Narrative Report: Young Peacebuilders’ Forum
15-18 July, 2019
Bogotá, Colombia
1. Introduction

In collaboration with its local partners in Colombia—and after holding several Young Peacebuilders’ Forums in The Hague—the United Network of Young Peacebuilders (UNOY) organised its first regional forum, in Bogotá from July 15-18, 2019 with a focus on the Americas. Through its theme—‘Leaving No Youth Behind Through Resolution 2250 and Agenda 2030’—the Young Peacebuilders’ Forum (YPF) brought together 60 participants from the region and around the world to collaborate and share with each other best practices to advance youth inclusion. Participants at the forum actively demonstrated that youth are already in charge of important peace and development processes in the region and underscored the need to work in partnership through a strong network that bridges the gap between policymakers and youth in the region. The regional forum was made possible through the generous support of the Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA).

This report highlights the main outcomes, the methodological approach, and lessons learnt in achieving the forum’s four main objectives, namely:

- Create a stimulating yet open space for young peacebuilders to build concrete and meaningful partnerships and cooperation beyond mere networking;
- Foster a multi-angled and lively discussion on the place and role of global agendas in peacebuilding processes in Americas and beyond;
- Generate a comfortable space for participants to share experiences, methods, narratives, and to learn from one another, in the shape of a “methods market”;
- Expand and strengthen the UNOY network in the Americas by bringing together young leaders and increasing our visibility regionally.
2. Methodological Approach

Through small group discussions, plenary presentations, and experiential learning sessions, the forum's methodology was participatory and inclusive of participants’ diverse knowledge and peacebuilding experiences. To promote spaces for sharing knowledge and learning with this diverse group of young peacebuilders, different sessions of the forum were structured on the basis of four identified outstanding regional issues that currently affect youth inclusion in the Americas:

- Climate change;
- Democracy/governance failure;
- Inequity and unequal access to resources (across genders);
- Human rights violations.

Furthermore, the facilitators of the forum fostered a conducive dialogue environment that enabled mutual respect and open-mindedness. In the course of the forum, participants engaged with each other in three specific spaces as demonstrated by the diagram below:

The first space—the auditorium—was the main venue of the forum in which plenary sessions, panel presentations, and general discussions were held. The second space—called ‘working spaces’—helped participants to identify common narratives around shared problems. Lastly, in the third space—dubbed ‘networking islands’—participants forged networks with each other and interacted with multi-stakeholders invited to attend the forum.
3. Main Outcomes of the Forum:

- **A stronger approach to youth facilitation was developed** with the development of facilitation and a methodological toolkit. This toolkit enabled knowledge exchange and the formation of networking spaces during the forum. The toolkit includes all reading resources, forms, and instruments developed during the design of the methodology.

- **Youth inclusion and diversity were fostered.**
  The forum aimed to be a microcosm of youth diversity, both in terms of regional and thematic representation. The 60 participants hailed from 25 countries and are presently working on youth inclusion initiatives related to youth reproductive rights, youth participation in environmental protection, arts for social engagement, youth entrepreneurship in fragile contexts, reintegration of former combatants, education, youth political inclusion, protection of migrants’ rights and marginalised youth, among others.

- **The seeds of peer-to-peer collaborations were planted, with 20 formal partnerships enabled at the Forum.** Forum participants were able to forge partnerships among each other and receive experts' feedback on suggested initiatives to implement after the forum, with follow-up support from the UNOY team.

- **Increased understanding of youth-led peacebuilding across the continent, as areas of intervention of youth-led peace initiatives in the region were mapped.** Additionally, the forum served to identify categories in which youth-led organisations are focusing their work. During one of the transversal dialogue sessions, seven lines of intervention were identified:
  1) Arts as a mechanism to prevent violence and promote inclusivity;
  2) Dialogue facilitation of polarised groups ('Improbable dialogues');
  3) Gender and diversity;
  4) Innovation, sustainability, and income generation;
  5) Youth political participation;
  6) Identities and historic memory;
  7) Leadership education and capacity development.

- **Comprehensive funding opportunities offered to five forum initiatives.**
  Five forum participants are currently being supported by the UNOY team in
developing proposals for a grant application to Lisle International, a US-based charity that funds peace education and cross-cultural understanding initiatives around the world.

- **Critical thinking elicited.** Participants also had the opportunity to examine the intersection between Agenda 2030 and Resolution 2250 as crucial policy instruments that youth-led initiatives can use to advance inclusion of different youth constituencies still left behind in peace and development processes in the region.

- **Increased visibility of UNOY, the forum, the participants, and more broadly, the Youth, Peace and Security agenda.** The three-day event drew significant social media attention of both local and international media platforms. Some of the media agencies that covered the forum include PeaceNews, El Espectador, Agencia EFE, Canal 1, El Colombiano, among others. Furthermore, forum participants agreed to consolidate a common peacebuilding strategy through which they can be recognised as UNOY ambassadors in their respective countries. Through UNOY’s communications strategy, an action plan will be carried out to sustain communication among forum participants.

- **Valuable lessons from the Colombian peace process shared.** Another important feature of this year’s forum was learning from institutional efforts working to support youth participation in the implementation of the Peace Accords signed between the Colombian government and the FARC in 2015. To this end, UNOY invited a diverse range of expert representatives involved in the implementation of the Peace Accords to share best practices and challenges in broadening youth participation in the Colombian peace process:

  1) UN agencies—UNDP and UN Verification Mission in Colombia;
  2) Bilateral agencies—Embassy of Finland and Embassy of Sweden;
  3) Government entities—Mayor’s Office of Bogotá, Truth Commission, and Special Jurisdiction for Peace;
  4) Peace Research Authorities—the Kroc Institute;
  5) Civil society institutions;
  6) Donor organisations—USAID, Caritas, and NDI.

Through this engagement with multi-stakeholders, most of whom have a regional reach in their youth programming, UNOY also identified opportunities for continued collaboration at a regional level to support young peacebuilders’ initiatives through Resolution 2250. By so doing, UNOY
also increased the visibility of its work and attracted the attention of potential new members in the Americas, a region still underrepresented in the network.

- **The forum served as a launchpad for an important advocacy message.** Forum participants shared a very important political statement regarding the case of 17 youth peacebuilders expected to attend the forum but whose visas were rejected by the Colombian government for unknown political reasons. Through this statement, participants echoed their frustrations with the visa restrictions and appealed to the Colombian government to lift unfair travel bans that further exclude some youth peacebuilders from around the world to travel to Colombia and support the ongoing peace process.

### 3.1. Testimonies

- **Youth are the most affected by stereotypes that define them as passive, violent, and apathetic to social issues. Through the forum, we celebrated the diversity of youth actively committed to social justice around the world.**

- **“Being one of the participants, I had time to tour the Colombian city of Bogota: a city of art and expression. As young people, we must know that creativity, honesty, and standing up to social injustices & exclusion is the way to promote peace.”**

- **“What an incredible opportunity it was for so many inspiring young peacebuilders to come together from around the world and learn from one another, exchange information and grow together. It is only upwards from here!”**

- **“The young peacebuilders I met at the Forum are quite exceptional; each with their unique approaches to build peace from social awareness, creativity & discipline—working with love & humility to expand the path towards a better future for all.”**
4. Lessons Learnt

4.1. To do again:

- **Link UNOY’s goals to a specific peacebuilding context, offering a tangible and relevant setting to host such an event.** The decision to host this year’s forum in Colombia—where a peace implementation process is currently taking place together with the accompanying social changes—fostered an appropriate mechanism for participants to gain a deeper understanding of how peacebuilding operates in a real context.

- **Bring a regional focus to the forum, which is a springboard and catalyst of greater UNOY presence in a region, presenting an opportunity to boost a regional peacebuilding network as an effective strategy to implement Resolution 2250.** The success of the forum at bringing together so many youth-led initiatives, methods, and projects demonstrated how relevant it is to work on the consolidation of a regional space for young peacebuilders in which they can share their experiences and promote horizontal cooperation.

- **Enhance collaborative work through the emphasis of a network structure, sharing knowledge and ideas, rather than ‘reinventing the wheel’.** UNOY’s added value for the Americas is that in order to make youth peacebuilding actions more effective it is necessary to provide a network to share knowledge and promote transfer processes.

- **Promote creative processes, in addition to developing capacities and project management skills among youth-led organisations.** Young peacebuilders participating in this year’s forum strongly valued the possibility they had to propose actions and initiatives that were simultaneously observed by experts and advisors who gave them feedback on how to formulate ideas and what elements should be considered.
Be aware of how important it is to prioritise identity and local understanding of development. Youth leaders promoting social change in the Americas are fully committed to the conservation of ethnic knowledge, values, and the particularities in our understanding of what development means. Therefore, it is important for UNOY to maintain space for traditional knowledge, ideas, and world views of ethnic regional groups.

4.2. Follow up suggestions:

- Enhance advocacy efforts with relevant stakeholders to support the continuity and sustainability of UNOY’s work in the region. This involves mapping relevant actors to work with and identifying opportunities for action that best position UNOY as a relevant regional actor.

- Identify and continue to support formed partnerships and joint ideas shared during the forum. This includes providing both technical and financial support to outstanding youth initiatives and enabling relationships with donors and other relevant actors in the region. From the 20 partnerships that participants formed at the forum, UNOY will identify high impact initiatives that should be given priority in terms of follow up.

- UNOY should explore work possibilities at the local and rural levels. Most countries of the region are deeply affected by inequity and dynamics of center-periphery economic and social development. While it is quite easy to identify youth peacebuilding initiatives that are taking place in urban spaces, the initiatives that are taking place in rural and remote areas are less visible and recognised. Thus, UNOY has a great opportunity to identify and promote those isolated initiatives by connecting them to other experiences in order to achieve greater impact, mainly in places in which peacebuilding and activism faces poverty and exclusion.
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