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Written statement* submitted by the Jssor Youth Organization, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

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* This written statement is issued, unedited, in the language(s) received from the submitting non-governmental organization(s).

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Good Practices for Youth inclusion: Encouraging the participation of young people with fewer opportunities

Good Practices for Youth inclusion Encouraging the participation of young people with fewer opportunities

For most of the youth development whether in physical, emotional, intellectual, or social processes takes place within the context of adult guidance and direction. At first, adults are necessary for safety and survival – few beings are as helpless as a human infant. As the developing child learns autonomy and initiative he/she becomes more capable of independent actions and thought, and as simple skills are mastered he may take over certain survival activities for himself. But survival is not the same as development into a successful, well functioning, independent, contributing member of society. The latter requires much more from the adults surrounding a child than assuring that they survive – it requires a steady flow of interactive engagements through which the developing child gains increasing self-sufficiency while learning about self, others, and society as a whole.

Youth engagement has emerged over the past three decades as a philosophy that guides all of those interactions between the developing youth and the adults in their lives in ways that best prepare the youth for successful, satisfying adulthood. The youth engagement philosophy is grounded in the belief that children and youth are best served when they are active participants in their relationships and activities with adults and other youth, when their input influences decisions made about them, appropriate to their age and maturity, and when they can shape those relationships as much as they are shaped by them. Youth engagement moves the philosophy from “children should be seen and not heard” (children are a blank slate on which adults write who the child will become) to “children benefit by actively participating in their own development.

The international community has recognized the importance of youth participating in political systems, including through several international conventions and UN resolutions¹. In line with these commitments, Jssor Youth Organisation views youth as a positive force for transformative social change, and aims to help enhance youth political participation.

For young people with fewer opportunities, participation is a step in successfully integrating them into society. To succeed, participation strategies should be tailored and shaped together with them. It is especially important that youth not feel that decisions are being made for them by someone else and then given to them with an expectation that they will accept those decisions. We need to create an environment that invites youth participation and prevents decisions from being made when the youth is not participating, and take into consideration the following:

- Empowering by involving
- Mentoring rather than assisting
- Inclusion instead of stigmatisation on
- Short-term projects in a long-term perspective

¹ The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) has codified everyone’s “right to take part in the government of his country, directly or through freely chosen representatives” (Article 21).

The United Nations’ Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), In 1996, the UN General Assembly adopted the World Programme of Action for Youth to the Year 2000 and Beyond, In 2010, the 122nd Assembly of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) adopted an ambitious resolution on youth by consensus.

It is important to remember that even though youth involvement promotes positive youth development, involving youth is not only a way to help them to develop positively, but also to utilize their expertise in enhancing systems transformation through:

- More specific programmes
- Better coordinated services
- Better recognised non-formal education
- More evidence-based knowledge
- More support for youth workers, youth leaders and youth organisations
- Tailor services and supports to be accessible, coordinated, appealing, non-stigmatizing, and developmentally appropriate – build on strengths to enable the young people to pursue their goals across the relevant transition domains.

Legal Framework

In many countries, the relationship between youth and political parties is strained. To break a cycle of scepticism and mistrust, youth can develop the skills and motivation to successfully interact with political parties. At the same time, political parties could be encouraged to create space for them by removing barriers to youth involvement. In some contexts, youth wings of political parties have played a central role, by providing a powerbase for young members, retaining and grooming them, and reaching out to young voters.

A youth-friendly legal framework is crucial in enabling youth political participation. In one-third of countries, laws stipulate an eligibility age to run for parliament at 25 years or higher, creating a gap between the legal age of majority and/or voting age, on the one hand, and the age at which an individual can serve in elected office.

Since national governments and parliaments can review the legal framework, they can consider:

- Aligning the minimum voting age and the minimum age of eligibility to run for office;
 - Introducing youth and women's quotas in electoral laws; and
 - Identifying and addressing context-specific legal barriers to youth participation, such as to facilitate the registration of youth-led organizations.
 - Civil society organizations (CSOs) and political parties could review and discuss the legal framework for youth participation;
 - Consider proposals for a youth-friendly legal framework; and campaign for changes.
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