



YOUTH EMPOWERMENT THROUGH HUMAN RIGHTS

Keeping The Dialogue Alive

June, 2014



IIMA (ISTITUTO INTERNAZIONALE MARIA AUSILIATRICE) or Salesian Sisters of Don Bosco, is a religious association born from the principles of St. John Bosco which require the dedication of oneself to the service of young people and children, in particular, the poorest and those living in difficult situations.

IIMA promotes and defends **HUMAN RIGHTS**, especially those of **CHILDREN, YOUNG PEOPLE** and **WOMEN**.

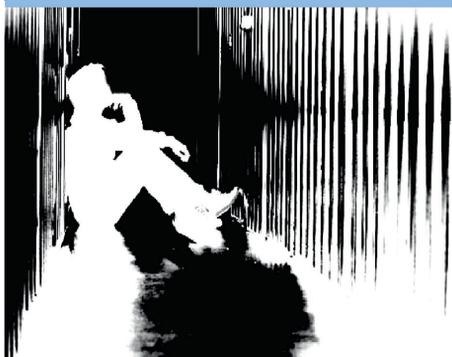
Education, understood as integral development, is at the center of our commitment, and we believe that our total dedication to children and young people is the best gift we can give to humanity.

IIMA **WORKS** in **1455 CENTERS** in **93 COUNTRIES** on **FIVE CONTINENTS**.

IIMA obtained **SPECIAL CONSULTATIVE STATUS** with the United Nations Economic and Social Council in 2008. It contributes to the work of the Human Rights Council, the Universal Periodic Review and Treaty Bodies through the IIMA Human Rights Office in Geneva (Switzerland).

We would like to extend a special thank you to Misesan Cara for supporting IIMA's initiatives on youth human rights, especially in regards to the print version of this report.

IIMA
Istituto Internazionale
Maria Ausiliatrice



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Through Human Rights

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On Tuesday, March 11th, during the 25th session of the Human Rights Council, Room XXVII in Palais des Nations was turned into a forum for ideas and hope.

A Side-Event, entitled **“Youth Empowerment through Human Rights”**, organised by **IIMA and VIDES International** in collaboration with the **Permanent Mission of Uruguay**, gave the floor of a UN meeting to **young people**.

Co-sponsored by the OHCHR and by 25 Permanent Missions, the Side-Event represented the last step on a long road: beginning with our simple recognition of the realities faced by our young volunteers and all those in their age range.



Since this realisation, IIMA and VIDES have been instrumental in an awareness raising campaign within the UN to ensure that the rights of youths are placed high on the list of priorities. In the same period as our Side-Event in June 2011 entitled “Young volunteers and Human Rights” and our event in June 2013 on “Youth Empowerment, which strategies?”, we have seen parallel sentiments and initiatives both within the ILO resolution adopted at the 101st International Labour Conference and the OHCHR Expert meeting on the human rights of youth.

Observing this great progress in the youth rights agenda, IIMA engaged in crowd sourcing in Latin America to gather experiences directly on the field and followed this with meetings with several Permanent Missions in Geneva to raise awareness about youth and to prepare and promote a new Side-Event on the 11/03/2014.



All our hard work, and where we hope the international community will proceed in light of it, will be described below. We hope that it will both interesting and inspirational but, most of all, that it will encourage you to take part in the fight to empower the generations that follow you, to enable them to enjoy their rights and to fight for a better life. **We want a better world, that we are young simply means we have the most to lose by standing idle.**

Side event: Young Volunteers and Human rights.

June, 2011

On 16th September 2011, VIDES International, in collaboration with IIMA, organized a side event at Palais de Nations, Geneva.



The event, entitled “Young Volunteers and Human Rights” served as a response to the UN Secretary General **Ban Ki Moon’s request to “the international community to support youth as agents of change and development.”** The panelist present at the event focused on voluntary activities carried out by youth of

different organizations in their respective countries and on governmental contributions to these activities.

The event was a great success and, as stated by MariaGrazia Caputo, main representative of IIMA, **“for the first time governments were invited to reflect on the role of youth as protagonist and not as mere objects of governmental measures and actions.”** Ambassadors, specialist and young volunteers productively contributed to the discussion emphasizing the need to invest in future generations to guarantee a better world.

International Labour Organisation Resolution on Youth

June 2012

At its 101st International Labour Conference the ILO adopted a Resolution calling for immediate, targeted and renewed action to tackle the youth employment crisis. It stated:

“Youth are part of the solution. Their voices should be heard, their creativity engaged, and their rights respected [...].”



The resolution provided a portfolio of tried and tested measures in five areas: macro-economic policies, employability, labour market policies, youth entrepreneurship and rights. It underscores the need for balance, coherence and complementarity across the policy measures.

The ILO called for action on youth employment from governments and social partners:

To foster pro-employment growth and decent job creation through macroeconomic policies, employability, labour market policies, youth entrepreneurship and rights to tackle the social consequences of the crisis, while ensuring financial and fiscal sustainability.

- To promote macroeconomic policies and fiscal incentives that support employment and stronger aggregate demand, improve access to finance and increase productive investment – taking into account different economic situations in countries.

- To adopt fiscally sustainable and targeted measures, such as countercyclical policies and demand-side interventions, public employment programmes, employment guarantee schemes, labour-intensive infrastructure programmes, wage and training subsidies and other specific youth employment interventions. Such programmes should ensure equal treatment for young workers.

For IIMA and VIDES, the most pressing result was the recognition that:

“Young people represent the promise of changing societies for the better. Yet, there are not enough jobs for young people. Millions are also not transitioning into decent work and are at the **risk of social exclusion**. In 2012, close to **75 million** young people worldwide are out of work, [...] and **more than 6 million have given up looking for a job**.

More than 200 million young people are working but earning under US\$2 a day. [...] Persistent youth unemployment and underemployment carry **very high social and economic costs** and threaten the fabric of our societies. Failure to generate sufficient decent jobs can result in **long-lasting “scarring” effects** on young people.”

Side event: Youth Empowerment, Which strategies?

June 2013

On June 4th, at the United Nations in Geneva, IIMA and VIDES Human Rights Office organised, in collaboration with the Permanent Mission of Uruguay the side event: “Youth Empowerment: which strategies?” The side event’s goal was to **invite all the participants, especially States, to reflect on how young people can become empowered and catalysts for social change**.

Ms Maria D’Onofrio (IIMA and VIDES Human Rights Office) highlighted that “**youth are a key human resource**, young people are **called to be catalysts for change** [...] oriented toward the realization of the common good.”

The presentation of **IIMA best practices for youth empowerment**, was introduced by Ms. Molly Kaniampadickal, and Mr. Thomas Vattathara, both coming from Guwahati, capital city of Assam, India.

They presented their experience in a professional school, **educating young people belonging to different tribes and religious groups**, often with conflict between them. In the school young people, besides studying to get a job, learn to value their cultural identity and appreciate that of others. **Human rights, equality, respect for diversity and dignity for everyone are at the core of all educational activities carried out.** After completing their studies, they become active and responsible citizens who contribute to build a society based on democracy, justice and peace.



OHCHR Expert Meeting on the Rights of Youth

July 2013

On the 25th and 26th of July 2013, the OHCHR organised a meeting of experts to analyse the human rights framework applicable to young people, and to **formulate possible ways forward for the human rights of youth at the international level.** These experts consisted of members of United Nations treaty bodies, regional organisations and monitoring mechanisms, as well as a number of youth representatives, civil society organisations, the UN Secretary General Envoy on Youth, UN-HABITAT, UNFPA and ILO representatives.

While there was **agreement that young people do experience difficulties in the exercise of their rights by virtue of being young and that there are gaps in the protection of the human rights of youth,** there were, however, divergent views expressed with regards to the need for an international instrument.

Participating experts highlighted several mechanisms that could already be used to promote the human rights of youth and suggested we ensure that these receive adequate attention at the international level. **There was a clear message for a need for urgency in moving the youth rights agenda forward, and that maintaining momentum is of crucial importance.** In any action, participants were united in emphasising the **needs for youth participation and leadership,** and ensuring the full involvement of youth organisations.

Throughout the meeting there was extensive discussion of the areas in which youth are particularly vulnerable to human rights violations. These included multiple discrimination against youth, youth employment, political rights, education, military service and health services, youth in conflict with the law, and the gender gap in youth rights.

The experts made **several recommendations** for ensuring the recognition of youth rights and their implementation at an international level. Several participants **suggested that a binding legal instrument was needed** to enable youth to fully realise their rights. However, concern was expressed as to the impact of this on the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

As a result of this lack of consensus, a step by step approach was advocated. For example, **mainstreaming youth rights into the work of the treaty bodies and special procedures**, greater focus on youth in the **reporting guidelines for treaty bodies** and in **the lists of issues sent to states**, specific **sections on youth in concluding observations** and more **General Comments** that pay attention to youth rights and youth issues. A **joint General Comment** was also suggested. It was also recommended that the **Universal Periodic Review mechanism be used**.

Similarly, **greater engagement with the HRC** on the subject was recommended. **Participants suggested a move to engage an interested sponsor to formulate a resolution at the HRC**. Other participants proposed that the Council develops, via OHCHR and other partners, **guidelines to help direct States** in their human rights based approach on youth policies. In addition, the idea of a **Special Rapporteur on Youth**, as a special procedure of the Human Rights Council, was also raised.

In correlation with all these procedures, participants also highlighted the **need for further research in the area of youth rights**

SEMINARS IN LATIN AMERICA

October, 2013

From October 7th to 16th, 2013, the IIMA Human Rights Office staff organized several seminars and workshops in Panama, Nicaragua and Costa Rica to **raise awareness on the importance of adopting a human-rights based perspective** and bring local civil society concerns to the international level.

This visit to Central America aimed at enhancing local awareness and participation in the monitoring and advocacy process within the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) of the three countries. More than that, the visit specifically **focused on the situation of youth** in those countries: the participants



included Salesian Sisters, young people and other educators working with youth. The seminars offered an introduction to the UN mechanisms, especially the UPR. The workshops **emphasized youth empowerment and active citizenship**.

It was here that the final concept for the side event was born.

Youth Empowerment: A Human Rights Perspective

On Tuesday, March 11th, IIMA and VIDES, in collaboration with the Permanent Mission of Uruguay, organised a Side Event entitled “**Youth Empowerment: a Human Rights Perspective**”, co-sponsored by **25 States and the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR)**, to encourage a reflection on the current situation of youth and to analyse the human rights framework applicable to young people. This analysis involved a discourse between young human rights activists, State representatives and experts on the rights of youth and aimed to: **(i) identify conditions which allow young people to fulfil their potential, (ii) to emphasise the value of the role of young people as privileged partners in the realization of human rights, and (iii) to encourage Governments and Civil Society actors to engage in constructive dialogue to move the youth rights agenda forward.**

The contemporary youth deserve special attention. The global challenges faced by young people have been **unequivocally recognized** by the international community. As stated by **the UN Secretary General**, "The world is on the cusp of an unprecedented demographic phenomenon."

While efforts continue towards ensuring the human rights of many vulnerable groups, **young people are often left aside** in human rights based-policies and interventions. They are **not recognized as a key resource** and a driving force, but are rather **portrayed as problematic**, both locally and globally. As they are often perceived as the cause of such tension, they are **frequently treated as a threat to security and the socio-political status quo.**

On the contrary, **the young feel deprived of their fundamental rights and excluded from decision-making processes.** Frustration and disaffection among the youth has become more and more widespread worldwide, especially in terms of a **generalized distrust towards their own governments and institutions.** Why should they participate in a society in which their rights' claims are not recognized or taken seriously? Why should a young person participate if they are not entitled to citizenship or do not have access to **social and cultural rights**? In fact, the interdependence of human rights also implies the interdependence of barriers to the exercise of rights. As a result, **young people often refuse to engage with traditional political and social institutions** and consequently may be **more easily seduced by extreme politics.**

More importantly, lack of trust and a **lack of civil engagement** have a strong **impact on society at large.** By their very nature, young people are called to **be initiators for change in society.** Full recognition and **implementation of youth rights is necessary to adequately prepare** them to assume their **responsibility** in society. The empowerment of young people in the exercise of all their rights will allow for their proper political and civil engagement. If empowered through human rights, **youth will find ways to help make those rights a reality for the rest of the society.** The support of governments is crucial to create new spaces for youth as key actors for the promotion of human rights for all.

This Side Event represented a significant step within a larger project on the parts of IIMA and VIDES. While this side event has been a goal in itself, it is the **starting point of the new process**, a step further

towards a **concrete commitment**. We have all acknowledged that the young face **specific challenges**, now we must **act accordingly**.

We must find a way to give youth a voice; **we must keep this topic alive**.

Below are the main outcomes and speeches from the event so that you can have detailed insight into the work of the inspirational young people who spoke and the topics discussed by both experts and States. One thing is certain, the youth rights agenda is gaining momentum with every step taken.

Main outcomes

1. All Member States co-sponsoring, and in particular those attending, shared concerns on the situation of youth today and perceived the need to take action.
2. Member States acknowledged the common difficulties faced by youth in different countries and valued the sharing of domestic best practices concerning measures which facilitate their empowerment.
3. There was agreement among participants that international measures are potentially useful for empowering youth and promoting their rights.
4. The attending States welcomed the recommendations made by the Expert Meeting on the Human Rights of Youth, organized by the OHCHR, in terms of identifying possible ways forward which included: mainstreaming the rights of youth into treaty body discussions and Special Procedures, dealing with issues pertaining to youth more systematically within the UPR and through a possible resolution of the Human Rights Council.
5. It was also suggested that more frequent meetings among Members States were required in order to discuss youth related issues and relevant measures to be undertaken by the international community.

Co-Organised by:
IMA, VIDES INTERNATIONAL and THE PERMANENT MISSION OF URUGUAY

YOUTH EMPOWERMENT: A HUMAN RIGHTS PERSPECTIVE

Co-Sponsored by the
Permanent Missions of:

- Albania
- Argentina
- Austria
- Burkina Faso
- Chile
- Costa Rica
- Ecuador
- El Salvador
- France
- Guatemala
- Holy See
- Honduras
- Hungary
- Italy
- Maldives
- Morocco
- Palestine
- Panama
- Paraguay
- Peru
- Portugal
- Romania
- Spain
- Tunisia
- Uruguay

and the OHCHR

**TUESDAY,
11.03.2014
1PM-3PM
ROOM XXVII, PN**

Moderator: H.E. Ambassador Laura Dupuy, Permanent Representative of Uruguay

Speakers

Young Human Rights Defenders

- Simon-Pierre Escudero, France
- Laura Catherine Barry, U.S.A
- Johnny Adalberto Buitrago Pais, Costa Rica
- Thiago Luiz Queiroz Ferreira, Brazil
- Dima Asbur, Palestine

UN Experts

- Jorge Cardona,
Committee on Convention on the rights of the Child & Ibero-American convention on the rights of Youth
- Imma Guerras-Delgado, Child and Youth Rights Advisor, OHCHR

Light refreshment will be provided. Interpretation in Eng. Fre. Spa

Young Speakers

Thiago



Thiago Luiz Queiroz Ferreira, 29, of Belo Horizonte, Brazil, is a Physiotherapist, a post-graduate in manual therapy and is currently 4th year student of Medicine in Buenos Aires, Argentina.

He is also the founder, co-owner and manager of a paramedical specialties clinic "CONSAM" (2007/2011) and has worked in various branches of Physiotherapy since 2007.

He is a VIDES Volunteer, acting with the NGO VIDES Brasil since 2007 where he assumed the position of Administrative and Financial Director of the NGO (2010/2011). Following this, he has moved to Argentina, where he is the creator and coordinator of Project "CONVIVIR: Brazil and Argentina", which is based on the proposal of the humanizing medical students through volunteerism, to provide broad experience of different practices with peoples.

A young man engaged with the world and its people, he feels that the ideas of co-responsibility for the world and of a quality life should be entrenched worldwide.

As a child I was very shy, I kept away from classmates who were not what can be described as "friends". A victim of bullying, I assumed the role of an excluded individual during childhood, unable to defend myself and fight for my rights.

This led me to a retracted position, away from my feelings and dreams and this, I can now assess, was the cause of rebellion on my part during adolescence. This change in my personality, seeking to impose myself and be accepted by the people, may have been the first time in my life when I recognised fighting for my space.

Once people saw how I defended myself, they perceived in me someone who could also defend their rights. This situation, however, led me to a fighting stance: I transformed into the questioner, the fighter, which is not always a positive way to behave.

Upon entering college, I prepared professionally to exercise care work for others and, at this time, that was enough. I worked for excellence as a student and to provide quality professional practice, I studied for 5 years in Physiotherapy, and realised my dream of opening a business, a specialty clinic providing work with patients and clinical administration.

In this same period, I experienced a situation that changed my life significantly; it shaped how I look at the world. I took part in volunteering experiences, allowing me to open up new horizons and to feel more responsible for the world and for the people, not only in my professional exercises.

However, it was only later, when I went to live in Argentina for medical studies that I experienced a real change in my approach. I spent two months living in an impoverished community in the region of the Province of Buenos Aires. Here I participated in community work done by the Salesian Sisters of the locality. The experience made me feel part of this community.

Thanks to the knowledge I had acquired with the work done by VIDES in Brazil I organised a project named "CONVIVIR: Brazil and Argentina", where the main objective was to train my peers in the medical faculty as volunteers to achieve a more humane practice in the area of health.

My experience is not easy in today's world, trying to voice your ideals, to find a space to implement something good for others. The biggest problem I have encountered is the lack of confidence in the young. I would like to discuss the following questions:

- Are youth's rights and duties as human beings recognized by society?
- What kind of actions do you believe to be important for the formation of young people engaged with the world and their rights?

Laura

I grew up in a world where human rights are implicit. A few years ago, I came to Geneva to intern at the IIMA Human Rights Office. It was during this experience in which my own personal awareness of human rights initially became heightened. Afterwards, I was able to spend eight months teaching in Gisenyi, Rwanda. Being on the ground showed me the harsh reality of existence in those places that human rights do not permeate. My students who are incredibly intelligent and talented, are unlikely to become empowered: the effects of poverty and a past of violence prevented them from reaching their capabilities as young people.

In Entebbe, Uganda, I saw much of the same detriment. The children I met had all been abandoned or orphaned by disease or violence, but the organization I worked with realized that education is the one input which could help these young people break the circle of poverty. Education is not only a human right itself, but a means by which to promote all rights. It is essential to youth empowerment.

From what I've seen in the United States, too, it is not uncommon for youths to merely accept the status-quo, unaware they could make a difference. It is pertinent for youths across the world to be able to unlock their potential in order to voice their concerns to promote integral development.

In order to strengthen democracy, obtain a multilateral security and promote human dignity, we must first ensure education. Only upon this foundation of education can true empowerment be obtained. Integral and sustainable development is important in order that youth become active participants in their society. Once this cycle of full and integral development begins, it will be perpetuated into the future.

I was blessed with access to a good education, but also parents who encouraged my brother and me to follow our passions so that we could become "fully alive." I was given the tools, from a young age, to become an active participant in my society, which many in our world are not. The young people I have come across, from here in Switzerland to rural Rwanda, are ready and looking to make a difference if afforded the opportunity.

An empowered person is one who is able to share their ideas and concerns at whatever corner of the world they are in. This is what is happening here at the United Nations, and this opportunity needs to be afforded to every youth globally. The 20th Century was full of humanitarian crises; this is the period in which the current youth have grown up in. We have seen the failure of human rights, and how it can be a detriment to a society for years to come. It is important that we learn from our history and empower the youth of the world for future generations.

I would like to discuss the need to put in place more policies that truly aim at integral development so that youth are able to reach their true potential and to make positive changes. Further, it would be beneficial to discuss the disconnect between what occurs at the United Nations and what happens in rural towns across the world.



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Laura Catherine Barry, 26, is from Rhode Island in the northeastern United States. She studied French and English at Fairfield University in Connecticut. In her final year at university, Laura went on a ten-day service trip to Kingston, Jamaica. The following year, she spent four months in Geneva, Switzerland working at the IIMA Human Rights Office. Subsequently, Laura spent eight months volunteering at the Maria Domenica Mazzarello Secondary School in Gisenyi, Rwanda. There, she taught English lessons and worked with the local children during their school recess.

She is now working towards her master's in International Development at the University of Pittsburgh in Pennsylvania where her major is Human Security. She spent last summer in Entebbe, Uganda working with her professor on a monitoring and evaluation project at Bright Kids Uganda. The organization works to care for youth who have been abandoned or orphaned by illness or violence.

Laura is inspired by working with youth and helping to improve their situation and learn to find their own strength, whether be it through teaching or playing sports. She comes from a family that values the relationships built between each other and with God. Through them, she learned to appreciate each individual for the gifts he or she brings to a situation.



Johnny

I come from the indigenous Bribe community from the Talamanca area in the south of Costa Rica. I would like to take this opportunity to share my experience as a young indigenous person.

I work as a farmer while doing volunteer work in the Costa Rican Red Cross and local VIDES group. I have learned the most important values from my family, it is from this starting point I began to value everything. I learned about indigenous principles such as our relationship and respect for nature, the earth and the animals, the source of our survival; the importance of the way of life which we have inherited from our family and the significance of solidarity. All this has allowed me to be an independent young man interested in the community where he lives.

The reality for young people in my country is different from before. We used to work for survival and from a very young age we learned how to do the work. We exchanged resources and we learned from practice. The fieldwork practices were learned by seeing and doing.

However, now we study in a school that does not teach the traditional values of our culture, which presents the challenge for us to adapt without losing our cultural identity. We have not lost the habit of work in the field, of taking care of our land and our animals, as is still how we get our daily bread, but further work serves to pay our studies in areas such as transportation and books.

Many different voluntary associations have helped us to be aware of the dignity of every person, of our rights. In particular the VIDES volunteers of San José adapted without imposing different cultures. This opened us to trusting and sharing with them. From this we have learned about issues of human development, infrastructural development, human rights and child rights and these principles helped us to form as a group of young people.

We feel responsible for the needs of our people and we want to defend and promote our cultural identity. To this end we have started to teach children their rights in the Bribe language.

We have a few difficulties with education at all levels. While we appreciate the efforts of the Government to ensure the right to education, we need education that helps us to learn more about our Bribe culture without this requiring our exclusion from the country and access to other opportunities.

In the group of young people we have worked voluntarily to increase civil participation and awareness to help the indigenous people to take an active part in solving the problems of our community without losing their culture.

I would like to invite you to visit our land to see why we love it and so you can love it too.

Johnny Buitrago Pais, 25, is working as a farmer and is a volunteer in the Costa Rican Red Cross. He belongs to the indigenous community in Bribe Talamanca, a Province of Limón in Costa Rica. This territory is shared with the indigenous community of the Cabecar in a relationship of cooperation and peace. The population of Talamanca is 30,713, of which about 7,000 people belong to the indigenous Bribe population.

Johnny is a community leader and, as a young indigenous person, he defends the principles and values of Bribe culture. He promotes respect for and pride in the indigenous identity, especially among young people, working with them to encourage involvement in social action to help the community to realize the rights of young people.

This youth work was reinforced by including volunteer groups such as VIDES who supported and guided the projects.

Simon-Pierre

In the course of my life my rights were always something that seemed natural. I have a healthy family and I received an education. This made me feel that I had to give the best of myself, to learn to excel. I see now that I lived in a beautiful bubble. The fact that these rights seemed so natural in fact guaranteed the foundation of my "empowerment."

My young life was however, marked by acknowledgment of the racism that existed towards migrants in my country. I was embarrassed because ultimately we were talking about something of which we were ignorant. Therefore, after my studies, I did six months voluntary civil service for migrants in impoverished areas in France.

With money I had set aside I went to Central America where I perceived the reality of the street children and indigenous peoples in El Salvador. I discovered a beautiful country. This is now my second home, my second family. It was during these two powerful experiences I learned two things: that our rights were not so natural after all and that many people do not enjoy them. This period gave me the tools to move from awareness to action, to be able to engage and act.

On my return, the association with whom I had volunteered hired me as an educator. After two years, I started a Masters in Social Science where I am working on children living in the streets of El Salvador and the new law concerning the Integral Protection of Children and Adolescents. I have been back several times to "el Pulgarcito de Centroamérica" (the small thumb of Central America) with a simple idea to make friends of these children, yet not to provide them with particular activities, rather, get to know their visions of society. They have desires and can find their place in society, it merely requires the same atmosphere I had experienced: we must give them an opportunity to realise their dreams.

It is at this point that we set up an association for the protection and promotion of the rights of these children and young people. I did not want to do something "French", I want it to be El Salvadorans who mobilize. They have begun to do so. We are finally uniting young adults from around the world who also thought they should do something in the accordance with a multicultural approach.

However, given to some procedural difficulties, we had to establish the association in France to keep moving forward in our project.

There is a question I ask myself and I would like to share with you: What spaces can we build to enable young people to mobilize and invest constructively for peace and for the needs of others?



...

Simon- Pierre Escudero was raised in a small town in France in a family of 6 siblings. After studying in a scientific high school he spent 6 months as a volunteer in civil service in socially disadvantaged areas of France. Following this, he spent several months in Central America investigating the situation of children living in the streets and indigenous peoples.

Upon returning, he worked for two years as a teacher at the Association for the Prevention of Crime. He is now 23 and studying a master's degree in social science which focuses on the lives of children living on the streets of El Salvador and the impact of the new law on children and adolescents in the country.

From his research in the field and an internship at the IIMA and VIDES Human Rights office in Geneva, a new NGO project was born.

This newly formed civil partnership aims to promote and protect the rights of children in street situations.

UN Experts

Mr Jorge Cardona

Committee on the Rights of the Child

Commission of Experts of the Ibero-American Convention on the Rights of Youth

First of all I would like to thank IIMA and VIDES for inviting me to participate in this event. When I came into the room I didn't really know what we were going to speak about. We were trying to pin down a human rights perspective from the testimony of young people. Now that I've heard their experiences, I know where to start.

The youth have the same rights as any other; there are no specific rights for them. However, what is true is that young people have a special situation, as young people, in terms of realising their rights.

There are many groups that have been recognised as vulnerable by the international community, e.g. children, women, people with disabilities, indigenous peoples. Similarly, young people encounter specific obstacles to the enjoyment of their rights. There are specific difficulties due to violence, healthcare problems, the lack of political participation and of social commitment. As Laura discussed, education and participation are huge concerns, how do we go about ensuring integrated social development? For Johnny, the key issue of identity and the issues surrounding this are the focus of youth rights, along with the right to development.

Thiago referred to the role of youth as promoters and defenders of human rights. Simon-Pierre spoke about the values of young people seeking an inclusive society, a society that will allow them to recognise difference as something to be valued; he also raised the right to peace, which is a very valid point. We can identify specific elements which are common obstacles to all young people, often impeding when they try to gain equal conditions, prevented from accessing work or justice. Being beyond 18 years is often a wonderful time, but it is also the time when the special protection guaranteed by the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) no longer applies and different sanctions become applicable, for instance, in the context of criminal justice.

In the face of these many challenges, the question that came to my mind is, "how must the international community act to eliminate these obstacles, to help young people so that they can be empowered in their social commitment, so that they can change their current situation. How can we break down the barriers to their participation?"



A first suggestion is to use the instruments we have already, for instance, in the Committee on the Rights of the Child we have discussed some of these issues and we are producing a paper on the rights of adolescents, but this intervention only provides a partial solution since the aforementioned challenges do not simply end at the age of 18. We must do more past this point. In ECOSOC, they are particularly concerned about the right to work as well as the full implementation of other rights for young people, yet there is nothing specific within the international instruments.

It would be positive if the international community, through the Human Rights Council, could go deeper into specifications of rights for young people; A HRC Rapporteur for youth is perhaps one path we could take. We must move forward and bring dialogue to State parties surrounding these issues. We can perhaps even ask ourselves if a convention would be convenient. I attended the OHCHR Expert meeting in July 2013 and another last December in New York on Youth Issues. Both times this was put on the table. I still do not have a clear position on this: on the one hand, the possibility of a Convention inspires fear that this could restrict the existing protection framework for those under 18; e.g. in terms of avoiding marriages at too young an age, and the other progress that we have made for the protection of children. However, when I speak to those at 17 years old, I cannot avoid noticing that they identify more with those older than younger. This should inspire some sort of reaction. In one way or another, the international community must react.

Ms Imma Guerras-Delgado

Child and Youth Rights Advisor
OHCHR



What we have heard here shows the great potential for enabling youth as actors for change and it has illustrated the value of volunteerism. The testimonies we have heard also show the importance of empowerment at different levels. There are currently 1.5 billion young people in the world. This group represents a great potential for talent yet, at the same time, it faces enormous challenges. As has been said, the UN Secretary General has made youth a priority; he has also appointed a Special Envoy on youth.

There are many problems which affect youth: the transition from educational settings into the labour markets makes them 3 times more likely to be unemployed; as a result, there are 73million young people unemployed. In addition, we have 7milllion international migrants between the ages of 15-24 and young people are increasingly migrating. Recently, we have seen international protest from young people leading to significant changes in several regions, yet their right to peaceful protest is not always respected. The Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders presented a report this session which noted trends towards acts of repression against young student activists. She expressed particular concern at the brutality of the treatment of this group, which at

some points amounted to torture. She referred to young people as at particular risk and requested specific attention be devoted to them. She also expressed concern at the passing of legislation which prohibits young people from participating in assemblies.

Violence disproportionately affects young people. According to the World Health Organisation, 41% of all global homicides affect those between the 14-24, and mostly young males. The Human Rights of young people, it has been said, do not have to be protected in an instrument as all Human Rights instruments apply to them. However, in the OHCHR expert meeting last year we recognised that they face distinct challenges.

Before I tackle our recommendations from this meeting, I would like to point out that the Human Rights of youth is not a new topic at the UN, it has merely been dormant since 1973. The last meeting took place under the initiative of the government of Italy to discuss Human Rights of youth and included the situation of young people protesting against gross violations of human rights. At this point, the sub-commission named a Special Rapporteur on this issue and he presented a report on this particular subject, including a draft charter on rights of youth.

For whatever reason this was not taken on by Human Rights commission, the only follow up was on the subject of conscientious objection. Many areas have progressed a long way in this regard, but there is still a lot that could be done at the international level. Rights based approaches establish from the beginning that the youth have the same rights; that they should not be seen as beneficiaries of services but as active rights holders.

To briefly refer to our conclusions from the expert meeting in July 2013, we did not reach an agreement on whether further protection was needed, the group of experts thought we needed a step by step approach, mainstreaming youth rights into Special Procedures and Treaty Bodies. We also recommended that the UPR be used to highlight youth rights issues. Our main recommendation was for better engagement by the Human Rights Council on the subject of youth. There are a number of ideas for achieving this; there is the possibility of a resolution, of a request for a report, developing guidelines to help States in this regards, or the possibility of undertaking an in depth study. At this point it is important that we take these recommendations seriously and reflect on what is the best way forward.

Attending States

All states asserted their gratitude to IIMA, VIDES and the Permanent Mission of Uruguay for hosting the event as well as the young speakers and the experts for their presentations.

Austria

Permanent Mission of Austria to the United Nations in Geneva

Involving young people in our work can be an inspiration. I wanted to talk about participation. Within the UN framework, we recognise that participation is a key point in promoting fairer societies, which respect human rights. It is important to emphasise that States have to create spaces (through a legal framework and budgetary backing) to ensure young people can participate. For instance, Austria is the only country in the EU that has lowered the voting age to 16. We want to have formal youth engagement in the political process. Informal participation is also

important; having a civil society which is active, which has appropriate space to undertake its activities, is key. For instance, there is a youth council in Austria that brings together all the youth in civil society.

We also have national and European projects on this issue. I personally benefited from voluntary experience in Brazil at 17 and this is something I have carried with me. Friendships we can establish between people are very important. Also, the youth program of the EU has helped young people to change their ideas about what Europe is.

How can we address youth in the future? We should meet more often to discuss this, the youth have the same rights, we are not talking about special rights, I think any such move might undermine those with definite specific rights, for example those under 18 protected by the CRC, but we should consider our options for possible measures concerning youth and Austria is very glad to be part of the conversation.

Italy



Firstly, I would like to say we are pleased that we were involved in the initiative concerning youth in 1973, which is some new information for me. This is the right time to discuss the challenges faced by youth today from a human rights perspective. The economic downturn has had a significant impact on young people; on this issue we need a deep analysis and an exchange of practices. The rights of young people are high in our government's agenda, not simply because of unemployment, but because we are convinced young women and men are key for social and political progress.

Italy is actively participating in the European Union framework for cooperation in youth fields. These activities are based on principles that have become firmly anchored in the international system of Human Rights: eliminating discrimination; taking into account differences in attitudes and living conditions, with a special attention to those who may suffer from lack of opportunities. We must recognise young people as a resource for society, and ensure their participation in deciding policy which will affect them. Youth organisations are key. The EU has set out a structured dialogue based on a work cycle of 18 months dedicated to the specific theme of evolving consultations with young people and youth organisations. It is also holding EU councils of youth which are organised by President Country of the Council of the European Union. This is taking place as we speak in Greece.

Next semester Italy is President of the Council of the European Union, so we will do our best to continue this practice.

Guatemala



Our delegation would like to thank the organisers and we are happy to share the work of our national council for youth, making a better life for young people. We have met with members of Parliament in our region to promote this issue.

Burkina Faso



We must admit the youth themselves are often at the origin of problems. There are problems of youth self awareness, ignorance of what they can contribute to society and gain in return. This disjunction between the attitudes of youth and societal realities leads to problems such as housing and employment. There is also a question of understanding that when we look for a solution, or when we do integrate human rights perspectives, we have problems precisely because youths, who in most cases find themselves without respect for institutions, are disengaged.

In Burkina Faso, according to latest official statistics, we have a population of more than 14 million. 50% of these are below 16. When we take this group, and extend it to those who are 20 or younger, this is 57% of the population. Thus, this issue is something of great importance for us and for many other countries similar to mine. We must look first at education, 80% of our children at the moment have some form of education, even if not all of them take secondary and higher level educational courses. The question is, how can we communicate the message to groups with poor education that they do have a place in their country and that they can work on their skills to be able to contribute to the development of their societies?

I thought of this regarding Johnny's testimony. I would ask, specifically looking at this age group and non educated children, how is it, exactly, that we can ensure these young people are aware that they have rights and that fulfilling these rights will allow them to participate? This is why this event is of interest to us. We are also thinking about this carefully in seeking solutions. We have programs and projects for creating jobs, but can we really consider these measures as rights-based when we know the young are not aware of their rights? We are very interested in taking part in these debates so we can look at coming together to make an international instrument which takes into account youth rights and increases the chances of them gaining these rights.

Uruguay



In Uruguay we have a different situation, we do not have quite so many young people but we do perhaps extend the definition up to 29 which allows us to compensate. I also wanted to make another comment: in the framework of the protection we ensure to children at the national level, we distinguish between childhood and young adulthood at 18 years of age. In these different periods we have different approaches when it comes to criminal issues, one more lenient, one is more punitive. However, should we make an identical distinction in all areas involving youth or should changes between childhood and adulthood be introduced more gradually in other areas?

Similarly, should we focus on policy taking into account the youth and family context? What are we doing to protect those young people who are failed by the CRC? When we look at things practically there are a number of complications in defining things in the same manner as in the criminal justice system and simply removing all protection at 18. When it comes to teenagers, we must make them aware of their rights and responsibilities. I completely support the need to fully implement the CRC.

However, this generation includes people who are not taking their own futures into their own hands, not integrating or finding a place as actors. In Uruguay, we use to call it the “Ni ni generation” (not working nor studying). It is important to have high quality education. This is a key issue: quality and free education, as far as is possible. In the case of Uruguay we have free public education since the 19th century, but we are looking at further digital integration and ensuring the curriculum acts as a springboard into the labour market. If not, it makes it very difficult for people to find work. This can create a widespread loss of potential.

One suggestion is that those who are retired can come back to train young people, even in values as basic as professional behaviour. This is one contribution from older generation to support young people which is also supported by employers. We must think of such creative ways of integrating the “Ni ni generation”.

Tunisia



We listened with interest to the idea of the creation of an international instrument. We feel a convention is not a practical approach, in fact there is a greater need that we help young people become aware of their general human rights in an environment that will encourage the youth to take advantage of them. On giving them autonomy and a place to work, it would, however, be less complicated to look at the existing international instruments that are legally binding. We will take part in any effort, whether in the Human Rights Council or more generally within the UN, to achieve mainstreaming of these issues.

In 2009, we set up a national project for the youth which then led to the creation of a special representative to help deal with these issues. At the same time, I would like to state our approach is not just to look at youths as a vulnerable group, but we also see their potential for action. We feel the need to highlight this potential, particularly in those societies where the youth are a large proportion. These countries need this extra effort and all the energy these people can contribute to move forward.

We have a double proposition; we will need to look at straightening protection while providing encouragement for action so that, at the same time, we enable society itself to move forward. I would like to conclude that our new Constitution looks at youth issues and states that youth are a real force for the nation. This obliges us to make sure we are taking into account the needs of youth and increasing their participation. From now on we have a constitutional approach, it is now a necessity for Tunisia to take the youth into account in all activities.

Maldives



From this event we can see the importance of this topic for the Human Rights Council and we decided to join the many countries co-sponsoring this event. We all talk about our young populations, but the Maldives have a very young population, at all levels of the economy. In my own Ministry 80% are below the age of 35. In recent years we have seen volunteers in the economic and social council and in Human Rights defence, however it is important to further empower the youth. As we have

mentioned, young people need to be more involved in the works of the HRC as we are seeing here today. I would also like to personally congratulate IIMA on the best flyer we have seen so far at the Human Rights Council.

Costa Rica



No doubt there is a challenge when it comes to approaching this issue of youth, more than half of the population are below 25 in many developing countries, 45% in most cases. This is indeed a huge challenge, not just today but also in the future. Events like this are the opportunities for us to move forward and ask questions. This is something that we should take into account when we look at future generations. In the joint space of the Iberian American countries we have been talking about the convention for youth rights. I share some of the worries, at least to an extent, of the CRC when it comes to the creation of a binding instrument for youth rights. I think the best way to empower youth is to fully implement the Convention on the Rights of the Child and teaching children about their rights. In this way, we can create empowered generations. Today the panellists ask how we promote these rights, how can we, as experts in child's rights, practically improve the implementation of the CRC on a universal level to make sure the rights guaranteed are realized? I think this is a method that will move us forward, particularly, I think this will help because it will involve the children, in this sense it will create a source of hope for youth, key for civil society. The youth are the fuel for society and this gives particular importance to the rights of the child. We must ensure that there are spaces for them to be empowered. When looking at an instrument I think we should refer to the Ibero American experience.

Palestine

State of Palestine

Permanent Observer Mission to the United Nations
Geneva



دولة فلسطين

المبعثة الدبلوماسية لدى الأمم المتحدة
جنيف

It is a pleasure to see such a wonderful turnout and hear inspiring presentations, we are proud to be sponsors. We

cannot overstate the importance of this issue. Youth are the main catalysts for change in society, yet often find their rights trampled upon and their potential untapped. Rising expectations from access to information and education has caused frustration in the world's youth. Initiatives such as this should be multiplied, promoting the youth in society for a human rights society. We could have a cross regional statement in the HRC, or even a convention on rights of youth. We see no reason why not, since other age groups have already specific instruments.

Morocco



Thank you to the young panellists. We would like to continue to see this dialogue. Morocco feels strongly about this. A meeting was held in Casa Blanca in 2012 involving 200 Moroccans with a view to creating a consultative council for youth. This initiative was supported by the royal family following the events of the Arab Spring. Last June, we also had an event involving civil society in the same spirit of this council establishing

a parallel youth government. The power of this government is to allow youth to voice their opinions. I hope this initiative moves forwards in the future.

We agree with Palestine, why not an international initiative of some form within the Human Rights Council or the broader United Nations?

Paraguay



When it comes to me, I consider myself a young adult and, when it comes to youths, I feel that I am sufficiently young to be included. If we go back to 1976, the UN year of the youth -and examine what has happened since this time- we see that, with the work in the international community and the youth, particularly under the UN programme, we have promoted youth rights in many different countries. I bring all this up because I want to ask a question in light of the young panellist's speeches. The empowerment of other youths comes through young leaders; these are the people telling the youth they are the leaders of their own destinies. It reminds me of 1976, 40 years ago, which is quite worrying since we are still faced with the same needs. I do not know if legislation or conventions will help empower such people, but shouldn't we be making resources available, letting young people themselves decide what they are going to do about these problems?

Mr Cardona (In reply to several States)

I wanted to come back to one of the questions because I am a member of the CRC but I am also from the Commission on the Ibero American Convention on the Rights of Youth. When we look at reports from various Member States we identify major concrete problems, for instance, social engagement and political participation. Social engagement for young people means having their own organisations which allow them to have influence, this does not happen enough. Similarly, the lack of young people on political party rosters for elections exacerbates the problem. How can we break down these barriers?

We think States should follow Austria on voting age. If we are looking at young people over 16 being in charge of their own health they should be allowed to vote. Young people are finding themselves in a situation in which their thoughts and feelings are often difficult to drive through. Much still needs to be done for raising awareness about problems concerning military service: the Optional Protocol to the CRC on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict sets provisions for children; however young people also want to exercise the right beyond 18 to promote the right to peace and education. While secondary education is in place in all States, there is a series of barriers to the full enjoyment of secondary education. I don't think we can say that existing instruments are sufficient and we must reflect on this issue.

Adults have to realise that, in all analysis, young people have changed values. This is not to say values have been lost, which is an issue for adults in any case, but values are changing for young people. We were revolutionary, young people today don't want to change the world, they want to integrate. This is a great change. They don't want long term revolution; they want things that lead to concrete results, short term concrete results. We must give the appropriate space for their voices to be heard and we must have initiatives like this. What we have to do now is think about how we can take steps so we can talk further about this. The young people are ready to directly participate; we cannot integrate them without further support structures.

A GLOBAL YOUTH AGENDA



The Way Forward

Young people are called to **be initiators of change in society**. Full recognition and **implementation of youth rights is necessary to adequately prepare** them to assume their role of **leadership and responsibility** in society.

The **EMPOWERMENT OF YOUNG PEOPLE** through the full exercise of their human rights allows for active political and civil engagement. Empowered **youth will find ways to make those rights a reality for the rest of the society**. The support of governments is crucial in order to create new spaces for youth as key actors for the promotion of human rights.

Our **PRIORITIES** to Move the Youth Agenda Forward:

1. **Take concrete action** at local and international levels to empower young people and promote their human rights, through youth participation and leadership.
2. **Systematically mainstream** the implementation of youth human rights into existing UN Mechanisms for the promotion and protection of Human Rights, including Treaty Bodies, Special Procedures, and the Universal Periodic Review.
3. Establish, through a Human Rights Council Resolution, a **Panel Discussion** to identify challenges and share best practices to ensure respect of youth rights.

We have all acknowledged that the young face **specific challenges**, and now we must **act accordingly**. We must find a way to give youth a voice; **we must keep this topic alive**.

Young people need an opportunity for their voices to be heard and to initiate positive societal changes. **YOUTH ARE NOT JUST THE FUTURE OF OUR SOCIETY – THEY ARE THE PRESENT. ENABLE THEM TO FULFILL THEIR POTENTIAL.**



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