

**STOLEN DREAMS**

**YOUTH-LED ANTI-SLAVERY COLLECTIVE**



*20 October 2023*

**Youth Written Contributions: Constructive dialogue on the review process following the conclusion of the thirteenth session of the Working Group on Trafficking in Persons**

The following written statement is being supported by Stolen Dreams and the Migration Youth and Children's Platform (MYCP).

From the impacts of climate change and conflict to the challenges posed by technology and the adoption of harmful immigration policies, our efforts to prevent trafficking in persons, protect survivors, and take internationally coordinated action - in gender-transformative and human rights-centered manners - are falling short.

In this regard, based on the principles of the [Young Feminist Manifesto](#), which we strongly encourage all to read, we call for urgent action in three core areas:

1. It is no secret that gender inequalities are a root cause enabling trafficking in persons. When we talk of gender-centered and transformative approaches, we must go beyond looking at trafficking in persons only through the lens of organized crime. While the Protocol falls under the well-respected UNTOC, we must understand, dismantle, and eliminate the systemic factors, notably gender inequalities, patriarchal attitudes, gender stereotypes, and harmful social norms, that enable trafficking in persons - the root causes that have allowed this issue, as well as broader forms of exploitation, to thrive for centuries.
2. The full, effective, and meaningful engagement of youth, in all our diversity, as co-creators, co-leaders, and co-owners, across all efforts, and at all levels is critical, especially for youth with lived experiences, young women, girls, and youth facing multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination and marginalization. To ensure that we shift from seeing youth only as beneficiaries of the Protocol to partners at the table in its review and implementation, we must analyze power dynamics and build the capacity of young people on what the Protocol is, how to engage in the subsequent intergovernmental spaces, and importantly, how to localize the Protocol itself.

This has to be combined with building the capacity of Member States and UN Agencies on how to meaningfully listen to and work with youth - on how to convene more safe spaces to generate intergenerational collaboration and trust. Member States, conveners, UN staff, leaders, and those playing key roles in these processes, should participate in training and capacity-strengthening workshops on meaningful youth engagement and leadership, transformational literacy, systems thinking, intersectionality, power, and decolonizing

approaches to our work, relations and interactions. It is also important to make use of creative tools and methodologies to enable capacity strengthening.

We call on Member States to include youth representatives in their delegations - including in the Working Group and broader processes. As youth, yes, we will be constructively disruptive and exercise mutual accountability, but we are here to support your intergovernmental efforts and work with you towards our collective goal of ending trafficking in persons.

In any spaces that are being convened, across the review and implementation mechanisms of the UNTOC, a thorough power analysis must be undertaken, which should be followed by concrete measures that are effective to counter power imbalances and lead to a more equal and fairer distribution and sharing of power. This includes revealing and bringing down the hidden and invisible forces that reinforce existing power imbalances, and understanding who has the capacity to determine who gets what, who does what, who decides what, and who sets the agenda for combating trafficking in persons.

Recognizing language barriers, we call for interpretation to be provided in all official UN languages at all Constructive Dialogues, and their preparation processes, to strengthen the meaningful engagement of not only youth, but all stakeholders, to ensure that the process is as diverse and inclusive as possible. It is important to work with grassroots communities on localizing the outcomes of the Constructive Dialogues to ensure that information is shared effectively and appropriately, allowing for inclusive and diverse channels of communication.

We must continuously renew and reaffirm our collective commitment to keep vigilant about – and challenge – the (re)production of practices and behaviors that deter collaboration, and proactive listening, and that benefit a few at the expense of others. More intergenerational work to combat trafficking in persons is essential for catalyzing progress.

As youth working in the anti-trafficking in persons sector, we have the shared experience of being included in processes because it is seen as the “correct” thing to do (a tick-box exercise) – to give a perceived legitimacy to multi-actor processes led by civil society, the private sector, governments, and multilateral global and regional institutions. We cannot continue to accept tokenistic participation, restricted to very limited and either public-facing (declarative) or logistical unpaid roles that others determine for us. Youth must be given transparency and clarity on our role and the role of others in the Constructive Dialogue process, including the role of the convener, and how our efforts, work, and input are actively being taken into account.

As these Constructive Dialogues hold a unique space for youth and civil society to directly engage with Member States, we should strengthen these convenings. The Constructive Dialogues should strive to focus on generative dialogue and open conversation between all stakeholders where participants can build meaningful relationships and trust.

It is essential to allocate enough budget to support the core operating costs of youth, particularly youth facing the greatest barriers to engagement at the Constructive Dialogues. Youth must be recognized and compensated for our travel, accommodation, DSA, time, expertise, and overall contributions. Youth should be supported through core, flexible, and accessible funding that responds to their own self-defined needs. It is essential that funds that are committed to strengthening youth movements and youth leadership to combat trafficking in persons, and that these be directed primarily and transparently to youth and youth-led organizations, movements, networks, and collectives themselves, particularly those working at the grassroots, local, and community level.

Intersectionality must be at the core of our work. Research from the [United Nations University Centre for Policy Research \(2021\)](#), indicates that slavery and trafficking in persons impede two-thirds of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by, inter alia, weakening governance, creating intergenerational poverty, and institutionalizing inequality. It is crucial to incorporate an intersectional lens into the work of the Constructive Dialogues, shedding light on the multidimensionality of lived experience in which multiple axes of oppression intersect. This has been made clear by the thematic focuses of the Constructive Dialogues, for example, this year's theme of corruption, and we encourage more to be done to highlight further intersections.

3. On the matter of accountability, a clear procedure should be set up to allow for youth to be able to contest decisions, free from prejudice, discrimination, and judgment. There should be full disclosure or creation of decision-making procedures for youth to ensure that our work is integrated and institutionalized into the Constructive Dialogues, Working Groups, and broader processes. We need a bold, comprehensive, detailed, and concise plan that would make youth engagement in decision-making on trafficking in persons and the implementation of activities immutable and impermeable. As youth leaders and youth representatives, selected or nominated through diverse processes, we seek to hold ourselves accountable to the anti-human trafficking organizations, networks, collectives, movements, and constituencies that we come from and represent. We take very seriously the responsibility to be youth representatives within these Constructive Dialogues processes and bear the responsibility of transparency and accountability towards our young peers. This means reaffirming our continued commitment to advocating for meaningful youth engagement and leadership and bringing forth diverse youth perspectives to strengthen processes and the spaces we occupy. We also seek to hold other actors and leaders accountable to the mission and principles; healthy and mutual accountability.

The tools to transform negotiated language, commitments, and promises into concrete action are at our fingertips. Civil society, youth, UNODC - we are all already working on the ground on the frontlines in implementing the Protocol and beyond. What we need is your political will to act.

As youth, we look forward to continuing to work constructively in partnership with all stakeholders in realizing the full potential of the Protocol and sharing more comprehensive observations through our written statement.