



## 8th AU-EU CSOs Seminar on Human Rights



### 8th African Union (AU)-European Union (EU)

### Civil Society Seminar on Human Rights

9-10 October 2018

Brussels

### *Youth rights to participation in Africa and Europe*

#### FINAL RECOMMENDATIONS

Some forty civil society representatives from Africa and Europe met on the 9th and 10th of October 2018 for the 8th African Union-European Union Civil Society Seminar on Human Rights.

Participants discussed “youth rights to participation in Africa and Europe” and agreed on the following set of recommendations addressed to the AU and EU institutions and their member states. These recommendations have been presented to decision-makers from both continents at the 14th AU-EU Human Rights Dialogue on the 12th of October 2018.

The civil society seminar consisted of three panels devoted to the challenges of youth empowerment, political participation and solidarity. The participants agreed on the following key messages, and proposed concrete actions for the AU, the EU and their member states:

#### **1. Support self-organisation by youth**

Key message: It is vital to address the shrinking space for civil society on both continents. All actors must work to legitimise the work of youth movements and young human rights defenders (HRDs).

Key deliverable: Reinforce core/structural funding and provide resources for increased general capacity building for youth movements and young human rights defenders.

#### **2. Open institutions to youth**

Key message: Institutions need to prioritise unhindered access for individuals and civil society, including youth. This implies ensuring the independence of institutions that have a human rights mandate.

Key deliverable: Institutions with a human rights mandate should be reinforced and their criteria for civil society observer status should not be unduly restrictive. The EU and AU should ensure there are channels to create direct linkages between civil society (including youth) and their respective political and human rights institutions.

### 3. Support solidarity and partnership to construct together the society of tomorrow

Key message: African and European actors must work to ensure the inclusion and protection of all youth, in all its diversity, including marginalised groups like rural youth, young women, persons with disabilities, diaspora, migrants, asylum-seekers, refugees and displaced youth.

Key deliverable: The AU and the EU should work on a joint strategy on youth that should re-vitalize the Africa-Europe Youth Platform (encompassing African, European and diaspora youth), along with pilot projects like the African University on Youth and Development, the permanent dialogue of African and European youth, and training activities in areas such as leadership skills, human rights and democracy education.

#### Detailed recommendations

##### General context

- Any action directed towards youth should take into consideration the particular challenges represented by **sociology and culture** on the European and African continents.
- More than **60% of African people are young** and most live in rural areas featuring traditional social contexts. In addition, many African countries are currently experiencing transitions towards democracy.
- **In Europe, democratic institutions and societies are aging**, which also creates particular challenges. The centre of gravity of economic and political power still resides with older generations. The preservation of welfare systems (social security) and economic prosperity (access to jobs for youth) largely depend on the question of the balance of generations.
- Youth should be considered in **all its diversity and particular consideration should be given to groups that benefit less from societal opportunities, like diaspora youth in Europe, internally displaced persons, migrants, refugees, youth from rural areas and young persons with disabilities. Gender aspects** should also be considered as life is often twice as hard for young women.
- Many concerns that youth face in the area of legitimation and participation also apply to civil society in general. Youth concerns should be mainstreamed in all actions undertaken toward an enabling environment for civil society. Participants in the seminar insisted that the question is not so much to create fora for the youth, but rather to **create meaningful fora**. Tokenism is a risk that must be addressed when working on youth inclusion. Youth needs to be supported as youth, and their own vision of the future should be meaningfully considered.

#### 1. Support self-organisation by youth

##### 1.1. An enabling environment for youth: legal framework

- Ensure an **enabling environment** for civil society, youth movements, youth organisations and young human rights defenders, including informal and non-registered actors (movements, activists, bloggers). Ensure voter **registration conditions** reinforce and do not obstruct youth voters, candidates or movements.
- **Review the [AU Executive Committee Decision of June 2018](#)** which proposes to apply the restrictive Economic, Social and Cultural Council (ECOSOCC) observer status

criteria to other AU institutions. Unhindered access to the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR) should be ensured through open observer criteria and funding for civil society participation.

- Guarantee the **independence and autonomy and implementation of human rights mechanisms** in Africa (ACHPR, African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights (AfCtHPR), ACERWRI, Pan-African Parliament (PAP), African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM), etc) and Europe (Fundamental Rights Agency (FRA), European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR), etc), including their capacity to conduct activities like missions. Reform processes and internal rules review should reinforce this independence.
- Refrain from adopting laws, or revise or **repeal existing laws which impose undue restrictions on the right to freedom of expression** (including online), freedom of association and freedom of peaceful assembly, or which would grant powers to authorities to unduly repress critical voices and restrict civil society organisations and youth movements. Refrain from abusing counter-terrorism laws and policies to restrict the legitimate activities of civil society.

## **1.2. Access to funding**

- Reinforce the accessibility **and availability of funding**. In particular, **structural/core funding** is crucial for independent youth organisations and movements, including grass-root movements. Specific funding should be earmarked for youth organisations and movements, including movements organised by youth in exile.
- **Address the financial barriers to civic and political engagement** (candidacy, campaigning, etc) and propose safeguards to ensure that youth political engagement does not lead to undue negative consequences on individuals.

## **1.3. Supporting young human rights defenders**

- The AU and the EU should publicly reassert their **prioritisation of support for the work of human rights defenders (HRDs), including young human rights defenders**. The AU and EU should celebrate jointly the twentieth anniversary of the Declaration on the Right and Responsibility of Individuals, Groups and Organs of Society to Promote and Protect Universally Recognized Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms (also known as the Declaration on Human Rights Defenders). This should be the basis for further collaboration on HRDs between the EU, AU, their member states and civil society- through development, implementation and monitoring mechanisms to make sure that human rights commitments are fulfilled, and to allow stakeholders, including civil society and youth organisations, to highlight gaps and concerns to the institutions where they occur. The mechanism should also boost the fight against the stigmatisation, criminalisation and increasing threats to human rights defenders, including through in relation to anti-LGBTQ sentiment, the fight against terrorism, etc.
- **Reinforce capacity-building** for (young) human rights defenders, particularly in the areas of security/digital security, digital platforms and advocacy training. The EU, AU and their member states must integrate a youth activist perspective within their toolbox of instruments for supporting human rights defenders.
- **Reinforce protection mechanisms** for (young) human rights defenders. In particular, young HRDs require provide safe havens within and outside their country, in addition to a solid policy for emergency visas. Put in place comprehensive support programmes to ensure

that (young) human rights defenders can continue their work and activities while in exile.

- Set up programmes to support **peer-to-peer exchange among young human rights defenders, democracy activists and youth movements.**

## **2. Open institutions to the Youth**

### **2.1. Access to institutions**

- Create an **exchange on good practices to support youth rights and participation on both continents** and to deliver action on youth rights and participation to the highest possible level. The AU, the EU and their member states should learn from each other and build upon respective good practices, such as the African Youth Charter or the Erasmus+ programme. The EU should adopt a European Youth Charter, as demanded in the [Abidjan Declaration](#) at the AU-EU Youth Summit in 2017.
- **Review national election legislation to fully ensure the rights of youth to vote, stand as a candidate and campaign politically.** Fully implement the African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance at national levels with a particular effort to involve youth. Support election observations by civil society, including youth, and ensure youth inclusion and inclusion of youth rights concerns in Election Observation Missions led by international governmental organisations.
- **Make sure that youth is systematically consulted** in every policy project that potentially concerns and impacts them. Take concrete measures in favour of **participative democracy** with special attention to youth, for example on the right to petition and citizens initiatives.
- **Take concrete measures to ensure youth representation in AU, EU and member state institutions**, for example through the allocation of seats for young Members of Parliament in national and regional parliaments and internship programmes in parliaments. Engage all these institutions in the adoption of inclusive policies and programmes to reach out to the youth in all its diversity.
- **Support the capacities, representative nature and independence of institutionalised youth representative organisations** (Youth Parliaments, Youth Councils, etc). States should financially support these organisations while guaranteeing their full independence, representativity and diversity. It is fundamental that youth institutions be genuinely youth-led and have the potential to enjoy meaningful impact on institutional decision-making. Therefore, formal linkages of youth with AU, EU, member state institutions and national parliaments should be ensured.
- Support mechanisms and build the **capacities of youth to monitor the transparency of political life** and accountability of individuals taking office.
- Support youth's role in both mainstream and alternative/citizen **media**. Address restrictions on community media (e.g. licence restrictions) and support the emergence of alternative/citizen media, and recognise their role in human rights and democracy awareness.

## **2.2. Open political parties to the youth**

- Engage political parties on the adoption of **strategies to foster youth engagement** and representation. Adopt concrete mechanisms to ensure the meaningful participation and voice of youth in political parties, on the basis of a strict policy of non-discrimination. Support internship programmes within political parties and support the development of the role of parliamentary assistants.
- Put in place awareness-raising measures to **address the weak participation of youth in politics**, especially for disadvantaged youth benefiting less from societal opportunities. For example, a program should be developed to reach out to young African diaspora with European citizenship before the 2019 European elections. Develop specific analysis and indicators on youth political participation and report regularly on the evolution of youth participation.
- Place the inclusion of youth in political parties within wider efforts to support **transparency, the fight against corruption and the improvement of internal democracy within political parties**.

## **3. Support solidarity and partnership to construct together the society of tomorrow**

### **3.1. Building a true societal partnership with youth:**

- **Promote the role of youth in society in a spirit of partnership** between generations and actors (institutions-parties-youth movements etc) in order to build bridges across generational, cultural and linguistic divides.
- Undertake a **baseline evaluation of the inclusion of youth in Africa and Europe** to map out existing actors and activities, identify gaps and develop concrete solutions.
- **The AU and the EU should work on a joint strategy on youth** that should include the re-launching of the the Africa-Europe Youth Platform (encompassing African, European and diaspora youth), as well as pilot projects like the African University on Youth and Development and the permanent dialogue of African and European youths.

### **3.2. Support human rights education and awareness-raising**

- **Recognise and support youth leadership and youth-led awareness raising in the area of democracy and human rights**, for example by creating a programme for Youth Rights Ambassadors and a programme to reach out to youth in all its diversity (e.g. through a network of youth focal points in communities). Support training activities for youth in areas such as leadership skills, human rights and democracy education.
- Support mainstreaming of programmes for **formal and informal human rights education**, including by supporting special curricula in schools and universities. Support educational modules linked with sports and cultural activities. More generally, support university curricula in the area of political science, develop university centres on the model of Institutes for Political Sciences, and integrate goals related to human and civil rights education in standard performance indicators for education.
- **Develop a youth digital education strategy**, which could include the reinforcement of the African Virtual University (AVU) and support online curricula, accessibility to digital hardware and knowledge, facilitated e.g. by means of (digital) community centres. Support

generalised and low-cost access to networks and online content. Support the development of local content, encourage youth rights awareness raising and promote youth inclusion online.

- **Address the brain drain from the African continent** by reinforcing competency training for African youth in Africa, coupled with incentives and affirmative action to retain qualified young individuals/youth competencies on the continent.

### **3.3. Support solidarity between African and European youth**

- Boost awareness and reflection on the **role of diaspora in the AU-EU framework**, to develop concrete measures in relation with the UN Decade of African Descent. Support peer-to-peer capacity building amongst diaspora (youth), including through “training the trainers” programmes and mentorship programmes on political, social and economic inclusion of diaspora (youth). Support dialogue in European society to promote a better understanding and inclusion of African diaspora, including support for intercultural exchange and learning.
- Support (and pro-actively address criminalisation of) individuals and citizen movements – often led by youth – that assist migrant communities, including young migrants, refugees, asylum-seekers and diaspora. Facilitate the integration of migrants, refugees and asylum-seekers, with **special attention to the needs of youth** in terms of access to work, volunteering and educational opportunities (including language classes, recognition of diploma). Address the living needs of migrants, including young migrants, by providing resources for health, housing and other support.

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