

Tenth Commonwealth Youth Forum, Malta, 21-25 November 2015

Declaration by the Young People of the Commonwealth

“Young people can and must play a vital role at the centre of sustainable and inclusive development. Investing in young people today is the foundation for a prosperous and equitable tomorrow. Therefore, it is critical to harness the creativity, leadership and social capital of young people, towards the progress and resilience of Commonwealth countries, and a more democratic and prosperous Commonwealth.”

Commonwealth Heads of Government, November 2013

Preamble

1. This declaration and supporting action plan (Annex 1) express current policy recommendations of Commonwealth young people regarding the social, political, economic and environmental agendas. These recommendations have been gathered through regional, Commonwealth and global youth leaders’ forums, and were finalised at the 10th Commonwealth Youth Forum. They represent a common framework to inform and inspire youth led-development at national, regional and Commonwealth levels.
2. We, the young people of the Commonwealth, convened in Malta from 21 - 25 November 2015 for the 10th Commonwealth Youth Forum, recommit to the values and principles enshrined in the Commonwealth Charter and the Commonwealth Youth Council Constitution. In this year, when the Commonwealth family is focused on the role and contribution of young people through the Commonwealth theme, ‘A *Young Commonwealth*’, we support the declaration of Heads enshrined in Article XIII of the Commonwealth Charter that recognises the critical role of young people in the future success of the Commonwealth¹.
3. As youth leaders, we pledge our continued support as partners and stakeholders for the economic, environmental, social and political development of our countries and the Commonwealth as defined in the Global Goals for Sustainable Development that define our generation.

By this Youth Declaration, we:

4. *Commemorate* the 20th Anniversary of The World Programme of Action for Youth (WPAY) and call on governments and stakeholders to implement and monitor the priorities therein.

¹ Commonwealth Charter, Article 13, Importance of Young People in the Commonwealth

We also recall the Commonwealth's Plan of Action for Youth Empowerment and call on Heads to recommit to the 13 policy priorities included in the plan.

5. *Recall and commit* to the African Youth Charter, the CARICOM Youth Development Action Plan, and the Pacific Youth Development Framework, in addition to the policy recommendations put forward by the young people participating in the 2015 Regional Commonwealth Youth Ministers Meetings.
6. *Acknowledge the* role and contribution of national youth councils/bodies, national student organisations, youth organisations and youth networks in building safe, stable, secure and productive societies. We also recognise the continued support of youth workers, Ministries/departments of youth, and other stakeholders in youth development.
7. We therefore call on governments, civil society organisations, NGOs, International donor partners and other stakeholders active in member states to partner with the Commonwealth Youth Council to support the following policy recommendations:

I) ECONOMIC AGENDA:

8. We, the young people of the Commonwealth, recognise that youth unemployment is one of the greatest challenges facing member states. Unemployment is detrimental at any age; but for young people, long-term unemployment has particularly significant implications. Under-employment, un-fair working conditions and involuntary work can be attributed to a lack of self-worth, social exclusion and vulnerability. Employed and entrepreneurial young people are making an enormous contribution to economic growth across the Commonwealth. Therefore, we note the importance of expanding access to entrepreneurial training, technical training, vocational training and technology, in order to improve labour market outcomes for youth, promote youth entrepreneurship and promote decent employment.

The young people of the Commonwealth therefore call on:

9. National governments to prioritise employment opportunities and inclusive labour policies for young people by adopting a national youth employment action plan, working together with the private sector, and allocating budget to its implementation. The plan must be evidence-based, developed in partnership with young people, and recognise the interrelated role of education, employment and training in preventing the marginalisation of young people and building economies. ²

² Amman Youth Declaration on Youth, Peace and Security (2015); Global Forum on Youth, Peace and Security.

10. All member states to facilitate the creation of decent job opportunities for young people, particularly for those living with disabilities, displaced persons, youth of various ethnic backgrounds and indigenous communities, young migrant workers, LGBTQI+ youth, other minority groups, and homeless young people³.
11. All member states to support youth entrepreneurship by facilitating easier access to technology and start-up finance for young people, particularly those unable to furnish collateral⁴.
12. International organisations, National Youth Councils, donors and the private sector to foster a culture of youth entrepreneurship by advocating for youth entrepreneurship skills to be included in the education curricula and the creation of national and regional networks for youth entrepreneurs⁵.
13. The Commonwealth Youth Council, National Youth Councils and Youth Ministries to encourage the use of Information and Communication Technology in education and the establishment of inter- and intra-regional youth innovation and technology centers, as a means of disseminating knowledge, skills development, innovation and connectivity, thereby enhancing infrastructure in these areas⁶.
14. All member states to develop policies to ensure universal access to information and communication technology, and achievement of targeted outcomes in education, health care, social cohesion, training and employment opportunities among the youth, through greater use of ICT. ⁷

II) ENVIRONMENT AGENDA

15. We, the young people of the Commonwealth, are concerned about the social and environmental consequences of economic and development strategies that do not take into consideration environmental sustainability. Further, we recognise that climate change continues to be a major challenge for all member states, particularly for climate vulnerable developing countries. As such, we emphasise the importance of expanding access to

³ Colombo Declaration on Youth (2014); World Conference on Youth.

⁴ Youth Declaration and Plan of Action for Youth Development in the Caribbean Region and Canada (2015); Caribbean Region Commonwealth Youth Ministers Meeting.

⁵ Pacific Region Commonwealth Youth Ministers Meeting Communique (2015).

⁶ Colombo Declaration on Youth (2014); World Conference on Youth.

⁷ Youth Declaration and Plan of Action for Youth Development in the Caribbean Region and Canada (2015); Caribbean Region Commonwealth Youth Ministers Meeting.

efficient, secure and sustainable energy sources and mitigating climate change, in accordance with national priorities.

The young people of the Commonwealth call on:

16. Commonwealth leaders to commit at COP21 to achieving a 100% renewable energy future with sustainable energy access for all. We recommend that Parties at the UNFCCC take strides to acknowledge, in a legally binding agreement, that the long-term goal of phasing out fossil fuels and transitioning to 100% renewable energy by 2050 is essential and urgently needed. We also recommend putting young people at the centre of promoting the use of renewable energy within communities all around the world, building their capacities to do so⁸.
17. National Youth Councils, Youth Leaders and youth-led organisations to advocate for the implementation or enforcement of national legislation, action plans and policies relating to climate change⁹.
18. The new Commonwealth Climate Finance Skills Hub, which is to be endorsed by Heads at CHOGM 2015, includes within its structure youth desks both at the headquarters and at the regional nodes level, as well as a youth representative to be part of the Hub's governing body¹⁰.
19. Member states and relevant institutions to provide support to young entrepreneurs for the creation of youth-led Climate-Smart Agriculture, low-carbon and social enterprises which align expertise, skills, innovation and competence towards low-carbon and 'green' economies in agricultural transformation, climate change mitigation and adaptation and development¹¹.
20. All member states to formulate and implement national policies, which enable sustainable ocean governance and better use of the 'Blue Economy' to address youth unemployment and job creation. ¹²

⁸ Commonwealth Youth Expert Group Meeting on Climate Change Policy (2015), Recommendations and Voluntary Commitments.

⁹ Pacific Region Commonwealth Youth Ministers Meeting Communique (2015).

¹⁰ Commonwealth Youth Expert Group Meeting on Climate Change Policy (2015), Recommendations and Voluntary Commitments.

¹¹ Commonwealth Youth Expert Group Meeting on Climate Change Policy (2015), Recommendations and Voluntary Commitments.

¹² Commonwealth Youth Expert Group Meeting on Climate Change Policy (2015), Recommendations and Voluntary Commitments.

21. International organisations and treaty bodies, and international financial institutions at the global and regional levels to support developing countries, at their request, in the implementation of the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030, with youths' support¹³.
22. All member states to enable young people to take a key role in disaster relief and recovery in times of crisis and natural disaster with sufficient resourcing¹⁴. We ask member states to support youth to create awareness on the needed changes at the grass root level in relation to climate change and disaster management¹⁵.

III) SOCIAL AGENDA

23. We, the young people of the Commonwealth, recognise that there are challenges in regards to access and quality of education by all groups of young people across the Commonwealth. While young people are key stakeholders in education, they are not always consulted when policies that directly affect them are being formulated, implemented or evaluated. Additionally, many young people are not acquiring the relevant skills they need for the changing labour market of the future, and transitions from education to full-time work are becoming more challenging. Furthermore, national youth policies need to respond to the challenges facing young people, including access to support services and information relating to Sexual and Reproductive Health, mental health and non-communicable diseases.

The young people of the Commonwealth call on:

24. All member states to extend access to free universal early childhood, primary, secondary and tertiary education of the highest quality for young people, based on the principles of equality and non-discrimination and ensuring equal and equitable access to education at all levels¹⁶. In particular, we ask states to prioritise gender responsive policies and implement programmes to promote the right of young girls to have a chance at accessing quality education and to create and/or enforce anti-discrimination legislation and enhance education policies, curricula and systems to include students with special learning needs and disabilities¹⁷.

¹³ Commonwealth Youth Expert Group Meeting on Climate Change Policy (2015), Recommendations and Voluntary Commitments.

¹⁴ 1st Africa Region Commonwealth Youth Ministers Meeting Communique (2015)

¹⁵ Pacific Region Commonwealth Youth Ministers Meeting Communique (2015).

¹⁶ Colombo Declaration on Youth (2014); World Conference on Youth.

¹⁷ 19 CCEM Youth Forum Communiqué (2015) CSA.

25. All member states to increase the recognition and availability of non-formal education and vocational education, including volunteer schemes and Information and Communication Technology apprenticeships, as an effective means of empowerment and skills transfer¹⁸.
26. All member states to promote healthy lifestyles and take steps towards a sustainable framework for health financing, to make adolescent and youth friendly services that are accessible and affordable and ensure the quality of universal health coverage, including but not limited to maternal health, communicable diseases, including HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis, polio and malaria, non-communicable diseases, mental health, injuries and drug and substance abuse including alcohol¹⁹.
27. Youth leaders, youth led organisations and NGOs to advocate for early detection, treatment of and support for mental health issues and promote universal healthcare and education on sexual health and reproductive rights among adolescents and youth²⁰.
28. All member states to develop strategies, investment and best practice to enhance youth work; promote full labour rights of youth workers; and ensure the minimum professional standards of youth work²¹.
29. All member states to support youth work education across the Commonwealth, promote the formalisation of youth work as a profession, and include youth development work as a priority area for scholarships and remuneration²².

IV) POLITICAL AGENDA

30. We, the young people of the Commonwealth, believe it is important for member states to place young people at the centre of sustainable development, given the increasingly large global youth demographic. We note that member states should take into account young people's needs, aspirations, challenges and ability to contribute. In particular, special efforts should be made to ensure that the voices of marginalised young people are taken into account. Especially, as young people work to build a peaceful world, it is important to note that reconciliation and cultural understanding are critical components of the pathway to social cohesion.

¹⁸ Colombo Declaration on Youth (2014); World Conference on Youth.

¹⁹ Colombo Declaration on Youth (2014); World Conference on Youth.

²⁰ 1st Africa Region Commonwealth Youth Ministers Meeting Communique (2015).

²¹ Pacific Region Commonwealth Youth Ministers Meeting Communique (2015).

²² Youth Declaration and Plan of Action for Youth Development in the Caribbean Region and Canada (2015); Caribbean Region Commonwealth Youth Ministers Meeting.

The young people of the Commonwealth therefore call on:

31. National governments and local authorities to facilitate an enabling environment in which youth actors are recognised and provided with adequate support to implement violence prevention activities in order to prevent violence and violent extremism. This space must be inclusive of youth from different social, political, economic, ethnic and religious backgrounds.²³.
32. National governments, local authorities and researchers to ensure that contextual research is conducted in collaboration with young people and youth organisations to identify the drivers and enablers of violence and extremism in order to design effective responses at local, national and international levels²⁴.
33. International organisations, national governments, donors and the private sector to support youth-led and youth peace-building organisations as partners in youth employment and entrepreneurship programs, as those organisations are uniquely placed to engage marginalised young people and to promote social cohesion²⁵.
34. International agencies, national governments and local authorities to establish mechanisms to meaningfully involve youth in current and future peace and reconciliation processes, including formal peace negotiations from the local to the global levels. These mechanisms need to ensure youth are engaged as equal partners and promote youth leadership²⁶.
35. Member states to address the urgent need to recognise the existence of young people's human rights, through introducing programs and policies that provide social protections to reduce the vulnerability of all young people, especially young people from marginalised backgrounds²⁷.
36. International agencies, national governments and local authorities to implement internationally agreed commitments and policies to promote and protect the rights of girls, prevent gender-based violence and end impunity for crimes such as child, early and forced marriage, sexual and domestic violence, femicide and female genital mutilation²⁸.

²³ Amman Youth Declaration on Youth, Peace and Security (2015); Global Forum on Youth, Peace and Security.

²⁴ Amman Youth Declaration on Youth, Peace and Security (2015); Global Forum on Youth, Peace and Security.

²⁵ Amman Youth Declaration on Youth, Peace and Security (2015); Global Forum on Youth, Peace and Security.

²⁶ Amman Youth Declaration on Youth, Peace and Security (2015); Global Forum on Youth, Peace and Security.

²⁷ Colombo Declaration on Youth (2014); World Conference on Youth.

²⁸ Amman Youth Declaration on Youth, Peace and Security (2015); Global Forum on Youth, Peace and Security.

Conclusion

37. The delegates of the 10th Commonwealth Youth Forum thank the Government of Malta for hosting the 10th Commonwealth Youth Forum and the 2nd Commonwealth Youth Council General Assembly and look forward to the Government's continued support in promoting youth participation and engagement in the Commonwealth.
38. We welcome and encourage on-going partnership and collaboration between the Commonwealth Youth Council, Commonwealth Secretariat, member states and Commonwealth civil society in moving forward towards an inclusive and sustainable future for young people.
39. Towards a more renewed, inclusive and prosperous Commonwealth, we call on Governments, the Non-Government Organisations, agencies, donor partners, private sector, civil society organisations to partner with us to ensure that the policy priorities outlined above are implemented.

Annex 1 - Supporting Action Plan

This action plan expresses the practical recommendations of Commonwealth young people regarding the social, political, economic and environmental agendas. These recommendations were finalised at the 10th Commonwealth Youth Forum. They support the Policy Declaration and contribute to a common framework to inform and inspire youth led-development at national, regional and Commonwealth levels.

I) ECONOMIC AGENDA:

The General Assembly adopted the following action plan in support of the recommendations relating to the economic agenda:

- The creation of an ICT programme, allocating resources for entrepreneurship and development across the Commonwealth. The programme will facilitate increased access to the internet and educational ICT resources for all people in the Commonwealth, provided through school facilities and funded by Public-Private partnerships.
- The creation of an online engagement platform, known as an “e-sensitisation program”, to educate employers and educators about the useful capacities of persons with disabilities and their respective potential contributions to the labour market.
- The establishment of a youth employment policy across the Commonwealth and a “People’s Bank”, to match the skills of young people with jobs available, and to make young people prepared for the labour market. The “People’s Bank would be an online and offline platform whereby young people seeking decent employment would register their skills.
- The creation of a “Young Entrepreneur’s Fund” led by the Commonwealth Alliance of Young Entrepreneurs (CAYE), for the purpose of supporting and funding more young entrepreneurs, who have promising ideas but do not have the collateral necessary to start-up their businesses. This would involve member states and the private sector increasing financial support to young entrepreneurs, including start-up finance and resources.



- The establishment of a Commonwealth-wide vocational qualification on youth entrepreneurship, to be recognised across the Commonwealth, in order to empower young people to become entrepreneurs and tackle the problem of youth unemployment. This would also involve the creation of a common measurement system of skills across the Commonwealth, in accordance with the Youth Entrepreneurship Guide, proposed by the Commonwealth Secretariat.
- The creation of a programme to ensure access to accurate information and the safe, effective contraception method of choice, which can improve the chance of survival and health outcomes, across the Commonwealth.

II) ENVIRONMENT AGENDA

The General Assembly adopted the following action plan in support of the recommendations relating to the environment agenda:

- The development, implementation and advocacy related to the strengthening of the “Youth Leading on DRR: Now!” programme over the next 2 years. The programme will educate national youth on Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) and engage the National Youth Councils and other youth bodies in DRR decision-making processes, action, implementation and monitoring plans.
- The establishment of the ‘Project Prepare’ campaign, to provide training and toolkits to schools regarding disaster relief and natural disasters. This will involve creating school partnerships among Commonwealth countries, connecting classrooms through class projects, Skype communication or video messages. Teachers will be provided with material to raise awareness, share local realities and best practices with partner schools as well as a list of resources for students to inform themselves further.
- The adoption of a 2-year Social Enterprise programme providing training, mentorship, financial knowledge, capacity building, access to networks and financial support in the field of climate smart agriculture and low carbon to young people.



- The creation of an educational, training and research centre for the marine environment and opportunities for youth in the Blue Economy, including a Funded Networking Programme and educational and internship opportunities.
- The initiation of the 'Eco- Warriors' programme, with assistance from the CYC and National Youth Councils. This will be a regional capacity building initiative to empower young people to become effective youth advocates on climate change. It will include a forum to ensure that there is a safe space where young people can hold their governments accountable of their Intended National Determined Contributions (INDCs).
- CYC and National Youth Councils to work with governments to redirect fuel subsidies by 2020, towards developing renewable energy efforts and innovation involving young people.
- The creation of an advocacy campaign to showcase youth action towards climate change. The campaign will be based on a compilation of examples of youth researchers and entrepreneurs, allowing them to showcase their engagement and action towards climate change.

III) **SOCIAL AGENDA**

The General Assembly adopted the following action plan in support of the recommendations relating to the social agenda:

- CYC and National Youth Councils to advocate for quality education at all levels and at all demographics.
- Facilitation by CYC of an increase in the number of young people in the Commonwealth who have access to non-formal education.
- Advocacy for the increase in the number of youth positions in health policy decision-making, and for Heads of Commonwealth Governments to fund preventive medical measures, like polio eradication, for underserved and vulnerable youths in the Commonwealth over the next 2 years.



- Creation of an online Commonwealth wide social network and mobile app to share best practices and curriculum for mental health and HRSR issues.
- CYC to ensure all member states create accessible youth policy that are implemented by 2017.
- Advocacy for all member states to support youth work education across the Commonwealth, promote the formalisation of youth work as a profession, and include youth development work as a priority area for scholarships and remuneration.

IV) POLITICAL AGENDA

The General Assembly adopted the following action plan in support of the recommendations relating to the political agenda:

- Establishment of the Commonwealth Youth Peace Fund (CYPF) to further the work of youth-led and youth-focused organisations working to prevent violent extremism.
- Promotion of youth-led research by creating and strengthening relationships between youth and national, regional, international research institutions.
- Advocacy for the creation of legislated youth positions in government institutions, organisations and sectors at all levels, so as to ensure youth engagement in informal and formal peace and reconciliation processes.
- Provision of skills training and resources by the private sector to ensure availability of employment opportunities for youth, to reduce youth susceptibility to violent extremism.
- Lobby for national governments to implement, enforce and strengthen laws related to sexual and gender-based violence, by creating public awareness and thereby encouraging sustained public pressure.
- Initiation of the Commonwealth Human Rights Expo, with the assistance of the CYC and the National Youth Councils, over the next 2 years.