



**Second Forum of the UN Alliance of Civilizations  
Istanbul, Turkey, 6-7 April 2009  
Working Session 3**

**Youth: Key Actors and Stakeholders in Advancing Cross-Cultural Understanding and Dialogue  
Monday, 6 April, 15:00- 16:30**

## **Background**

While 50% of today's world population is under 25 years old, there are still many challenges to full and meaningful youth participation in decision-making at all levels. It is broadly recognized that supporting young peoples' participation in policy and decision-making benefits society as a whole. However, much remains to be done to reach systematic and meaningful participation from a critical mass of diverse youth.

Youth's active participation in building inclusive societies is of critical importance to all efforts towards this objective. Youth's inquisitiveness and creativity, as well as their natural ability to forge links beyond their own group position them as potent agents of positive change.

But at the same time, a minority of youth have been sometimes associated with violent extremist groups, especially in environments in need of public services, employment, and educational opportunities. As exclusion can lead to extremism, youth participation in civic life is critical.

As mentioned by the 1995 World Programme of Action for Youth adopted by countries member of the United Nations, "The capacity for progress of our societies is based, among other elements, on their capacity to incorporate the contribution and responsibility of youth in the building and designing of the future. In addition to their intellectual contribution and their ability to mobilize support, they bring unique perspectives that need to be taken into account". Moreover, a recent resolution of the UN Commission for Social Development stresses "the importance of recognizing young people as active agents in decision-making processes and for positive change and development in society". In addition, this resolution calls for "Member States, the international community, the United Nations system and the private sector to support youth-led organizations in being open and inclusive; and to strengthen their capacity to participate in national and international activities".

## **Organization of this Working Session**

The format for this working session will follow an interactive "interview" style thus avoiding pre-prepared speeches. The moderator(s) will ask panelists to answer questions in a maximum of 3 minutes each,

taking turns to ensure that each panelist can answer a certain number of questions. Panelists will be encouraged to engage into 2 minutes debates after questions for which they hold different points of view. A total of 5 or 6 questions will be asked and will pertain to the rationale and impact of youth participation; successful methods for youth participation; examples of current initiatives facilitating youth participation; recurrent needs and challenges; lessons learned; and success stories. This “interview” portion of the working session will last approximately 50 minutes.

Before questions are asked to panelists, a 5 minute introduction to the topic will be offered by the moderator(s) or member(s) of the High Level Group.

Once the “interview” portion of the working session has been completed, we will turn to Q and As from the audience for the remaining 35 minutes. The moderator will ensure that each panelist responds to at least one question from the audience.

It is important to note that all panelists and moderator(s) will be well briefed in advance with regards to expectations, interactions and length of interventions.

### **Objectives of Working Session**

This working session will allow participants to reflect on the fact that youth are both actors and stakeholders in cross-cultural understanding and global peace. In addition, remarks about the fact that youth are not only tomorrow’s leaders, but are today’s influencers when it comes to diversity and inclusiveness.

Most of time available will be used to discuss the various methods and approaches available to international organizations, governments and civil society to fully leverage and harness the role that young people play in leading social and political progress.

Panelists from regional youth platforms, international organizations and civil society will share their own rationale and objectives for youth participation in their decision-making processes. In addition, they will present tested methods, innovative approaches and concrete systems for youth participation with a view generate ideas among those who have not yet put youth participation into practice. Diverse examples of current initiatives facilitating youth participation will be shared by all panelists. Recurrent needs and challenges regarding youth participation in decision-making related to cross-cultural understanding will be identified. Finally, lessons learned and success stories will be offered with a view to open discussion with participants.

Specific issues such as outreach to marginalized groups, diversity of youth consulted (e.g. rural youth, young refugees, gender balance, etc.), intergenerational relations, varied nature and roles of national youth councils, the use of new technologies for youth consultation, training of all involved (not just youth), etc. will be integrated into the discussions.

In sum, this working session aims to offer an in-depth understanding of the reasons for and methods available to advance youth participation in decision-making at all levels.