

The Regional Youth Ambassadors consultation for the development of the Arab Strategy for Youth, Peace and Security With The Arab League

The Lebanese Youth Ambassadors by The Ministry of Youth and Sports to The
Arab League

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1- Context

The world has been witnessing a growing acknowledgment of the positive role played by Youth in building peaceful, developed, and sustainable societies ever since the adoption of the UN Security Council's Resolution 2250 for Youth Peace and Security, back in December 9 2015. The attention has been brought even more to this Agenda following the later resolutions 2419 and 2535 which overall aimed to include the youth in peace keeping and peace building and which focused on providing technical assistance to member States and Regional Organizations around the YPS Agenda.

The Arab Region has played a prominent role in supporting this Agenda. On one hand, the global forum on youth, peace, and security led to the adoption of the Amman Youth Declaration, which presented a common vision and roadmap for partnership with youth to prevent conflict, combat violent extremism, and build lasting peace. On the other hand, The League of Arab States attached great importance to the youth sector and its pivotal role in development efforts and the promotion of peace opportunities through its youth-related mechanisms, foremost of which is the Youth Council of Arab Ministers of Youth and Sports.

Effectively, the General Secretariat has worked to advance the youth, peace and security agenda at the Arab regional level in partnership with the United Nations. In December 2021, the League of Arab States, in partnership with the United Nations Liaison Office to the League of Arab States (LOLAS) and the United Nations Population Fund-Office of Arab States (ASRO UNFPA), organized a regional training of trainers workshop for Arab youth leaders, followed by a regional consultation for officials in the ministries of youth and sports from Arab League member States on the development of an Arab strategy for youth, peace and security in the Republic of Tunisia. This was followed by a training of Secretariat staff and UN actors on YPS principles - facilitated by the UN Liaison Office to the League of Arab States-for a period of three days and implemented by the UN Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs (DPPA) and Folke Bernadotte Academy (FBA) in March 2022.

In support of these efforts, the Council of Arab Youth and Sports Ministers adopted Resolution No. 1010 in its forty-fifth session on 26/5/2022 to prepare an Arab strategy for youth, peace and security. The regional strategy aims to provide a framework and timetable guiding the League of Arab States and its member states towards greater cooperation on youth participation in peace and security issues and making more efforts to develop national strategies on youth, peace and security. The regional strategy is scheduled to cover a period of 4 to 5 years and will be launched during the first quarter of 2023.

2- Objectives of the Consultation

a. Our role & Selection

The Lebanese ministry of Youth and Sports was keen to select active, motivational & experienced youth to be the Lebanese Youth Ambassadors in Arab League, for the formulation and implementation of the Regional Arab Strategy for Youth Peace & Security Agenda launched by the Security Council. The program is scheduled to a period of 4 to 5 years and will be launched during the first quarter of 2023.

Zulfiqar Naser AL Deen & Christelle Aziz were the selected Lebanese Youth Ambassadors to the Arab League by the ministry of Youth and Sports, because of their excellency, distinctive competitiveness, sophisticated educational Level & high efficiency. They will be involved in the formulation and implementation of the strategy on the national and the regional level.

b. Main objective

This consultation was effected in order to include the youth itself in the formulation of the Regional Arab Strategy for YPS. The meetings focused on setting the priorities of the youth representing the members of the League of Arab States with regards to the regional strategy, and on discerning the opportunities, needs, and limitations perceived by the Arab youth in its implementation. Additionally, the meetings' outcomes served as validation for the points already discussed in the previously conducted youth digital dialogue on YPS, and helped nuance the perspectives of participants depending on their national background and context.

c. Participants

The consultation mainly hosted young men and women representing member States, and technical support officers on the behalf of the United Nations and the Arab League, interpreters, Specialists in the YPS agendas, and even professors who provided national educational insight. The youth who took part in the consultation had to be knowledgeable in and motivated to implement the YPS agenda, but also be activists in social, political, or environmental issues for development and sustainability.

d. Main goals of the discussion

- Assessing the Social, Economic, and Political situation of Arab youth and validating points previously collected from the Youth digital dialogue (day 1)
- Setting the priorities for the Regional Strategy based on the 5 pillars of the YPS agenda, additionally to identifying the common goals and the differences related to the diverse contexts of each Arab State (day 2).
- Discussing the limitations and risks which face youth initiatives and programs for peace and security from their perspective and identifying the areas for potential cooperation (day 3).

e. Important distinctions and definitions discussed:

- The difference between peace and security
- The 5 different pillars of the YPS Agenda: Participation, Protection Justice and Human Rights, Prevention, Partnerships, and Disengagement and Reintegration.
- Defining human security in a broader scope: we talk about economic security, food security, health security, environmental security, individual security, societal security, and political security.

3- Brief Minutes of Meeting:

a. Day 1: Friday September 23, 2022

Round of Introduction – important information:

- The round of introduction included young representatives of Arab States like us, consultants on YPS agenda, researchers, professors, representatives of the Arab League and UNLLOLAS, interpreters...
- Before this 3 day consultation, a youth consultation took place in Tunisia followed by a digital dialogue between youth for YPS.
- Greater pressure is needed for the implementation of the YPS agendas.
- The regional strategy is set to be launched in the beginning of 2023
- The meeting provides the youth with a platform to express their concerns and priorities.
- Concerning Iraq: Hanin Marwan discussed the 2250 Iraqi national coalition which she was representing, and which aims at advancing the Youth Peace and Security agenda. They had a 1st meeting in which they discussed the resolution and then started receiving training on the YPS agenda. Now, the coalition members have initiatives in which they introduce habitants in their regions to introduce the UNSC resolution which is essential in Iraq's war context. She herself is from Mosul and she lived and witnessed the conflict and insecurity firsthand.

Opening session with Susanna Dakkash (expert in YPS agendas):

- Susanna Dakkash is an expert in the YPS agenda. She will be formulating the strategy based on our discussions in cooperation with the Folke Bernadotte Association, the United Nations, and the Arab League.
- She then proceeded with a refresher on the YPS resolution and its five pillars.
- In our work, the youth is defined to be 18-29 years old, though there are some distinctions (UN says 15-24).
- She discussed the different definitions for peace and security which had been proposed by the youth who participated in the Youth digital dialogue.

- In discussing the pillars, two main ideas were highlighted. In the 2nd pillar (protection), there is specific attention which shall be brought on Human rights but also the protection of women especially in areas of conflict (link to WPS agenda). In the 4th pillar pertaining to partnerships, the focus is on coalitions and alliances, partnerships at the national or regional level, and supporting governments for implementation.

1st Workshop: Where are the Arab countries now regarding the youth, peace and security agenda?

The participants were divided into 2 breakout rooms. The discussion was moderated in one room by Yasmine Mohamed Ibrahim from the Arab League, and in the other by Susanna Dakkash. Interpretation was available.

The questions which oriented the conversation were:

- *What are the main issues that affect young people, considering the different dimensions of human security (personal, economic, political, health, societal, and environmental)? What are the main issues affecting young women?*
- *How do different forms of insecurity affect the rights, needs and opportunities of young people? (Please consider the broader definition of human security)*
- *Where do young people go for help if they face any kind of insecurity? What people or institutions do you trust to help solve each problem?*
- *What kind of youth organizations and youth-led initiatives are supported by the government? Do young men and women receive resources, opportunities, and skills training that help them participate meaningfully in society?*
- *Do young people share and discuss their interests with each other to build peace and contribute to decision-making? What roles do you think young people play in society and in political and/or peace building processes?*
- *What are the biggest reasons why some young people do not engage in common causes?*
- *How are young people seen in your community? What common narratives or stereotypes have you heard?*

After finishing the discussion, the participants went back into one room in which each of the 2 groups had chosen a speaker to present the main points they had discussed. Susanna would comment on each and would note the important ones down in order to add them to the regional strategy. Other participants were welcome to give their feedback, and the session as recapitulated and closed by Susanna.

b. Day 2: Saturday September 24, 2022

- Susanna presented slides on which she had recapped all the important outcomes of the Day 1 discussion.
- She also made a recap on the 5 pillars of the YPS agenda.

2nd Workshop: What is the vision of the Arab strategy for youth, peace and security?

The participants were once again divided into 2 breakout rooms to discuss their perspectives on the following guiding questions pertaining to the priorities, opportunities, and limitations for each pillar:

- *What are the issues that you consider to be priority issues for young men and women in your country (considering the five pillars)?*
 - *Participation*
 - *Protection, justice, and Human Rights*
 - *Prevention*
 - *Partnerships*
 - *Disengagement and Re-Integration*
- *What is the most effective action in establishing long-term peace and stability in the Arab region?*
- *What should the authorities do to increase safety and security in your community or country?*
- *What actions are required from national and local authorities to promote youth participation in peace building and decision-making processes?*

This activity was followed once again by a discussion in which both discussion rooms were merged back into one. Like the 1st day, each group presented what they had collectively come up with, Susanna validated the important points, and the different participants gave their opinions.

Main takeaways from this workshop:

- It is almost impossible to set priorities or required actions for each pillar separately as all of them intertwine in more than one area. In that sense, the pillars seemed to often overlap as objectives in many suggestions.
- Social media has an essential role in advocating for the YPS agenda and disseminating influential messages for the youth especially for prevention and reintegration.
- A good way to prevent the youth from radicalization is to turn youth which had successfully disengaged themselves from violence into ambassadors for peace.
- It is very important for the youth in this region to be approached with a consideration to their mental health.
- Work can be done with NGOs and Governments in order to spread awareness and encourage critical thinking among youth, give importance to moderate religious discourse, fight hate speech
- Partnerships are pivotal in providing the resources needed for the regional strategy and its initiatives. Resources are essential as they make the main logistical part of any initiative. The strategy should have a clause specified for appealing to donors and supporters to help with financial and human resources.

- Haneen Marwan Ali from Iraq shared a touching personal experience to advocate for a focus in disengagement and reintegration on States which struggle/have struggled with terrorist organizations. Back when ISIS were in Mosul, she witnessed firsthand how many young habitants got involved with terrorist organizations, and lost contact and trust with their government. Even when the youth realized that they were deeply involved in bad things, they were convinced that there was no way out. However, after the rescuing of Mosul, a lot of those people turned themselves in and the government rehabilitated them and made them join their ranks to help liberate other areas, this time against ISIS. After spending their due sentences, these people went back into society for a fresh start. Unfortunately, though, some communities were not able to forgive and accept them. **The lessons here are a suggestion for the regional strategy to encourage governments to walk in the footsteps of Iraq in similar cases, but also to understand the best ways to help societies trust such people again.**
- This point was built on in a broader scope to include the treatment of prison inmates by Arab governments as young people are vulnerable of entering jail for minor offenses like drug use and could leave jail radicalized due to violent circumstances in jail. Governments should thus reinforce the rehabilitative aspect of jails, not just the punitive aspect.
- When it comes to the structure for the coordination in the strategy, the importance of a clear structure was stated, starting from local mappings to the establishment of national youth councils, and then the consolidation a regional coalition whose members are national youth council members from each Arab State. The regional coalition shall invite IGOs, and other stakeholders involved in the YPS agenda. It should serve as a forum in which we learn from the successes and failures of States which are developing/have developed their NAPs.
- The discussions also tackled the importance of education and media in raising awareness on the role of youth in peace and security which help with the prevention and protection pillars mostly.
- Making the economic conditions of youth better will help them go from survival mode to a mode where they can care and participate in solving issues such as YPS in their nations. An example would be providing work opportunities based on the need of youth is important for their participation.
- Attention should be brought to the dissection of the causes behind the lack of peace: national unity, participation of youth in peacemaking...
- The agenda should be made reachable by everyone. Access to it should not be exclusive or elitist. This means including the youth who might be far from urban cities, the youth who do not have access to education, who do not have the resources...

All participants were then thanked, and the meeting was concluded.

c. Day 3: Sunday September 25, 2022

- Opening words
- Susanna once again presented the main ideas we had discussed the previous days in slides she had prepared. We then went into breakout rooms for the 3rd workshop.

3rd Workshop: What are the challenges and opportunities for the youth, peace and security agenda?

The questions which this discussion gravitated around were the following:

- *From your experience, what are the biggest challenges that youth, peace and security projects and programs face? What are the risks for young people? What should be considered so that young people are not harmed while participating in peace and security efforts?*
- *Who should participate in joint efforts to promote youth-led peacebuilding to ensure broad representation of viewpoints? How do we make sure that no one is left behind?*
- *Can regional cooperation be useful and effective for the youth, peace and security agenda? What kind of regional activities or initiatives are needed to support youth leadership on the YPS agenda?*
- *Is there an interest among young people in the Arab region to meet and exchange ideas? What kind of mechanisms and support do young people need to engage with each other at the regional level?*
- *What topics should future youth dialogues discuss? Who should be invited to these discussions?*

Main takeaways from the breakout room discussions and the following presentation and evaluation:

- It was suggested that the Arab League creates an Arab fund for YPS, or/and that NGOs or other actors help fund. This should be reinforced in a clause in the strategy.
- Another addition was the suggested focus on having a “human centric” approach
- The youth reiterated the importance of a regional Youth coalition
- Political awareness was deemed essential for national unity and creating a common identity, which could thus prevent conflict.
- Having some sorts of Key Performance Indications has been discussed in order to assess the effectiveness and progress of the Regional Strategy.
- The Strategy should incite member states to establish youth councils, and the importance of creating a regional youth council.
- The youth suggested prioritizing countries going through crises and giving the youth a role in crisis management as nobody knows the needs of the youth better than the youth itself.

- Among other things, we insisted on the importance of having funding, having an executive plan, a communication plan, and a chart of core values which should all come with the strategy.
- The representative of the Arab League then discussed the viability of some our suggestions and provided some clarity on the next steps, which we discuss below.

4- What next?

The representative of the Arab League provided some clarifications around their initiative with regards to the YPS agenda and the timeline of the steps that will follow this consultation.

The partners of the Arab League for the Regional YPS Strategy are UNLOLAS, UNFPA, DPPA, Folke Bernadotte, and UNDP. They started by gathering information from governments on what they already apply in the context of YPS, then there was a consultation round in Tunisia. Later, they met with the ministers of youth and sports of all member States and prepared a regional report on what the Arab countries were applying from the recommended agenda which they had sent to all countries. Then, Folke Bernadotte was welcomed in the Arab League to conduct a training on the YPS and WPS agendas, after which they created a technical taskforce that set up the youth digital dialogue platform on which approx. 330 young individuals responded with their opinions and understanding on YPS and its implementation. They then consulted with the people responsible for the YPS agenda advancement in each Arab youth and sports ministry and invited us for this consultation.

Now, Susanna will draft the strategy and send it to member States, then the latter will comment on the strategy after which it will be edited and proposed to the Council of Arab Youth and Sports ministers to be voted upon. Once it is approved and endorsed, it becomes operational. Then, the strategy is set to be voted upon again in the Economic and Social Council of the Arab League, then in the council of foreign ministers, all the way until it is approved by the council of the heads of governments – a move which could make the strategy binding to the member state governments.

In that sense, we are reminded that all the strategies decided by the Arab League and the UN (except its security council) are decisions that are non-binding for States (due to respect of sovereignty). However, they serve as a recommendation and best practice. This strategy will thus be implemented on a regional level and will serve as a reference for the governments which aim to practice it on a national level.

Concerning funding, nothing will force the member States to financially support the strategy. Certain governments will implement and fund their own YPS activities falling under the strategy, but besides, it's international organizations on which we might be able to count for support. Also, the strategy will have a regional executive plan to concretize it and an evaluation mechanism to estimate its effectiveness.

5- Conclusion

After having reported the context, details, and future plan for the Youth Consultation for the Development of the Arab Strategy for Youth, Peace, and Security, both Lebanese representatives agree that the discussion was well-guided, fruitful, and necessary. This event served as proof that regional cooperation is essential to better understand the nuances in the context of each State willing to instill or sustain peace and security, and even more as proof that one cannot write strategies and lead initiatives for youth without the youth itself holding the main seat at the table.

In the context of Lebanon, one main limitation to full and uncompromised participation were the lack of electricity and good Wi-Fi connection which were fortunately worked around for the most part. However, this served as a reminder that such discussions would be even more effective and enriching if the participants were to meet in person, an idea which seemed to be reiterated at many points in the 3-day meetings.

6- Acknowledgement

On a final note, both of us feel grateful for the training we had received under the umbrella of GNWP and PPM which on one hand made it possible to have such an opportunity to represent Lebanon in a consultation discussing one of the most pivotal matters in the Arab Region, and which on the other hand made us feel comfortable and confident to speak on behalf of the Lebanese youth. We owed this ease in representing a group, discussing ideas, and critically thinking about others' proposals to the technical baggage we were provided with through the "Training of Trainers for Young Women+ Leaders for Peace workshop in Lebanon". Some of the key moments and notions which came in useful were: the 5 pillars of the YPS and WPS agendas, the previous experiences of States with their National Action Plans, and the brainstormed propositions presented before the adviser to the Lebanese minister of Youth and Sports.

Quite simply, if the same pace and will is kept by Arab League member States and their youth, we can rest assured that the YPS Agenda in the Arab Region is heading in the right direction.