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**Commission on Crime Prevention
and Criminal Justice****Twenty-eighth session**

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Agenda item 10*

**Contributions by the Commission to the work of the
Economic and Social Council, in line with General
Assembly resolution 68/1,¹ including follow-up to
and review and implementation of the 2030 Agenda
for Sustainable Development****Youth empowerment to support the implementation of
Sustainable Development Goal 16: the role of education******Conference room paper prepared by the Secretariat****2015: a landmark year in multilateral diplomacy**

It is not an exaggeration to say that the year 2015 was a milestone in the history of multilateral diplomacy, as it marks the year in which a number of significant developments in the area of youth empowerment took place within the United Nations intergovernmental bodies, as well as within the larger scope of sustainable development. In that year, and while the negotiations on the post-2015 development framework were taking place, the Thirteenth United Nations Congress on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice held in Doha, Qatar from 12-19 April 2015 adopted its outcome political document: the Doha Declaration. The Doha Declaration is unique in how it emphasizes that, to achieve peace, justice and sustainable development, the way the international crime prevention and criminal justice community operates should change. Such shift could be articulated in two elements that are key to upholding the rule of law and justice and fostering a culture of lawfulness, namely: youth participation and quality education.

Further, the Doha Declaration stressed the fundamental role of youth participation in crime prevention efforts.² This assertion demonstrates a changing paradigm in the way crime prevention and criminal justice approaches should be designed and implemented, while also signalling the commitment of Member States to promoting effective youth participation in policymaking, particularly in upholding the rule of law, peace and justice.

* E/CN.15/2019/1.

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¹ As revised by A/RES/72/305.

² Paragraph 7.



After the Thirteenth Crime Congress, the General Assembly adopted its resolution [70/1](#), Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which contained the ambitious set of 17 Sustainable Development Goals and related targets. Building on the experience of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development innovates in various aspects. First, the 2030 Agenda innovates in its reach: while there are 17 goals, the 2030 Agenda comprises a total of 169 targets, demonstrating their complexity and multiple facets. Second, it recognizes the interconnectedness, interdependence and mutually-reinforcing characteristic of the Goals. Finally, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development innovates by incorporating peace, justice and strong institutions into the framework of sustainable development, which was not directly addressed within the framework of the Millennium Development Goals. Therefore, a shift of how all partners and stakeholders work and operate in implementing the Sustainable Development Agenda is required to meet these ambitious goals and targets.

Later, in December 2015, the Security Council adopted a landmark resolution, [2250](#), on Youth, Peace and Security. This resolution further stresses the need to involve young people in relevant rule of law policymaking, including violence prevention and the promotion of social cohesion.

These multilateral documents are but a few examples of the eventful and important year in multilateral diplomacy that recognized the importance of youth participation in upholding of the rule of law. The United Nations, including the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, have continued to build on and supported the implementation of the measures contained therein.

Youth as partners and drivers to promote the rule of law and foster a culture of lawfulness

Implementation, follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development must involve the widest possible set of stakeholders. For this reason, the United Nations launched a Youth Strategy in 2018,³ referred to as Youth 2030, which is linked to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and fully aligned to empowering youth to both support its implementation and for their communities to gain from it. The document emphasizes that “young people’s empowerment, development and engagement is an end in itself, as well as a means to build a better world.”

In further recognition of the need to widen the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, the General Assembly, in its resolution [73/183](#), invited Member States to provide views on how the Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice can contribute to the review of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, in particular Sustainable Development Goal 16. In addition, General Assembly resolution [73/185](#) calls upon Member States to promote education on justice and the rule of law “to strive to achieve all relevant Sustainable Development Goals, including Goals 4 and 16”.⁴

During the 2019 Economic and Social Council Youth Forum, held in New York, United States of America, on 8 and 9 April, young people were able to share their views on the implementation of Sustainable Development Goals 4, 8, 10, 13, 16 and 17. The Youth Forum, accordingly, echoed the upcoming Economic and Social Council High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development, which will be held from 9 to 18 July at the United Nations Headquarters, and culminated in a presidential statement and summaries of breakout sessions,⁵ highlighting the views on the issues related to the aforementioned Goals.

In addition, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime’s Education for Justice (E4J) initiative, in partnership with the non-governmental organization Hope for Education and Leadership in Afghanistan, held a side event during the ECOSOC Youth Forum, with the specific objective of seeking and collecting young peoples’ views on how education can serve as a catalyst for the implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 16. The side

³ Available at: <https://www.un.org/youthenvoy/youth-un/>

⁴ Paragraph 8.

⁵ Available at: <https://www.un.org/ecosoc/en/2019youthforum>

event reflected the richness and diversity of the perspectives of youth and their ability and potential to innovate and find solutions to the most pressing challenges to the rule of law.

The purpose of this Conference Room Paper is to share and analyse the views and perspectives of youth that were collected during the ECOSOC Youth Forum, so that it is brought to the attention of the Commission as the main policymaking body in the area of crime prevention and criminal justice. It therefore informs the Commission on young people's perceptions of their role in implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, particularly Sustainable Development Goal 16, as well as the role of education in empowering youth to act as transformative positive changemakers in support of the rule of law and fostering a culture of lawfulness.

Youth perspectives

The below summary and analysis reflect the ideas and perspectives of youth who participated at the ECOSOC Youth Forum, as reported by the aforementioned side events and breakout sessions.

Our voices and views: nothing about us without us!

1. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development presents an indivisible and integrated approach to sustainable development and its goals are complementary and interlinked. In this regard, youth recognize Goal 16 as an enabler, in the sense that its implementation is key for other Goals to be achieved. Youth are particularly concerned with how issues such as corruption, inequality, human rights violations, organized crime and conflict inhibit progress on, for example, poverty (Goal 1), health (Goal 3) and education (Goal 4).
2. Young people are also keen to be considered as a key partner in implementing the Sustainable Development Goals, including Goal 16. In particular, such consideration should generate meaningful inclusion and engagement in policymaking, implementation and review, which can be summarized in the Secretary-General's Youth Envoy's mantra: "Nothing about us without us!" This is particularly relevant for Goal 16 since, for example, the Doha Declaration supports the "development and implementation of consultative and participatory processes in crime prevention and criminal justice."⁶
3. Meaningful youth engagement, however, requires society to look at youth differently from the way in which they are currently considered. Young people have a positive role in preventing crime but are often looked at passively and confronted with the misperception that they are responsible for causing violence in higher proportions. As a result, governments often design social policies and programmes targeting this group in a top-down approach, though not necessarily entering into dialogue or establishing how youth themselves are agents and can be partners in such efforts.
4. Youth are, accordingly, eager to rid themselves of the troublemaker stigma and to become part of the solution. In other words, they would like to be considered as positive changemakers rather than solely the recipients of governmental policies in which they did not have a participatory role. Due consideration must be given to young people's voice in policymaking, implementation and follow-up.
5. The change towards making the implementation of Goal 16 more inclusive also involves promoting youth-led initiatives on crime prevention, criminal justice and other rule of law aspects that are making an impact at the local, national and international levels. Youth-led formal and informally-established entities have increased in numbers and, as young people become more engaged, Member States can learn from, support and replicate good practices related to the implementation of Goal 16. This has the potential to further young people's engagement in support of

⁶ Paragraph 10.

the rule of law since they are often inspired by their peers' successful stories elsewhere.

6. In addition, youth are keen to participate in relevant inter-governmental fora and Member States should be encouraged to include youth representatives in their delegations and national deliberations. In the Vienna-based fora, the Commission on Narcotic Drugs has been regularly hosting a pre-session youth forum, though this has not specifically been done for the Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice. Specific suggestions were made at the Youth Forum for the involvement of youth in the follow-up and review of implementation of Goal 16, including in the development of voluntary national reviews (VNRs), which are presented at the High-Level Political Forum. The engagement of youth can take place both at the national level, in the creation of VNRs, as well as through the support of young people's participation in the High-Level Political Forum and its preparatory events.

7. Young people's desire to participate in policy and decision-making also reflects the commitments made by parties to a number of international treaties. Examples include the Convention on the Rights of the Child,⁷ the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights,⁸ United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime⁹ and the United Nations Convention against Corruption¹⁰, which all support the participation of society. Furthermore, participation is, itself, a target under Goal 16¹¹ and should consider youth as they are a significant part of the population.¹²

Education: empowering youth to support Sustainable Development Goal 16

8. Across the world, youth have made it clear that they wish to be meaningfully engaged in upholding the rule of law and implementing Goal 16 to foster peace, justice and effective, accountable and inclusive institutions. In this context, young people's perception of the importance of education, as a condition and an enabler, is two-fold: on the one hand, education can prepare youth for such engagement, while, on the other hand, it can also be an aim in itself, consistent with Goal 4, target 4.7.¹³

9. The link, in the Doha Declaration, between education and youth empowerment is also present in young people's minds. The implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals heavily depends on ownership and social mobilization. For this reason, education is well-placed to promote such mobilization and ownership, including when the issues under consideration are those of Goal 16. Therefore, Goal 4 is also an enabling goal for youth, who have expressed the desire to learn about the issues that surround and affect them, in order to contribute to well-informed solutions.

10. According to one of the breakout sessions at the Economic and Social Council Youth Forum, education "should be recognized beyond economic returns to [enable] learners to be responsible agents of sustainable change and driving forces for social progress." In other words, youth hold the view that one of the means through which their current and future role to act in support of rule of law issues can be realized is by acknowledging that education can prepare them for such responsibilities. These views also reflect international obligations such as those relevant to education contained in the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and

⁷ Article 12.

⁸ Article 25.

⁹ Article 31.

¹⁰ Article 13.

¹¹ Target 16.7: Ensure responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels.

¹² United Nations Population Fund, *State of the world population 2019*, available at: https://www.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/UNFPA_PUB_2019_EN_State_of_World_Population.pdf

¹³ Target 4.7: By 2030, ensure that all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including, among others, through education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship and appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture's contribution to sustainable development.

the Convention on the Rights of the Child. According to the former, “education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and the sense of its dignity, and shall strengthen the respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms”,¹⁴ while the latter emphasizes its role in the “preparation of the child for responsible life in a free society, in the spirit of understanding, peace, tolerance.”¹⁵

11. As an objective in itself, education on issues related to Goal 16 should focus not only on the specific topics related to crime, justice and the rule of law, but also consider cross-cutting factors. Young people are particularly keen on learning about the specific topics addressed under Goal 16, such as violence, trafficking in persons, access to justice, organized crime, corruption (including transparency, access to information and accountability) and terrorism – in addition to the aforementioned emphasis on participation, social inclusion and human rights. One of the issues highlighted by youth is the simplification of legal documents, including legislation, to widen its understanding and also promote people-centred legal systems.

12. Moreover, youth are particularly concerned with the means through which such knowledge is imparted and suggest in this regard the widest possible use of the formal, non-formal and informal sectors.¹⁶ Activities such as fostering the creation of school clubs, youth-led initiatives and similar informal groupings were identified as good practices. In addition, youth highlighted the role of universities to provide spaces for evidence-based and informed discussions on crime, justice and the rule of law at the tertiary level, to address challenges such as those posed by fake news and violence-inducing narratives.

13. When it comes to cross-cutting issues, young people also look at human rights education as a priority, which is also in line with Member States’ priorities within the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights’ World Programme on Human Rights Education.¹⁷ Further emphasis is needed, however, on rights that specifically relate to the criminal justice system or, for example, the intersection between the aforementioned Goal 16 topics and human rights.

14. Youth also see the mainstreaming of Global Citizenship Education as a means through which to address discrimination, xenophobia and violence. In line with this approach, it is important to emphasize that educational approaches to the rule of law should acknowledge the matter’s complexities and avoid over-simplification or any approach that promotes artificially positive messages about the issues at stake and that do not pave the road for youth to see how they may be meaningfully involved.¹⁸

15. Finally, young people are also conscious that, while education is important and can be an enabler for promoting action on Goal 16, it is not the only means through which such empowerment can be achieved. Through education, youth can learn about complex rule of law issues and may also become inspired to act to transform their communities and create a more just and peaceful world. However, the meaningful engagement of young people cannot be realized unless other conducive policies – developed with effective youth participation – are in place, especially those that provide the space in society and vis-à-vis the government for youth to be heard and be at the heart of global efforts towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals.

¹⁴ Article 13.

¹⁵ Articles 29.

¹⁶ See also United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization and UNODC, *Strengthening the Rule of Law through Education: A Guide for Policymakers*, available at: <http://www.unodc.org/e4j/en/about-e4j/unodc-unesco-guide-for-policymakers.html>.

¹⁷ A/HRC/RES/39/3.

¹⁸ See also The Centre for Global Education, et al., *International youth white paper on Global Citizenship Education*. Available at: https://www.pluralism.ca/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/InternationalYouthWhitePaperGlobalCitizenship_EN.pdf

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