



Braga Youth Action Plan

INTRODUCTION

We, representatives of youth and youth-serving organisations, the United Nations System and other inter-governmental organisations have met from 2 to 7 August 1998 in Braga, Portugal at the third World Youth Forum of the United Nations System.

We have gathered here to promote Youth Participation for Human Development, convinced that the participation of youth is a prerequisite for the development of humankind as a whole.

On the threshold of a new millennium, young people are full of hope and commitment. We are convinced that in partnership between youth and youth-serving organisations, national governments, the United Nations System and other inter-governmental organisations, we can shape our world for the creation of a better future for all.

Young people face the challenges of injustice and exclusion resulting mainly from the enormous inequities in income, wealth and power dominating today's world. Because trade and investment agreements and relations remain unfair there is a growing gap between the rich and the poor.

Young people are burdened by the financial and debt crisis, and as a result of Structural Adjustment Programmes they experience the consequences of on-going cuts in government expenditure in human services. There is a decline of educational systems, young peoples' access to health services is restricted and youth unemployment is growing.

Young people suffer from xenophobia and racism, homophobia, exclusion from democratic participation. Young people lack access to information despite new possibilities to communicate across borders that should promote tolerance in multiethnic societies, increased respect for Human Rights and greater participation.

Real and sustainable solutions to these problems can only be found at the global level through the development of new partnerships between all the parties involved. Such solutions include the promotion of social spending through the cancellation of external debt of the highly indebted poor countries; trade agreements respecting the right to work and decent working conditions; fulfilment of the agreed 0.7% target of GNP for Official Development Assistance; the full payment of UN dues in time without conditions; and further reform of the United Nations System.

Young people can and should be a part of the solution to the problems in the world. Everywhere, young people and youth organisations show that they are not obstacles, but invaluable resources for development. Youth are building democratic leadership, civil society and social capital for the 21st century.

With the Braga Youth Action Plan we want to empower young people to participate in human development. Youth Participation for Human Development requires that:

- the international community, the private sector and especially governments provide young people with adequate financial resources in order to realise their entire potential in becoming full and active partners in the development process;
- young people are recognised not only as future leaders, but as actors of society today, with a direct stake in the development process;
- young women and men should be enabled to participate on equal terms: sexism is an obstacle that must be overcome and the empowerment of women a prerequisite for development;
- ALL young people should be enabled to participate as both creators and beneficiaries of development: unemployment, illiteracy, the discrimination against indigenous young people, against young people with disabilities or discrimination based on religious beliefs, and other forms of social exclusion are threats to development;
- justice between present and future generations is recognised as a fundamental base for sustainable development: young people should participate in the decisions taken today about the resources of tomorrow;
- youth should participate in political decision making on all levels, and young people must be enabled to organise themselves in youth NGOs, students unions, trade unions, political parties, and in the creation of massmedia, in order to fully participate in political, economic, social and cultural life; and
- youth issues are not treated in isolation, but mainstreamed into all policy making. The third World Youth Forum is an example of how a cross-sectoral approach can be used successfully.

The Braga Youth Action Plan is a joint commitment to Youth Participation for Human Development made by youth NGOs, the United Nations system and other inter-governmental organisations in partnership.

As participants at the third World Youth Forum of the United Nations System, we pledge our personal and unwavering commitment towards Youth Participation for Human Development.

We now call upon all youth, governments of the world and the international community to work together with us to carry out these commitments and make our vision of Youth Participation for Human Development a reality.

The World Youth Forum Recommends:

YOUTH POLICIES

Integrated Cross-Sectoral Youth Policies

1. the formulation in all states of youth policies, by the year 2005, which are cross sectoral, comprehensive and formulated with long-term vision coupled with Action Plans taking into consideration the guidelines set forth in the *World Programme of Action for Youth to the Year 2000 and Beyond*. Youth policies should be accorded a legal status and backed by legislative structures and sufficient resources. We encourage all governments to establish and/or strengthen youth focal point institutions within the governmental structure. Youth policies should be formulated via a thorough consultation process between the government and the national youth NGO platforms as well as other stakeholders as equal partners in that process.
2. the effective implementation of cross sectoral youth policies in accordance with the Action Plans and their time-frames which are formulated together with the youth policies. Action Plans should be utilised as a guideline for monitoring and evaluating the status of the implementation of youth policies by all stakeholders, especially by the youth NGO platforms.
3. that the United Nations, in collaboration with other inter-governmental and non-governmental organizations, identify the best practices on youth policy formulation and implementation and encourage the adaptation of the principles and experiences among the member states of the United Nations. Greater use could be made of the Youth Theme Group mechanism within the United Nations Resident Co-ordinators System to increase the co-ordination of United Nations entities in the field of youth for the promotion of national youth policies. The Youth Theme Group should give priority to collaboration between youth NGOs and United Nations entities.

Youth NGO Co-operation at the National Level:

4. the formation and/or strengthening of national youth NGO platforms, which represent the widest range of democratic youth organizations of each state to be established with the initiatives of the youth organizations themselves. The platforms should respect each member organization's independence and operate based on the principles of solidarity and democracy. The governments should recognize the national youth NGO platforms legally and as partner in policy making, provide them with adequate financial support and guarantee the free development of NGOs.
5. the formulation of informal and formal consultative mechanisms between national youth NGO platforms and governments, which operate based on the principles of mutual respect and equal partnership, so that the concerns of youth are fully reflected in the national policy making.
6. the United Nations System, international organizations, including international and national youth NGO platforms, should strengthen the capacity of youth NGOs at the national, regional and international levels through enhanced co-operation at all levels.

Youth, Poverty Eradication and Development:

7. based on the Braga Initiative on Debt Crisis, governments; the international community, including the IMF, the World Bank and other United Nations agencies, to work in partnership with youth NGOs to organise regional seminars before the year 2000 to assess the impact of the debt crisis on young men and women in countries with such debts. The results of their findings should be used to make informed policy in the international community, particularly in the areas of structural adjustment programmes, capacity building, awareness raising, and advocacy with the aim of eradicating poverty. These regional seminars also should lead to a joint international conference of Youth NGOs and the United Nations system, including the World Bank and the IMF, to be held before the year 2001.
8. We recommend that youth organisations, in co-operation with governments, United Nations agencies and organisations, IGOs, and international financial institutions, establish where they do not exist, and strengthen existing national, sub-regional, and regional youth networks and agencies. Such agencies, autonomous in planning, decision making, and implementation, should carry out effective poverty eradication, participate in development programmes, and act as a monitoring body to evaluate progress. They should give due consideration to the social and cultural background of target groups, and appropriate training and follow-up should involve local community members.

9. While emphasising the fact that Governments and the international community have the primary responsibility for poverty eradication, the World Youth Forum affirms the indispensable contributions made by young people in poverty eradication and development. We recommend that all major actors concerned with poverty and youth promote, support, develop, and fund youth volunteerism. Furthermore, high-profile should be given to youth-led volunteerism during the International Year of Volunteers in 2001.

YOUTH PARTICIPATION

Participation of ALL Young People:

10. it be recognised that young people with disabilities have greater difficulties participating in society due to lack of equal opportunities. To improve their independent access to the physical environment, information, devices of assistance, equipment, awareness campaigns and fundraising are necessary. This should be promoted and enhanced at all levels through co-operation among NGO's concerned with disability, as well as UN agencies, governments and IGO's.
11. governments, NGOs, IGOs and the UN system promote inter-cultural understanding among different cultures through workshops, seminars, exchange programmes and youth camps, with an adequate evaluation process to ensure that all cultures, and specifically Indigenous young people, are fully recognised, respected and valued in society. We also propose that the UN sponsor a World Indigenous Youth Conference and for any future UN sponsored youth activities, processes be established to ensure specific Indigenous participants are included as delegates in their own right.
12. that NGOs take the initiative, in co-operation with UN specialised agencies, programmes and funds as well as national youth platforms, to establish conferences that enable an exchange of experiences and information about working with young people living in extreme poverty and those requiring protection from violence, in particular young women. Priority should be given to reaching young people living in extreme poverty and working in partnership with them in the design and implementation of youth policies and concrete projects in the areas of health, education, training and employment. We also propose the creation of national monitoring centres to submit an annual report to the United Nations System on young people victimised by violence. The results of the conferences on young people excluded by extreme poverty and the report on young people victimised by violence should be widely disseminated by all forms of media and used as a reference in evaluating the implementation or national youth policies.

Youth Organisations and the United Nations System:

13. the United Nations support broad involvement of youth NGOs in the decision making process in a democratic manner throughout the United Nations System. We ask for greater consultation and the full and effective participation of youth NGOs in United Nations System conferences, commissions, specialised agencies, programmes and funds – which should meet in different regions to ensure equitable geographic representation. We encourage Member States to include representatives of youth NGOs in national delegations to the General Assembly, and other United Nations System conferences and commissions. This must allow for a wide, inclusive and gender balanced representation of all youth, including groups such as indigenous people, the youth with disabilities, immigrants, refugees and all minorities.
14. The recognition of the responsibility of youth to take it upon themselves to help implement the Braga Youth Action Plan and other United Nations initiatives - thus we offer to the United Nations System the services of youth at the national, regional and international levels. In order for this to be successful, there must be increased co-ordination of such implementation at the national and regional levels, information should be made easily accessible to all young people (which may be facilitated by United Nations System offices); the question of national funding to broaden the effectiveness of youth NGOs with the aim of using such funds to set up eventual self reliant organisations should be addressed; and non-associated youth must be involved in order to ensure effective implementation of all programmes.
15. That youth issues should be given higher priority in United Nations System. We recommend the strengthening of the United Nations Youth Unit and its counterparts in other funds, programmes and specialised agencies and the provision to them of greater resources and more staff – notably young people. We recommend the expansion of their mandate to include the dissemination of information and the co-ordination of policies and programmes between youth NGOs and the various specialised agencies, funds and programmes. There should be national liaison offices for young people at the United Nations local offices, and a quota for youth organisations in the national United Nations programmes. We must also ensure the continuation of the World Youth Forum process, including the convening of regional youth fora/consultations both in the preparation and follow-up of the Forum and the strengthening of its links with future high-level, inter-governmental conferences on youth (such as the Ministers' Conference on Youth), through joint preparation, meetings and follow-up. Member States should contribute generously to the United Nations Youth Fund, which should give priority to for South - South project.

Education for the 21st Century:

16. that education shall be free of charge at all levels, and equally accessible to everyone. Access to all education should not be on the basis of economic status. We call on governments to increase resource allocation to education and for UNESCO to be the co-ordinating agency, with the technical and financial contributions of Governments, for the establishment of a World Education Fund to provide grants to facilitate equal access to all levels of education.
17. that it be recognised as a right the empowerment of young people via full and active participation and representation in all types of education, and calls upon governments to do the same. We call on governments to recognise and promote the importance of non-formal education, it being integral to the full development of individuals and societies and as therefore being complementary to formal education. We recommend the establishment of Departments of Non-formal Education within Ministries of Education, which would work in partnership with NGOs responsible for non-formal education policies, through a democratic NGO forum.
18. while recognising that education should be relevant to employment opportunities, we call on the governments to analyse and review their formal education policies to incorporate the teaching of languages, including local and indigenous languages, and global citizenship education, emphasising universal concepts such as peace, human rights, intercultural and inter-religious understanding, environmental protection, sustainable development, and gender equality. The World Youth Forum calls for the development of regional and international teaching materials through United Nations agencies, the adequate training of all educators and the establishment of national co-ordination units.

Youth Employment for Social Development:

19. the recognition that the problem of youth unemployment is serious and complex which requires action both the macro and microeconomic levels by governments, the social partners, NGOs, and the United Nations System. There is a need to promote, improve, and extend the design and implementation of policies and programmes to promote employment among young people. We recommend that the United Nations System, in close collaboration with youth NGOs, undertake a comparative evaluation of the situation of youth employment programmes in different countries from different regions. This evaluation should emphasise programmes for disadvantaged youth, such as, but not exclusively, women, youth with disabilities, the long term unemployed, indigenous peoples and migrants. The evaluation should look at issues such as the sustainability of jobs created once programmes are completed, the quality of jobs created and the contribution of the project to social development.

20. the recognition that there is a lack of institutional capacity of NGOs in the employment area and communication between NGOs and the United Nations System. NGOs often face difficulties in raising funds to finance projects and lack knowledge about existing projects and programmes to promote youth employment. To overcome this, we propose a new system of information exchange between youth NGOs and the United Nations System and a framework of collaboration to provide technical and financial support to NGOs. The first step is for all NGOs to gain access to relevant communication facilities (with the assistance of the United Nations System). The second step would be to create a web site and mail-out directory with and for NGOs as another means of communication. The Webster should contain, among other things, information regarding the NGOs and International Organizations themselves, printed material in electronic format produced by the United Nations System, project updates and experiences and ideas on how to obtain financial and technical support for activities related to youth employment.
21. that there is a need to empower, mobilise and inform young people about fundamental rights at work. In order to promote social development these rights must be respected by all. Youth NGOs should participate in the ILO's efforts to publicise its Conventions, Recommendations and Resolutions, especially the "Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work" adopted by the International Labour Conference in June 1998. We further recommend that an information dissemination campaign be undertaken by NGOs with the financial support of the United Nations System to educate young people about their rights under the ILO's instruments. The campaign should take the form of conferences, information materials and training, and will emphasise grassroots participation.

Youth, Health and Development:

22. the formulation/review and implementation of an integrated national youth health policy addressing all major health issues including : sexual and reproductive health, HIV/AIDS, infectious diseases, substance abuse, nutrition and hygiene, harmful traditional practices such as female genital mutilation, sexual abuse, sexual exploitation, mental health, occupational and environmental health. This requires the active participation of youth, youth related organizations, government bodies, NGOs, international organisations and agencies of the United Nations System.
23. the provision of youth-friendly health services, counselling and especially reproductive health services that are comprehensive, accessible and participatory, to ensure the holistic well-being of all young people.

24. the international community implement reliable research, monitoring and assessment concerning the health needs of young people with the full participation of youth and widespread and interactive exchange of information addressing those needs. The government bodies, NGOs, international organisations, and agencies of the United Nations System, in collaboration with youth organisations should co-ordinate the efficient peer-education training of young people in all spheres of life on life skills, and the training of parents, teachers, religious and traditional leaders and caregivers on support skills. Information centres should be created that would be run by youth and for youth.

The Role of Youth in the Promotion of Human Rights:

25. that human rights education be recognised as a basic human right. This right includes access to, and exchange of, information on universally accepted civil, cultural, economic, political and social rights, and their violations. It aims at advocating the implementation of basic human rights. ALL young people must become involved in human rights education as key recipients and providers.
26. Institutions, including governments, the UN system, intergovernmental organizations and educational authorities, responsible for human rights education at the community, national, regional and international level, must ensure an enabling environment for youth involvement in human rights education. This includes the opportunity for active participation of youth organizations in the decision making process, in the implementation, as well as in existing monitoring and reporting procedures linked to human rights education.
27. that youth organizations commit themselves to develop and implement effective strategies on human rights education. We recommend a human rights focal point to be designated in each youth organisation. Partnership between the UN system and such focal points should be established within the framework of the UN Decade on Human Rights Education (1995-2004). Human rights education methodologies shall take into account the need for cultural sensitivity and should include lobbying, networking, exchange of best practices, capacity-building and preparation of material in local languages.

Youth Rights Charter and a Special Rapporteur on Youth Rights:

28. instead of a so called "Youth Rights Charter", the United Nations Youth Unit produce and assist youth NGOs disseminate at international, regional, national and local levels a *compendium on existing youth rights* which consists of the compilation of the existing rights regarding young people already included in reports adopted by the General Assembly and United Nations Human Rights

instruments, including United Nations international conferences such as the conferences in Cairo, Copenhagen, Vienna and Beijing. The compendium should be made into a *youth friendly* publication available and accessible to all youth around the world. was not adopted.

29. the *UN Special Rapporteur on Youth rights* should be appointed by United Nations Secretary General before the end of 1999 basing on nominations through regional consultations of NGOs to be made by August 1999. He or she should be mandated for three years (renewal possible only for two terms). He or she should be a young independent expert (no older than 35 years of age at the time of appointment and renewal), experienced with human rights issues, recently and directly involved with youth organisations. Effort must ensure the elimination of discrimination with every appointment to ensure fair and equal opportunity in the position over time. He or she must submit an annual report to the UN General Assembly and other relevant bodies, including recommendations for better implementation of youth rights. He or she should be actively supported by all UN structures.
30. we urge the Secretary General of the United Nations to take the initiative, with the help of specialised agencies, relevant regional organizations and youth NGOs, for the organisation of an *ad hoc* event on Youth Rights, in order to bring together representatives of states and all interested national, regional and international youth NGOs. This World event (either a special session of UN General Assembly or a UN World Conference on Youth Rights) should be prepared at the national and regional levels through campaigning to promote the largest possible involvement of young people. The *ad hoc* event on Youth Rights should address the questions of how to improve the Human Rights situation of youth under sanctions, embargoes and occupation.

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