



WIDENING SPACE WITH & BY YOUNG HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS IN PUBLIC DECISION-MAKING

WRITTEN STATEMENT BY AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL TO THE FORUM ON HUMAN RIGHTS, DEMOCRACY AND THE RULE OF LAW 2016

Amnesty International participated at the forum on Human Rights, Democracy and the Rule of Law held from 21 to 22 November 2016 with a delegation of four young human rights defenders. It welcomed the theme of *Widening the Democratic Space: the role of youth in public decision-making* and the strong presence of young people at the Forum and encourages future sessions which might not have a youth focus to build on its success and ensure youth participation. Young people, in all their diversity, play a key role in public decision-making which should be supported by state and non-state actors. We recommend that the following points be integrated into the report.

1. Recognise & Protect Young Human Rights Defenders

Various participants at the Forum emphasised the need to challenge perceptions of decision-makers about young people. Young people are often labelled as immature and are told to believe that their voices will carry weight only when they attain adulthood. This creates unnecessary barriers to their participation in public decision-making. States should take measures to recognise and protect young human rights defenders and youth-led organisations engaged in defending and promoting human rights. This can be done by removing age-based discriminatory practices which restrict participation of young people in public decision-making, as well as by providing resources for the work of young human rights defenders and youth-led organisations.

2. Implement Human Rights Education

As discussed during the Forum, human rights education can play a key role in creating an enabling environment for young people to participate in public decision-making. Human rights education and training is a lifelong process that concerns all ages. States should continue to strengthen work towards fulfilling the objectives outlined in the World Programme for Human Rights Education and the implementation of the UN Declaration on Human Rights Education and Training. This can be done by promoting and implementing human rights education in all forms whether in a public or private, formal, informal or non-formal settings, as well as ensuring adequate human rights training for state officials, civil servants, judges, law enforcement officials and military personnel.

3. Remove Discriminatory Restrictions to the Rights to Freedom of Expression, Association and Peaceful Assembly

For young people to participate in public decision-making no undue or discriminatory restrictions should be placed on their rights to freedom of expression, association and peaceful assembly. In many states this is not the case and certain restrictions can hinder the ability of young people to participate. States should promote and protect the rights to freedom of expression, association and peaceful assembly without discrimination. This can be done by ensuring young human rights defenders and their youth-led organisations can work in a safe and enabling environment and are allowed to comprehensively report on human rights violations. There should be no undue or discriminatory restrictions on the way they exercise their rights.

4. Human Rights Treaty Bodies to Develop General Comments/Recommendations on Youth

We would like to welcome the suggestion made by Ms. Oveido encouraging human rights treaty bodies to develop general comments/recommendations on youth. Young people's rights are human rights and cut across all the human rights conventions. There is a need to recognise how the lived experience of being young can impact on the exercise of all human rights. Therefore, Amnesty International recommends that each human rights treaty body consider developing a general comment/recommendation on young people's enjoyment of human rights in their treaties. These should be developed in collaboration with youth-led organisations and with the active participation of young human rights defenders and other young people.

5. Human Rights Defenders Mandate Holder Report on Young Human Rights Defenders

As was evident from the discussions at the Forum, young human rights defenders are at the forefront of many movements towards change. Yet young human rights defenders face challenges in accessing resources and are discriminated against because of their age and many other factors. While there is a general understanding that young people face different realities and lived experiences than other generations, it was also recognised that there is a lack of research on, and understanding of, these realities. Therefore, Amnesty International recommends that the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders focusses a report specifically on young human rights defenders.