

Joint statement of the Latin America and the Caribbean regional Inter-Agency Working Group on Youth of the United Nations System in observance of the International Youth Day

THE YOUTH AND THEIR LEADERSHIP IN OUR SOCIETIES TRANSFORMATION

Panama City, August 12, 2016.- On the occasion of the International Youth Day, the undersigned agencies, funds and programs of the United Nations in Latin America and the Caribbean are calling for the recognition of youth leadership role in the implementation of the Agenda for Sustainable Development and changing production patterns and consumption of our societies.

The region of Latin America and the Caribbean counts with 156 millions of young people (between 15 to 29 years old) representing 26% of the population. According to the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), poverty disproportionately affects young men and women: 39% live in poverty, with the highest numbers in rural areas (46%) and in urban areas (25%)¹, in a region counting with 10 of the 15 most unequal countries in the world². According to the International Labour Organization (ILO), the unemployment rate of young men and women in Latin America and the Caribbean reached 13.3% in 2015, a figure three times higher than adults.

Education appears as a key investment to ensure decent jobs. Unfortunately, 23 million young people in rural areas have low or no educational opportunities and only 37% are paying contributions to health insurance and 30% to the pension system, according to the data from 2013³. Young indigenous people, young LGBTI populations and young Afro descendant also experience special situations of exclusion and human rights violations. Educational systems remain poorly inclusive in socioeconomic terms, which tends to perpetuate structural inequalities rooted in the region⁴. In addition, one out of five young people is excluded from both from the educational system and the labor market: most are adolescent and young women working in housework and unpaid care work⁵.

The region has the second highest rate of teenage pregnancy in the world. UNFPA estimates that 4.7 million teenagers in 2020 will become mothers before the age of 18 in Latin America. This implies serious consequences in terms of development opportunities and in the right of enjoying the highest attainable standard of health for these adolescents in the present and in the future.

According to the Global Study on Homicide⁶, Latin America and the Caribbean is the most violent region globally. Within the region, Central America and the Caribbean have been the only sub-regions where homicides increased between 2000 and 2010⁷. Approximately 33% of all homicides globally occur in the region⁸. As noted by the United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), the direct violence faced by young people, in particular homicides, is one of the leading causes of death for youth. In addition to this situation of social violence, violence against women, child marriages and unions, forced unions⁹ and specifically sexual violence affects young women¹⁰.

¹ <http://lac.unfpa.org/temas/adolescencia-y-juventud>

² <http://www.latinamerica.undp.org/content/rblac/es/home/regioninfo.html>

³ http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---americas/---ro-lima/documents/publication/wcms_235577.pdf

⁴ UNESCO (2015) Results Report TERCE: <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0024/002439/243980s.pdf>

⁵ Trucco y Ullmann (2016). "Youth: realities and challenges for development with equality" (ECLAC). Available online: http://repositorio.cepal.org/bitstream/handle/11362/38978/S1500718_es.pdf;jsessionid=ABF9899B1DA91AD21F725286BA66196B?sequence=4

⁶ https://www.unodc.org/documents/congress/background-information/Crime_Statistics/Global_Study_on_Homicide_2011.pdf

⁷ <http://www.undp.org/content/dam/rblac/img/IDH/IDH-AL%20Informe%20completo.pdf>

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ 1,678 women were killed in 2014 on the basis of gender in 14 countries in Latin America and three in the Caribbean, according to official data compiled by the Gender Equality Observatory of Latin America and the Caribbean, ECLAC.

¹⁰ PAHO- In absolute figures, it is estimated that the rate of sexual violence against women in Latin America records for 500 episodes per day.

Other major causes of death among young men and women between 15 and 24 are related to road safety and traffic accidents, but also to health problems and AIDS¹¹. A third of all new HIV infections occurring in the region corresponds to young people in this age range¹². There are still many legal barriers and other social and cultural obstacles for adolescents to have access to sexual and reproductive health, in accordance with international instruments that protect their right to sexual and reproductive health.

Unsustainable models of consumption and production are also causing poverty experienced by young people and the deterioration of the planet. Climate change and natural disasters represent an important challenge for the survival of young people, while at the same time the region counts with an extraordinary biodiversity¹³ and recognized leadership in climate change adaptation.

Finally, the political representation of young people in Latin America and the Caribbean is very low¹⁴ and, according to the first Ibero-American survey on youth¹⁵, youth of the region has high expectations to increase their participation in the course of the next five years.

These multiple challenges faced by young people are also opportunities for change and transformation for our region. Youth has shown strong courage in denouncing inequalities and injustices, in fighting to guarantee their human rights and in nonviolently demanding new options for social and political participation.

Young people are key actors in this transformation as citizens but also as consumers and creators of innovative proposals and alternatives in the field of education, technology, ecology, industrial production, among others.

It is urgent to transform consumption and production patterns and to promote greater educational and learning opportunities that meet the needs of the region and reflect a model of sustainable development. This requires a paradigm shift, focusing on people and their rights.

For that, distorted and negative images of youth as violent actors, victims, or excluded agents must be changed, and instead to show their enormous potential, that states open spaces for their participation and decision making in the development of legislation, policies and programs that countries develop in the framework of the Sustainable Development Goals. Organized civil society and youth volunteer organizations must be strengthened, so that they can influence the political, economic and social decision making spaces. It is crucial to ensure that "green economies" are an opportunity for social inclusion and decent work for everyone.

In this key moment for the development of the countries of the region, the undersigned agencies, funds and programs of the United Nations in Latin America and the Caribbean come together to say that it is not possible to eradicate poverty, transform patterns of production and consumption and achieve all the Sustainable Development Goals without the active participation of youth.

ECLAC, FAO, ILO, PAHO / WHO, UNAIDS, UNDP, UNESCO, UNFPA, UNICEF, UNV and UN Women.

¹¹ http://ais.paho.org/phis/viz/rho_sa_causas_principales_mortalidad_es.asp

¹² Aidsinfo database <http://aidsinfo.unaids.org/>

¹³ For instance: <http://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/presscenter/pressreleases/2010/12/02/amrica-latina-y-el-caribe-superpotencias-de-biodiversidad/>

¹⁴ According to a recent UNDP study that extended to 25 parliaments, only 2.7 % of members of parliaments, and 1.3% in the region were under 30 years old. Among young people of African or Indian descent, this percentage is below the figures presented.

¹⁵ http://www.oij.org/es_ES/publicacion/1-encuesta-iberoamericana-de-juventudes-informe-ejecutivo