding the European Union and European governments accountable to their commitments in the field of development cooperation and to ensure that human rights are mainstreamed into all external EU policies.²⁴ Youth organisations should

²² See for example the main findings of the study « Youth and Conflict: a brief review of available literature » by Marc Sommers

²³ The role of young people in development and peace has been for example recognised by the World Bank and the IFM (see document 0636-03 Youth, Development and Peace), the Berghof Research Center for Constructive Conflict Management (see [Conflict Transformation through Education and Youth Programmes](#)).

²⁴ See for example the EU thematic guidelines related to the promotion of human rights in foreign policy.

be consulted, together with other civil society organisations, by policy makers when developing and implementing these policies.

5. Conclusion

Promoting a culture of peace is a process embracing many different perspectives and fields of action. Similarly, the contexts within which a culture of peace needs to be achieved varies as well as the challenges intrinsically linked to these contexts.

While all these complexities need to be taken into account, as well as geographical and cultural diversities, the values upon which a culture of peace is based upon include human rights, diversity, solidarity and global justice, human security and intercultural dialogue. We would like to stress that in times of economic crisis it is very important to ensure social cohesion and provide security to individuals and communities. As young people we are both the subject and object of our generation's drive to create a culture of peace and to prevent violence in all its forms.

While the geographical and material scope of the commitment put forward by youth organisations to promote a culture of peace might vary, it is important that specific actions aimed at achieving a culture of peace in a given context are designed. Considering the vital role played by young people in terms of bringing changes to societal attitudes and promoting change, any efforts aimed at promoting a culture of peace should effectively involve youth and foresee genuine mechanisms by which they can bring forward their contributions and make their voices heard.