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Agenda item 5

Multidimensional approaches by Governments to promoting the rule of law by, inter alia, providing access to justice for all; building effective, accountable, impartial and inclusive institutions; and considering social, educational and other relevant measures, including fostering a culture of lawfulness while respecting cultural identities, in line with the Doha Declaration

Mobilize. Engage. Empower. The Voices of South-East Asian Youth to Promote the Rule of Law through Education*

Conference room paper prepared by the Secretariat

Introduction

1. This conference room paper has been compiled by the Secretariat to reflect the views of South-East Asian youth who participated in a series of virtual gatherings organized by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) under its Education for Justice (E4J) initiative. The events, called E4J South-East Asian Youth Empowerment Dialogues, took place between December 2020 and March 2021, and were financially supported by the Government of Japan. Their purpose was to raise awareness of the United Nations Congress on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice among young people in South-East Asia, as well as obtaining their views on the agenda items and workshop topics under discussion.¹

2. These activities come at a time when education systems worldwide are disrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic. It is also evident that the pandemic also brought about a divide in access to education both between and within countries. Examples of this divide include the form in which private schools and wealthier nations have not been as disrupted as other countries and public schools or universities, which were points mentioned during the discussion.

3. This conference room paper will present young people's perspectives and analyse the findings against wider crime prevention, criminal justice and sustainable development policy discussions, while recognizing the vital role of education in mobilizing youth to support the rule of law through activities and engagements on the

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¹ As contained in document [A/CONF.234/1/REV.1](#).



Sustainable Development Goal 16 and other related goals and targets (SDG 16+). Accordingly, this conference room paper reflects the views of participating youth, and not of the Government of Japan, the Secretariat or that of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) or its members.² This document was drafted by volunteer youth rapporteurs who participated at the dialogue series.

2020: A Breakthrough year in solidarity and global interconnectedness

4. The United Nations celebrates its 75th anniversary at a time of unprecedented insecurity and disruption due to the global pandemic and consequent health, economic and social crises. The COVID pandemic proved to the international community that horizontal cooperation, mutual understanding, and inter-disciplinary partnerships are keys to overcome global and regional challenges. Therefore, strengthening coordinated action to tackle current pressing issues faced by youth earns a different light and sense of urgency to realize the Decade of Action and achieve the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.³

5. The COVID-19 pandemic has created one of the largest disruptions of education systems in history. However, educators worldwide have demonstrated eagerness and creativity to motivate students and identify new and innovative ways of teaching, thus minimizing the impacts of the pandemic. The pandemic has, therefore, confirmed the need to address and reduce the digital gap and rethink education for the future.

6. Now, more than ever, the rule of law is fundamental to all aspects of society in forging mutual accountability, reliability and building public trust. A multi-stakeholder approach to its promotion is crucial for protecting participation, safety, dignity, and human rights for all. In this regard, education plays a key role in enabling a safe, inclusive, peaceful environment for youth, and – most importantly – with youth, and by youth. This is only possible through mobilizing, engaging and empowering youth to build a better future and contribute to a positive, sustainable development through the transformative sharing of knowledge, values, and competences.

7. The Doha Declaration,⁴ outcome of the 13th Congress, held in Doha in April 2015, calls for the promotion of the rule of law through education and youth empowerment. The Education for Justice (E4J) initiative, of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), aims at promoting culture of lawfulness through strengthened and globally connected education activities, translates the policy guidelines of the Doha Declaration into programmatic activities. This is realized especially in the Global South, as demonstrated by the events that led to this paper. The dialogues were designed to empower youth to become socially responsible global citizens with a sound moral and ethical compass and are prepared to tackle the world's challenges related to the rule of law, particularly SDG 16+.

Youth as global citizens for promoting the rule of law, fostering a culture of lawfulness, and ultimately igniting positive change

8. The enhancement of safe and inclusive spaces to develop youth knowledge and skills through education, participation, and civic engagement, is key to safeguard the rule of law and SDG 16+, especially in the South-East Asian region, which is home to over 200 million young people. ASEAN youth should, therefore, strengthen their commitment to innovation and enhance collective engagement to identify and tackle complex crimes, criminal justice, and the rule of law matters relevant to their countries and the South-East Asia Region.

² In this document, the term “ASEAN youth” refers to young people living in ASEAN countries.

³ General Assembly resolution [70/1](#).

⁴ General Assembly resolution [70/174](#).

9. Young people in South-East Asia have been exposed to multilingual, interfaith, and diverse identities shaped and formed in a backdrop of various conflicts. In fact, ASEAN's shared vision is to be "a concert of Southeast Asian nations, outward-looking, and living in peace, stability, and prosperity." Although there remains no open conflict between ASEAN Member States, it is vital to emphasize that maintaining peace and security in the region is a lifelong journey. As the next generation of peacebuilders, youth have the right and responsibility to continue this legacy. Young people can promote the culture of peace in their respective countries, in the region, and beyond. As young leaders, they also hold the responsibility as global citizens to propose and enact sustainable solutions to global issues.

"All of us Matter"

A. Youth for Crime Prevention

10. Youth representatives expressed the importance of identifying key factors likely to be the root causes of crime in South-East Asian (SEA) societies. As the main causes identified were of economic nature, such as inequality conditions and high unemployment rate, it was concluded that, to fully understand how to promote rule of law in SEA countries, it is necessary to further examine in a detailed manner the extent to which precarious economic situations contribute to the manifestation of crime in each country.

11. Participants highlighted the need for data collection on misconducts or crime and to analyse crime statistics to develop strategies for evidence-based crime prevention. A balance between data collection and strategies for prevention and coordination is essential. On the other hand, inter-agency coordination, and cooperation, particularly with the government, international agencies, and local communities, are crucial.

12. The importance of multi-stakeholder engagement in maintaining good coordination between national and regional authorities was also highlighted in the discussion. Those who work at the grassroots level have the potential to experience first-hand the manifestation of criminal activities, and therefore are well-placed to deeply understand the dynamic cultural characteristics of such phenomena in their community. Other representatives also shared that awareness raising campaigns were necessary for crime prevention, particularly on the protection of women and children, as well as to support victims of human trafficking and domestic violence, especially in view of the increasing numbers reported. Youth in the events also shared that the authorities must ensure participation of women into every level of crime prevention, including in policy dialogues, their design, and implementation, thus mainstreaming gender equality and women's empowerment.

B. Youth for criminal justice

13. Participating youth shared how significance of the role of quality education in enhancing and understanding peoples' rights in law and justice. They addressed the importance of basic knowledge about the rule of law and criminal justice, while noting that the knowledge should not be limited to a particular group of people only. They also emphasized that a citizen needs to acknowledge their rights to know how to protect themselves and that they are protected by law. Some of the representatives quoted, "Know your rights so you can fight for your rights."

14. Youth representatives also shared common views on realizing a fair trial that promotes equality, inclusivity, and integrity in the community. This will increase trust between society and law enforcement agencies in terms of governance and transparency, precisely when it comes to children, women, and underprivileged communities' protection.

15. Discussions also focused on the need for authorities to realize that an efficient way to accelerate the promotion of justice amongst the society's youngest contributors is to involve oversight bodies or movements. These bodies can comprise community members, scholars, and the media, for example, and their concerted action would provide transparency, accountability and inclusivity that ultimately would determine a boost in confidence and trust towards the authorities, and a smoother and more efficient transition of youth from classrooms to policymaking dialogues.

16. Some representatives also shared the relevance of giving a second chance to the former prisoners, including under probation, and young offenders with a view to rebuilding their lives after serving their sentences. It is fair to provide opportunities for these groups to get support in terms of social acceptance and a better life perspective through equitable employment and capacity-building activities.

17. The youth representatives also suggested implementing simulation programmes such as the ASEAN Foundation Model of the ASEAN Meeting (AFMAM) and Model United Nations (MUN), that could focus more on addressing crime prevention and criminal justice in respective countries and creating a policy paper based on the discussions.

C. Youth for a comprehensive and inclusive multidimensional approach

18. Based on the youth perspectives, multidimensional approaches require a robust legal framework as a basis. The participants were briefed on the existing policies in their countries and shared several success stories and challenges.

19. The youth representatives also highlighted that inclusivity is key to promote the rule of law and the empowerment of children and youth. A multidimensional approach must cover all relevant areas, including but not limited to the public and private sectors, educational institutions and the media. All participants agreed that youth have a significant role and need to be part of the discussions on education, rule of law and sustainable development. Based on discussions on the consultations, some countries in the region already have youth departments and governance mechanisms, but many young people are still struggling to be heard in other countries. Civil society organizations (CSOs) also faced difficulties in being part of the solution.

20. The discussion also generated several recommendations for a multi-dimensional approach to empower children and youth, including training and capacity-building, incorporating education on the rule of law into curricula and raising awareness on the rule of law through social media. In addition, the youth representatives agreed that good governance and transparency are also vital in promoting the rule of law.

D. Youth for strong international cooperation

21. The youth representatives addressed the importance of international cooperation in combating transnational crime and balancing sovereignty and cooperation among Member States. To achieve that, it was agreed that it is vital to maintain good international relations through judicial cooperation in ASEAN, venture in transparency and accountable joint research and funding, and ratify UNTOC (the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime) in all Member States.

22. The youth representatives raised concerns regarding the striking digital divide and lack of proper digital infrastructures. With a view to empower youth today to be the leaders of tomorrow, it is of utmost importance to invest in the tenacity of youth and their talents and interest in digital innovation through the provision of efficient equipment and up-to-date training and capacity-building to take advantage of the digital transition and innovation.

23. Cybercrime was also described as a critical subject in need of swift regulatory systems. The discussion concluded that more international cooperation is needed acknowledging the principle of non-intervention and sovereignty. They also recommended stronger collaboration between ASEAN countries and partnerships to combat existing and emerging forms of cybercrime.

24. The discussion also shared a common perspective: that young people can be the change-driver in promoting a responsible use of ICT (information and communications technologies) amongst their peers. The need for bridging the digital divide and for supporting youth to be the future provider of safer internet use is evidenced by several factors such as the emergence of fake news, data privacy breaches, fraud, and other cyber security threats. Hackathons were presented as efficient ways to build young people's capacity to use technology for social causes, including addressing rule of law issues.

Conclusion

25. Most of the youth representatives mentioned that education is one of the practical ways to promote the rule of law, including crime prevention and criminal justice. They illustrated that knowledge transfer between experts and authorities, on one side, and citizens, on the other side, is ever more important, especially for the formation of young people and their evolution into the future leaders of tomorrow.

26. The youth representatives also discussed how ASEAN youth could apply soft power in expressing disagreement or dissatisfaction with the government. Based on the discussions, several representatives shared that children can engage with the local community and voice their concerns, opinions, or frustration related to specific laws through the appropriate platforms provided by the government or other channels, including the media. They concluded that dialogues with their local community leaders could help share proposals on how to improve the conduct at the community level.

27. Finally, the youth participants highlighted that it is vital to educate children and youth on anti-corruption to become inspired global citizens. Participants concluded that, to focus on education for anti-corruption, it is necessary to have a strong international cooperation network that shares knowledge and best practices on good governance and anti-corruption. Only a strong, rich, and efficient network can strengthen the partnership between ASEAN countries and create the fruitful environment for youth in each country to take on the responsibility of becoming a true global citizen, igniting positive change in the local and regional communities.

28. In conclusion, South-East Asian youth are keen to be considered as active players in national, regional, and global discussions on topics of international complexity and relevance such as crime prevention, criminal justice and the rule of law. They are motivated to benefit from educational opportunities, knowledge and social skills. Together, these elements are pre-requisites for them to become actors of positive change and champions of the rule of law and sustainable development.
