

The Statement of UNECE Youth 2023

29th, March 2023, Geneva and online

Your Excellencies, colleagues of civil society, and my fellow young people in the room. I am Andrea Nakova from Macedonia, speaking on behalf of the Maior Group for Children and Youth and the Youth Assembly to the UNECE RFSD.

We, the young people from the UNECE Region, welcome the Regional Forum on Sustainable Development and urge all actors to engage fully in these crucial discussions on our collective agenda for development.

Over 100 youth groups met online over the past couple of days at the Youth Assembly in preparation for the ECE RFSD and in the lead up to the HLPF. We discussed the uneven progress across our region and highlighted how the COVID-19 pandemic and changing geopolitical landscape had reinforced existing inequalities, created new ones, and had **resulted in backsliding - rather than progress - on the 2030 Agenda**. These impacts have directly affected young people and our communities.

We bring to you our consulted recommendations.

First, regarding meaningful **engagement of youth**,

- We call upon member states to **provide youth organisations with needed financial resources** and opportunities to drive decision-making and lead action on sustainable development.
- The barriers to our participation must be **removed**, and youth should **co-lead efforts about issues that impact them**. To that effect, we call for the Issue Based Coalition on Adolescents in the ECE region to be co-chaired by the Youth Constituency. **Policies that are being made for us cannot be made without us**.
- Multiple crises in our region have heightened **the sexism, racism, ageism, ableism, misogyny, homophobia, transphobia** and other intersecting forms of **discrimination** that young people are facing. These must be addressed now in order to build back better for the SDGs implementation.

Second, regarding the goals under review,

- States must **recognise access to water and sanitation is a human rights issue**, especially for young women, girls, trans and non-binary persons, and young persons with disabilities, as well as others from historically marginalized communities. **What must be an instrument of peace and cooperation, is being politicized**, rural and indigenous communities are continuing to suffer across our region.

- We need **dedicated funding for youth** to deliver community-based water solutions and a greater focus on water literacy. We further call upon member states to **IMPLEMENT the commitments** in the Water Action Agenda adopted at the UN Water Conference on regional level.
- **We need to stop neo-colonialism** that is fossil fuels. ECE region **accounts for 35 percent** of global carbon emissions, and therefore must lead the way for just transition. We call upon ECE member states to table and work toward establishing a global fossil-fuel non-proliferation treaty.
- We need equal access to **wireless connectivity**. It is still a challenge in our region - especially in remote areas of Canada, Russia, Kazakhstan and other ECE countries. Meanwhile young people continue to be underrepresented in **infrastructure sector decision making, agenda setting and investments allocation**.
- We need to confront issues around insecure and unfair working conditions - **including unpaid internships for young people and the rise of the gig economy**.

Finally, on the road to the SDG Summit and UN Summit of the Future, we highlight the following.

As young people we urge greater accountability of these issues and a **renewed focus on implementation**. What may be 17 goals, 169 indicators and 232 targets **on paper are real lives of people and their communities**. As the Civil Society Forum highlighted, **we are NO WHERE NEAR**.

We call for enhanced intersectional approaches beyond the silos in the UN system and crucially - strong intergenerational partnerships. **Remember, young people are already working together** - the Major Group for Children and Youth has brought together over 27 youth constituencies in the UN system to work with each other - on a daily basis. **We call upon you to do just the same, it's really not that hard**.

We further take this opportunity to **highlight the need for politically safe spaces, free of retribution towards youth activists**. **Peaceful youth activists - including human rights advocates and environmental defenders - MUST NOT be persecuted**. They are trying to deliver a better future, when our leaders have so far failed to do so.

Finally, we call for the processes leading up to the Summit of the Future be youth-inclusive, with designated spaces **for youth-led organizations and youth activists**. We have been leading these actions in our communities, often with **little financing and balancing our own education and careers**. But **leaning on young people to "save the world"** while political and economic systems carry on business-as-usual **is not enough**. We need urgent and system-wide transformations to break through legacies of social inequality and environmental destruction.

We **must** build the future we want in partnership and create a new legacy: a **healthy and inclusive** sustainable world for young people today and the generations to follow.