Peace Powered by Youth

UNOY Peacebuilders’ Strategy 2021 - 2025
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Our Vision

We are the leading global community of young peacebuilders. Together, we are building a world free from all forms of violence.

A World

• where young people have the power to transform conflict;
• where youth participation is real and meaningful for all;
• where young people actively partner for peace without fear or threat.

Our Mission

As a global network of youth-led organisations, we are dedicated to building and sustaining peace. For 30 years, we have been working to end the violence of young people’s exclusion. The United Network of Young Peacebuilders exists to:

- Transform the power structures that exclude young people from decision-making;
- Build sustainable spaces for young people to shape decisions that affect them;
- Connect people to partner for peaceful and inclusive societies.

We will not stop until young people’s contributions to peace and security are recognised and supported worldwide; and even then, we will continue to sustain them.

“UNOY means creating safe spaces in which youth organisations working on youth, peace and security from different corners of the world can meaningfully engage, participate, and access adequate resources to keep acting in their communities.”

- Conseil Consultatif de Jeunes, Haiti

1 When we refer to young people, we refer to the extraordinary diversity of contexts, identities, and beliefs.
Introducing the Ecosystem

We like to think of peacebuilding in terms of a landscape. When soil is fertile, our natural world flourishes. The same is true of peace; when the environment is enabling, young peacebuilders thrive. As the United Network of Young Peacebuilders (UNOY), we are creating a world where young people are central to building and sustaining peace.

Peace is personal, and we know the power we have when we influence change as a united youth-led community. So, we introduce you to 5 young peacebuilders—Noura, Pablo, Ray, Musamba, and Sabeena—who represent the changes necessary for the peaceful and inclusive world we need.

Everywhere, young peacebuilders are planting positive seeds of change. Throughout her district, Noura is promoting gender equality, yet she is targeted as a national threat. In his region, Pablo is finding solutions to climate and conflict, but lacks the resources to sustain his efforts. Across the country, Ray is training their peers in civic activism, yet they are excluded from participating in peace processes. Within his surrounding counties, Musamba is leading conflict mediation and dialogue programmes, and still he is not treated as an equal partner in peace. In remote and marginalised communities, Sabeena is addressing violent tensions with creative peace education, yet her work is disregarded.

So, how do we create a peacebuilding ecosystem where young people have an equal and meaningful place? It starts with us youth powering peace, challenging and overcoming the barriers for young peacebuilders to thrive. We will prioritise the protection of young peacebuilders and their human right to civic space, riding the solidarity and resilience across the network. We will generate the enthusiasm and support that creative approaches to peace require. We will break ground with our non-youth partners to ensure the voice and agency of youth is present and commonplace in all aspects of peace and security. We will continue to transfer power and opportunity to our regional communities, increasing gender responsiveness throughout our work. None of this reshaped landscape would be possible without our networks, and we thank our partners for promoting with us a meaningful place for young peacebuilders to drive positive peace everywhere.

How did we develop this strategy?

In a network like ours, the process for developing the next 5-year strategy is as important as the content itself. It has been the perfect occasion to put into practice what we preach and be the participatory network where all voices are valued.

• 79% of our members directly contributed to shaping this strategy by attending one of the online consultations organised, and 40% of them attended all the consultations (during a pandemic);
• 12 young elected representatives from our network validated every single step of the way and co-developed inclusive and empowering methodologies for member consultations;
• 16 young professionals in the international secretariat led specific parts of the process.

These are only numbers, of course...

“Our new strategic plan is extremely solid, well-crafted, and most importantly done with the inclusive participation of all members.”
- Tomas, UNOY peacebuilder in Argentina

“UNOY is not just an organisation, it is led by all of its member organisations!”
- Samar, UNOY peacebuilder in Egypt

Co-director Lorraine Degruson, Board Chair Laura Lasance & ISG Chair Tomas Furfaro, on behalf of the United Network of Young Peacebuilders
The year 2020 the planet counts 2.4 billion young people between 15 and 34 years old, and 1.85 billion between the ages of 10 and 24. Among them, 90% are living in developing countries and one of every four is affected by armed conflict or violence.

The year 2020 is an important year for young people. Five years ago, the UN Security Council resolution (UNSCR) 2250 on Youth, Peace and Security (YPS) was adopted, which was a historic moment for the acknowledgement of youth in peacebuilding. Five years down the line, it is time to take stock of promises made.

The essential role of young people in peace and security is more widely recognised than ever before, thanks to the growing evidence available of youth-led peace. Since the creation of the network, UNOY peacebuilders have been involved in all phases of peace and conflict cycles—from prevention to humanitarian support to post-conflict truth and reconciliation processes—and have addressed multiple forms of violence to bring peace to their communities.

Yet, a majority of youth still face structural barriers to participate and influence decision-making, resulting in a number of exclusions (political, economic, educational, gendered, etc.) that are perceived by young people as the violence of exclusion.

Restrictions to young people’s civic space and inadequate resourcing of young peacebuilders remain major obstacles for unleashing the youth power for peace.

Youth’s participation in peace and security processes is still very low, as traditional participation arenas are often inaccessible. Too frequently, UNOY peacebuilders still face closed doors, lack of credit and recognition, and are marginalised in victims or villains roles. These negative narratives and stereotypes about our age group are frequent and disempowering to young people around the world. They continue to inform policy myths that frame youth as a threat and policy responses that focus on securitised and reactionary strategies, despite growing evidence debunking and criticising them.

In 2020, the conclusion is clear. The efforts of the international community and the multilateral system are lagging behind the ambitions of young peacebuilders and UNSCR 2250, protracting the violence of youth exclusion and fueling the reciprocal mistrust that hinders sustaining peace.

Young peacebuilders are essential partners to achieve global peace and security.

Despite barriers, young people’s lead in planting the seeds of change and creating peace has not stopped. Youth have mobilised informal environments and generated innovative spaces to participate. UNOY peacebuilders have been around for 30 years, and while the adoption of UNSCR 2250 raised the profile of our work, it is our strong history of determined and constructive contributions to peace that have made real changes possible.

UNOY have resourcefully built alliances and partnerships to contribute to sustainable peace and development, in spite of the mistrust and discrimination we face. Now, traditional peacebuilding actors are recognising that the participation of young people ‘around the [negotiation] room’ or their activism ‘outside the room’—through online campaigns and peaceful demonstrations—are more influential than anticipated, and that traditional methods for building peace are often limited.

In 2019, youth movements have risen against their exclusion from important...
decisions, establishing ‘solutions’ to oppose power structures that are socially and environmentally unfair and exclusive. UNOY peacebuilders have launched climate campaigns, monitored for fair and open elections, lobbied for more investment in peace, and stood for inclusive societies. In 2020, youth leadership has shaped the way in which communities have responded to unprecedented global threats. UNOY peacebuilders have developed on the spot support services for those affected by social isolation, campaigns to fight misinformation and fake news, while promoting social cohesion and tolerance. By 2025, we want young people to be more united and empowered than ever, steering social progress, inspiring political transformations, and innovating in social justice activism.

To get there, we will bring down the structural barriers to meaningful youth participation in peace and security. This means supporting political participation of youth in formal political, electoral and peace processes, and in less formal community-level and digital spaces. This requires breaking down stereotypes, creating entry points, challenging exclusionary structures, and mobilising adequate resources for youth-led peacebuilding. Ultimately, we will create an enabling landscape for youth participation, where there is space to be civicly engaged for peace and where young peacebuilders are empowered.

In bringing down these barriers, UNOY’s resilience, creativity and energy will be the driving force. We will need the support of all of our partners and donors. We will be holding Member States and multilateral actors accountable to their promises, especially in the central role they have to play in the implementation of the three UN Security Council resolutions 2250, 2419, 2535, so that youth participation becomes real and meaningful.

“UNOY is a peacebuilder’s hub, where local youth organisations working for peace raise their profile, and gain visibility, support, and a sense of inclusion.”

- United Network of Youth for Peace and Diplomacy UNYPD, Nigeria
Landscaping Change

To shape our vision of the world, we will focus on removing 5 barriers that stand in the way:

• the threats to civic space for young peacebuilders
• the under-resourcing of their efforts
• the lack of meaningful youth participation
• the unequal engagement of youth as partners
• and the disregard of creative youth approaches

So that in 5 years, the United Network of Young Peacebuilders can say:
1) We are protected
2) We are resourced
3) We are meaningful participants
4) We are equal partners
5) We are creative changemakers

It will take all of our young peacebuilders together to create these changes towards our vision. Therefore, we will continue to strengthen the Groundworks for Peace:

• a strong member-led community of young peacebuilders,
• supported by a sustainable international secretariat.
5 Young Peacebuilders embodying change

A world free from all forms of violence starts with enabling young peacebuilders to continue landscaping change.³

1 Noura, the Protected Peacebuilder

Change goal: Young peacebuilders’ rights to civic engagement for peace are protected

What if young people, like Noura, have safe spaces to build peace in their communities? More and more, young peacebuilders must navigate socio-cultural, political and legal, physical and psychological, financial, and digital threats when building peace. Often, an overemphasis on ‘security’ for peace is used as an excuse to crack down on civic space. Attempts to silence Noura’s voice for an inclusive society, to cut funding for her peace work, and to endanger her digital, physical and emotional integrity put us all at risk. These threats hinder her right to be civically engaged, to participate in decisions that affect her community, and to simply disagree with the system around her. Ultimately, safeguarding these rights has huge implications for the active participation and engagement of young people. In the world we create, Noura’s political and civic rights are protected, without further victimisation, and she builds peace in a safe, enabling and gender-responsive civic space.

Shaping a new landscape

How do we secure the rights and space for youth-led peacebuilding? It starts with mobilising people and resources within the UNOY community, while also securing a wider community of defenders. So that they can continue their important work even in times of crisis, we will develop a protection-specific network for young peacebuilders and an emergency response mechanism. So that their voice is not alone in identifying injustice and demanding accountability, we will strengthen our collective advocacy and bring a youth-for-peace voice to human rights spaces. Finally, we will empower youth to identify and navigate protection challenges and shrinking civic space through targeted capacity development on security risk management, advocacy, and knowledge transfer.

Harvesting changes by 2023

• A collective and resourced strategy among key international partners is in place for protecting young peacebuilders in times of crisis
• Earmarked funding for the protection of young peacebuilders exists in 2 critical regions, and focused on youth positive potential for peace
• More UNOY peacebuilders are able to carry out their work safely as a result of UNOY’s advocacy towards relevant national and regional governments

³ The 5 young peacebuilders presented here are fictional characters (inspired by our members) that embody the changes we want to make.
Pablo, the Resourced Peacebuilder

Goal: Young peacebuilders are sustainably resourced to build peace

What if young people, like Pablo, have access to the resources necessary to build sustainable peace? Absent or inadequate resourcing remains a major obstacle for Pablo to build peace in and around his community. Most organisations like his operate with very low institutional funding and have limited capacities. When available, funding often has a specific focus on the role of youth in relation to violent extremism and terrorism. This has pressured Pablo’s organisation to change focus as the only way to access resources, and reinforces the stereotype that young people are either victims or perpetrators of violence, failing to address the roots and key drivers of conflict, such as abusive and exclusive governance systems. In the world we build, Pablo and his organisation can access flexible and youth-tailored funding, developing multiple capacities for peacebuilding.

“I see the need for increasing and easing access to resources to support the operations of my organisation and transform climate conflicts, and for forming equal and long-term relationships with our partners in doing so. Concretely, I need dedicated funds for youth organisations that are easy to access, report and administer, and that focus on peace work and collective action.”

Shaping a new landscape

How do we create a different funding and resourcing landscape for young people? It starts with creating a new culture of engagement with young people. In the coming years, we will increase the capacities and financial resources available to UNOY peacebuilders, focusing on what they need to continue building peace in a changing world.

We will advocate for a youth-led funding agenda in relevant alliances and platforms where decisions on funding are made, and lead by example in developing our own diligent and empowering frameworks.

We will also create and sustain communities of learning for young peacebuilders, where methodologies and networks for collective empowerment can thrive in designing strategies to comprehensively resource youth.

Harvesting changes by 2023

- UNOY peacebuilders are empowered by the network, and equipped to build peace in times of new global challenges
- Non-youth power-holders engage with youth groups in long-term, meaningful and comprehensive partnerships
- There is earmarked funding for youth-led organisations and youth activism in all regions, that does not focus on radicalisation or violent extremism
3 Ray, the Participating Peacebuilder

Goal: Young people meaningfully participate in peace and security

What if young people, like Ray, have the space and tools to actively and meaningfully participate in peace everywhere? Oftentimes, Ray represents the majority of a population, yet is routinely excluded from crucial decision-making processes. Denying youth participation can trigger a downward spiral of social mistrust from young people, like Ray, towards other generations and their governments. This damages social cohesion and the functioning of a society in general, which can ultimately fuel fear and violent conflict. We know that when Ray and other young people meaningfully participate in peace processes, their sustainability increases and governance structures are more representative. In the world we shape, policies and decisions around peace and security are influenced by and responsive to the concerns, needs and aspirations of Ray and their peers.

Shaping a new landscape

How do we promote more meaningful youth participation to peace and security processes? It starts with advocating for, supporting and monitoring the national, regional and global implementation of UNSCR 2250. Beyond that, we will provide youth leadership to global platforms where decisions on peace and security are shaped, specifically focusing on promoting the protection of civic space, youth-inclusive peace processes, and youth, peace and climate action. Overall, we will reshape the discourse and mindset about young people, as the sowers and reapers of positive change, and equip young peace-builders with the tools they need to advocate for youth participation and peace.

Harvesting changes by 2023

• New evidence is developed by youth as a tool to advocate for their role in key peace and security areas (counter-terrorism, transitional justice, etc.)
• Frameworks for implementing YPS are adopted by at least 6 new national governments in 3 regions, shaped and monitored by youth
• More human rights mechanisms include the rights and participation of young people in their work

• 27-year-old non-binary person
• Living in a big university city
• Working as a trainer and educator in civic activism and participation

“As a young non-binary person, existing structures and cultures further challenge my meaningful participation in peace policies and processes. Programmes that amplify the voices of youth, address the intersectional nature of exclusion, and strengthen all youth capacities as advocates of peace will increase our impact on policies and processes that affect our lives. Ultimately, meaningful youth participation should be institutionalised at all levels so that we can influence all decisions on peace and security.”

We are Meaningful Participants.
Musamba, the Equal Partner in Peace

Goal: Youth and non-youth peace and security actors actively work together in strong intergenerational partnerships

What if young people, like Musamba, are regarded as equal partners in peace by all? For Musamba’s initiatives to succeed and achieve lasting impact, it is crucial that he can count on the understanding, solidarity and support of his partners in peacebuilding. An intergenerational approach is fundamental to finding common ground for action, developing mutual respect, and bridging trust gaps between youth and other members of society.

Partnerships across different ages that include youth across identities that include youth across identities are needed to expand the impact of youth and their contribution to peace. In the world we design, Musamba and power-holders have strengthened capacities to partner, as well as the spaces to engage together on decisions and policies related to peace and security.

“I have observed that many well-intended partnerships in fact create age and gender power dynamics where non-youth have most of the decision-making power. Youth-driven partnership development and supporting our partners in engaging with us can counter that! Trust-building is another essential element of meaningful intergenerational partnerships.”

Harvesting changes by 2023

- Important peacebuilding actors meaningfully include youth in decision-making
- Multi-stakeholder partnerships for YPS are formed and certified by youth in each region
- Most UNOY peacebuilders are confident and equipped to promote and shape equal partnerships between youth and non-youth

Shaping a new landscape

How can we create strong intergenerational partnerships between youth and other peace partners? We start by empowering youth and non-youth to engage equitably with each other, challenge power imbalances, and embrace a culture of meaningful youth participation. This involves supporting our partners in their commitments to actively and meaningfully engage young people in peacebuilding, while holding them accountable to do so.
Sabeena, the Creative Changemaker

Goal: Young people lead creative changemaking for peace

What if creative changemakers, like Sabeena, have the space and support to lead innovative action for peace? Sabeena manoeuvres a sector where there is a tendency to recycle old solutions with little innovation. Creative thinking and action, innovation, and a diversity of views and perspectives are key to challenging and changing the peacebuilding field for the better. Worldwide, young people like Sabeena have shown to be strikingly creative in addressing conflict around them, and in building spaces of belonging through which they express themselves. Sabeena innovates by offering critical new perspectives and insights to building peace. We see that too often traditional leadership styles and systems are lacking alternative expertise and talents, overlooking the potential and power of #Youth4Peace. In the world we make, Sabeena is leading innovation for sustainable change, and her alternative approaches to peace and security are expanded.

• 19-year-old woman
• Living in a remote village
• Working with creative peace education in marginalised communities

“Building peace in my community is so complex that it requires creative and non-formal approaches, and constantly reinventing them. Our ideas and approaches are rarely supported by donors or older actors in the field, despite their obvious added value to building peace locally. I’d love to be connected to other young changemakers in the world to learn from their creativity and tap into their innovative projects!”

We will also advocate for more traditional peacebuilders to endorse the power of young people’s creative contributions to peace processes.

Harvesting changes by 2023

• UNOY peacebuilders’ capacity to develop creative action for peace grows as a result of exchange of expertise in the network
• Several of our peace and security partners are adopting alternative approaches to peacebuilding

Shaping a new landscape

How do we go beyond simply participating in peace, and change traditional systems for the better? It starts by watering the roots of creativity, so that young people have the space to innovate, create and act. We will design spaces for peer exchange and developing capacities of our young changemakers to lead creative thinking and action for peace. While others overlook them, we will instill confidence in them by encouraging and expanding their approaches.
Groundworks for Peace

Goal: Our network of grassroots youth-led organisations and international secretariat are inclusive and sustainable.

How can young peacebuilders landscape changes for a more peaceful and inclusive world? It starts with providing a healthy soil for peace to grow. It takes all of our young peacebuilders together to create change, challenge structural barriers to youth participation in peacebuilding, and drive peace in our communities. Therefore, we will continue to strengthen our member-led network of young peacebuilders and the international secretariat.

To make us stronger, we will continue expanding our unique community of youth peace organisations by representing young people in new conflict geographies and identities, and by embracing our youth leadership in all layers of the network. The most impactful structural decisions we can make are who we support, how we prioritise our resources, and whose mission we amplify. Regional expertise and leadership will continue to grow as we further decentralise our programmes and governance, transferring more resources and power to our regions. Each of our members is a UNOY peacebuilder. Within the network, we will continue to create spaces to foster active and meaningful participation, as well as peer learning among members. Particular attention will be extended to diversifying network representation and outreach beyond ‘usual suspects’. Our goal is for UNOY peacebuilders to have ownership over the network and feel empowered by our community of young peacebuilders.

To make us more sustainable, in a post-Covid-19 world, where boundaries of financial and human resources for peacebuilding organisations will be redefined, we will focus on sustaining an organisational culture that is anchored in our values. We will be proactively drawing our line between growth, professionalisation, and our DNA of an agile, horizontal organisation, creating working environments for our teams that are empowering, people-centered, and respectful. Our goal is to be an example of decentralised, sustainable and inclusive governance in the field of peace and security, and to enable meaningful youth participation throughout our structures.

“UNOY is the most active network in the world! UNOY means networking, inspiring, and building capacities of the world’s young peacebuilders to have one amplified voice calling for peace.”

- Youth without Borders & Yemen Peace School organisations, Yemen
What it takes to reap change

How do we make this strategy a reality?

We focus

Advocacy  Capacity development  Networking

We learn and adapt

Peace and conflict occur in highly changing contexts, where objectives and the paths to achieve them are unpredictable. Predetermined indicators are not helpful in assessing progress towards our vision, so we have designed a framework where we will harvest outcomes as evidence of change.

We are ready to face the uncertain end of the COVID-19 crisis and its implications, which make it difficult to decide on timelines for types of activities UNOY has traditionally relied on, namely in-person networking meetings and advocacy missions. Knowing this, it has been crucial to focus on change and not on specific interventions during the development of this strategy. We know we will have to be flexible, innovative, resourceful, and ultimately adapt to what is possible, while setting ground for new ways to build peace online.

We resource

We want to stabilise the growth that UNOY has achieved in the recent past, while shifting power and resources to our network.

We communicate

We know that language alone can limit the extent of our knowledge, our ability to participate, to secure resources, to challenge disempowering structures, and so on. With this in mind, we have developed a roadmap that responds to our communications needs.

• We will solidify an effective communications approach to UNOY peacebuilders in crisis, so that Noura’s call for protection is heard and amplified.
• We will showcase impact on our newly designed website, so that Pablo is better equipped to navigate the funding landscape.
• We will empower UNOY members to advocate as UNOY peacebuilders, so that Ray’s sphere of influence expands.
• We will develop an internal peer exchange platform, so that other UNOY peacebuilders can learn from Musamba.
• We will translate more and more UNOY resources, so that Sabeena’s work to engage remote communities is easier.

You are an ideal partner for us if you are:

• Acting from a position of trust;
• Flexible and adaptable to a changing peacebuilding landscape;
• Willing to take risks, support innovation, and accept unexpected outcomes;
• Respectful of our autonomy and independence;
• Unbureaucratic and committed to a light-touch approach with minimum co-funding requirements;
• Interested in fostering our community beyond the immediate lifetime of a partnership;
• Transparent about your own strategy and motives for funding;

Networking

Advocacy

Networking to decide on timelines for types of activities UNOY has traditionally relied on, namely in-person networking meetings and advocacy missions. Knowing this, it has been crucial to focus on change and not on specific interventions during the development of this strategy. We know we will have to be flexible, innovative, resourceful, and ultimately adapt to what is possible, while setting ground for new ways to build peace online.

Capacity development
“UNOY has given us the opportunity to become connected with youth from across the region and the world who share the same value of a peaceful youth-led future for the world.”
- ANGO, Afghanistan

“Being part of UNOY means accessing a platform that brings together experts, volunteers, and activists who are committed to making positive change collectively.”
- Peace of Art, Lebanon

“UNOY means creating safe spaces and establishing an enabling environment for young peacebuilders to shape peace through collective action at local levels.”
- Local Youth Corner, Cameroon

“UNOY is a bridge between policies and actions. It is the dot that connects our hopes and actions for a peaceful and inclusive world.”
- LIFT Liberia

“The whole is greater than the sum of its parts”: UNOY is evidence of the added value of joining forces to create sustainable change.”
- Nexes Interculturals, Spain

“UNOY means understanding realities of youth-led peacebuilding in different contexts and providing support adequate to those needs”
- PeaceMentors, Iran