

## **Agents and Drivers of Peace:**

# **Strengthening meaningful engagement of young men and women in building sustainable peace in Libya**

### *Policy Brief*

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*This policy brief draws from the series of inclusive consultations with local peacebuilders and national, regional and international partners and presents practical recommendations for the United Nations presence in Libya on how to fully, effectively and meaningfully include young peacebuilders in peace efforts.<sup>1</sup>*

#### **Background:**

Libya is considered a young nation. The average population is 28 years old. In Libya, young people are actively working to advance peace in the country by creating peaceful platforms that promote social cohesion and rely on art to cross barriers and transcend discrimination, ensuring a supportive environment for behavioral change. However, despite their efforts, youth are wrongfully perceived as a “risk category” of actors who contribute to, or even cause, violence in communities. This is especially true for young men, while young women are often labelled as victims.

Despite the presence of a special UN Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL) since 2012 and the ongoing multilateral support from other UN agencies, funds and programmes, Libyan youth remain minimally represented in any political processes, and their perspectives remain excluded from peace agreements or national reconciliation, affecting their present and future opportunities for peace.

**What is needed is for the peace process in Libya to achieve representative and meaningful participation of young people through a comprehensive selection process and beyond advisory or parallel process.**

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<sup>1</sup> The key discussions that gave rise to this policy brief include: the 21-22 February 2020 Online High-Level Symposium on Youth, Peace and Security in Libya and the 5 November 2020 expert-level meeting on The importance of including young men and women in building sustainable peace in Libya.

## Opportunity presented:

One of the recent steps in advancing the peace process in Libya was the signing of a permanent ceasefire agreement in October 2020 in Switzerland. In November 2020, the United Nations Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL) organised the Libyan Political Dialogue Forum, in addition to the ongoing military dialogue (called 5 + 5 Committee) in Tunisia, where 75 Libyan representatives participated to move the process forward. However, no youth were engaged in the military dialogue, and very few participated in the Libyan Political Dialogue Forum.

The signing of the ceasefire agreement and political space that it provided offered an opportunity to re-envision the crucial role young men and women play in supporting the peace process. The emerging processes cannot run on the previous approaches that are not working and should be accompanied by an intentional strategy to meaningfully engage young peacebuilders.

## What are the critical challenges?

The lack of meaningful participation of young people is rooted in a number of challenges that form the foundation for the exclusion.

First, **the security situation specifically affects young men and women.** Young Libyan activists, human rights defenders and peacebuilders are facing significant violations that range from kidnapping to murder to threatening extortion.

Second, **the visibility and opportunities for young peacebuilders are significantly limited.** In the wake of COVID-19, participation in the dialogue becomes more virtual. In addition to the lack of stable and affordable internet, some young men and women suffer from frequent power cuts. The lack of secure online space exacerbates the situation as young men and women do not feel safe to share their experiences freely out of fear of persecution.

Third, **negative perceptions towards young people prevail.** Young men are often incorrectly perceived as “aggressors” that cause violence and fuel the conflict, and not as agents of change and peace within communities. Therefore, the policies are more likely to *target them* rather than be *developed with them*.

Finally, **the participation of young women is particularly problematic.** Young women's political participation remains limited due to discriminatory and masculine patriarchal challenges that continue to pertain both to the private and the public space.

### **What is the legal context?**

The UN Security Council resolutions are reflective of the UN and Member States' legal obligations. The recognition and affirmation of the importance of the role of young people and the need to create a safe and enabling environment for their participation build incentives for *the United Nations System* to take affirmative steps to ensure young peacebuilders' meaningful and representative participation in peace process and for *the UN Security Council* to update the mandate of UNSMIL and take critical steps to ensure that Libyan youth are a meaningful part of the peace process.

#### **SECURITY COUNCIL RESOLUTIONS:**

##### **UNSCR 2250 (2015):**

- Calls on all relevant actors, including when negotiating and implementing peace agreements, to take into account, as appropriate, the participation and views of youth, recognising that their marginalisation is detrimental to building sustainable peace in all societies (OP2).

##### **UNSCR 2457(2019):**

- Encourages all those involved in the planning for disarmament, demobilization and reintegration to consider the needs of youth affected by armed conflict (16).

##### **UNSCR 2535 (2020):**

- Encourages Member States, regional and subregional organizations to develop and implement policies and programs for youth to facilitate their constructive engagement, including through dedicated local, national and regional road maps on youth, peace and security, with sufficient resources, through a participatory process, with young people and youth organizations to pursue its implementation (OP14).

## Key Recommendations:

Given the political opportunity presented by the October 2020 ceasefire agreement and the November 2020 Political Dialogue Forum, the United Nations, and especially the UNSMIL, re-envision their role in supporting meaningful participation of young Libyan men and women and lend its support across the following priority actions:

- 1. In the next mandate renewal, the Security Council should consider going beyond sporadic references to youth in the UNSMIL mandate and encourage concrete actions in line with resolutions 2535 (2020).** Some possible provisions for the UNSMIL mandate could include:
  - 1.1. Creating policies for youth that would contribute to peacebuilding efforts, including social and economic development, by supporting projects to grow local economies, foster education, and promote political engagement (OP8);
  - 1.2. Coordinating and increasing UNSMIL's engagement in the implementation of the youth, peace and security resolutions, including through inclusive partnership with young people, and ensure dedicated capacities(OP16);
  - 1.3. Including the views of youth in relevant discussions pertinent to the maintenance of peace and security, peacebuilding and sustaining peace, and facilitate the full, effective and meaningful participation of youth at all decision-making levels, paying attention to the inclusion of young women without distinction or discrimination of any kind (OP20).
  
- 2. The Security Council should consider strengthening the accountability for the implementation of UNSMIL's obligations to ensure the meaningful participation of diverse women, including all deliberations, decisions and outcomes of the Libyan Political Dialogue Forum.** This includes:
  - 2.1. Regularly reporting to the Security Council on efforts made to ensure young women's full, equal and meaningful participation and leadership in the current peace and political dialogues UNSMIL facilitates;
  - 2.2. Ensuring young women's participation and gender priorities in the new government (including 30% women (including young women) in parliament) and the Political Dialogue outcome.
  
- 3. UNSMIL and other UN actors in Libya could consider creating an enabling environment for young men and women to participate in the political process.** This includes:



- 3.1. Providing political and operational support for engaging young men and women in all tracks of the political process, and bringing the Youth Track and the Libyan Political Dialogue discussions together as these processes should not stand separately;
  - 3.2. Encouraging a representative process of selecting youth representatives in all tracks of the political process using a gender- and age-sensitive selection criteria for the representatives of youth networks and coalition in Libya;
  - 3.3. Taking into account youth-specific needs and developing strategies, in partnership with young men and women, to respond to key issues affect youth such as insecurity, lack of digital space and the exclusion of young women.
  - 3.4. Encouraging the donor community to engage with young peacebuilders and invite them to the donor conferences.
4. **The UN actors in Libya should take advantage of the UN-system wide Community Engagement Guidelines<sup>2</sup> and develop strategies for engagement with young people.** This should include:
- 4.1. Mapping existing youth capacities in Libya and working with young peacebuilders to determine strategic areas of engagement based on complementary capacities and expertise;
  - 4.2. Allocating resources and time to build partnerships with young men and women peacebuilders, including the Libyan National Coalition on Youth, Peace and Security;
  - 4.3. Making the UN more available to young peacebuilders by developing outreach campaigns, simplifying language and providing clear requirements for partnerships and grant applications;
  - 4.4. Providing and protecting platforms and space for young people to share their ideas, expertise and needs, amplify their voices, and make their contributions to peace more visible for the actors engaged in the peace process.
  - 4.5. Consulting with young men and women to ensure that specific youth-related risks are taken into account throughout all steps of engagement.

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<sup>2</sup> [UN Community Engagement Guidelines on Peacebuilding and Sustaining Peace](#)



5. **UNSMIL and all UN actors in Libya should work to advance the integration of human security principles in the political process in Libya.** This includes:
  - 5.1. Advancing protection and disarmament, demobilization and reintegration programmes for young men and women in Libya;
  - 5.2. Continuing the support for national capacities to implement efforts to control arms and resource distribution to rebel fighters and, in the Spirit of the Silencing the Guns Initiative, involve youth as a key partner in the monitoring and evaluation of ceasefire operations;
  - 5.3. Encouraging the development and use of materials aimed at spreading the culture of dialogue, peace, conflict resolution and social cohesion, and work with educators and community leaders to conduct trainings;
  - 5.4. Inviting more research and studies to provide better knowledge of the various dimensions of violence and extremism, and utilize these resources to inform UN strategies only when young people are included in the formulation and implementation of these research endeavours.