

Civil Society Statement: Peacebuilding Commission Expert-Level Meeting on the margins of the 2nd Annual CSO-UN Dialogue on Peacebuilding

On 13 December 2024, Sarra Messaoudi on behalf of the MENA Coalition for YPS and GPPAC briefed the Peacebuilding Commission (PBC) on Youth Peace and Security.



Salam Alaykom,

Fellow peacebuilders and believers, my name is Sarra Messaoudi. I am from Tunisia and I serve as regional lead of the MENA Coalition on Youth, Peace and Security and as the network coordinator for GPPAC.

I will share some of the highlights we discussed with my fellow civil society colleagues yesterday during the session on Youth, Peace and Security (YPS).

Nothing about the past years has been normal for any of us. The pain and injustice we've witnessed in Gaza, Lebanon, Sudan, Syria, and so many other places across the globe, have pushed us all to our limits and tested our resilience in ways we couldn't have imagined.

We are standing at a turning point. We all feel it. And it's inviting us to rethink how we work together, how we co-lead the way to strengthen what is working and avoid what is not.

Despite everything as young peacebuilders we held onto hope and persisted!

We created solidarity spaces, we kept finding ways to show support, to help, and to stand strong. We organised movements, networks, and coalitions and kept our efforts for just peace alive and thriving, through youth-led, youth-centred, and youth-designed initiatives even as we carried the weight of everything we were feeling inside.

Despite the different efforts from all actors, we still feel our aspirations are not met.

Think about it. The YPS agenda talks about participation. This past year was the largest election year in human history yet young voices remain excluded from decision making. The YPS agenda talks about protection, but in places like Syria, Sudan, and Gaza, young people continue to face daily violence and insecurity. The YPS agenda has strong language on accountability for war crimes against young people, yet war criminals worldwide still enjoy impunity.

The focus of the UN CSO Dialogue on the YPS agenda truly matters! Especially amid the ongoing lack of political commitment to the agenda.

This year's Dialogue gives us a unique chance to reflect and push forward.

The landscape in which the conversation takes place this week allows us to be ambitious. In 2023, the international policy debate on YPS was significantly strengthened in comparison to the previous years.

- This achievement was in part due to **the leadership of Member States on the UN Security Council** to organise debates specifically focused on YPS. This includes Japan, Malta and Mozambique. We hope that in 2025, even more, Member States will pick up the YPS Agenda and systematise engagement on this topic. We are yet to see similar trends in the engagement of the PBC on YPS.
- Further, in 2023, the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan joined forces with Finland to energise and strengthen the engagement of Member States on YPS in the global policy debate through **the Group of Champions on YPS**. Moving forward, the Group of Champions could play an essential role in mobilising resources, advocating for policy coherence, building momentum for YPS implementation, and strengthening global policy utilising the opportunities presented by the 2025 Peacebuilding Architecture Review (2025PBAR), upcoming 10th Anniversary of the YPS Agenda, and the implementation of the Pact of the Future by September 2028.
- At the same time, neither Finland nor Jordan will be on the Peacebuilding Commission (PBC) in the coming years; therefore, we hope that other members of the Group of Champions will be able to act in their role as **champions of YPS in the PBC**.

I would like to share some key takeaways from the youth consultation we had on the 10th of December organised by UNFPA, GPPAC and other partners. **During the consultation, young peacebuilders shared the following priorities for action:**

- Strengthen the skills of UN staff, youth, and public officials in good governance through targeted and well-developed capacity-building programs;
- Address polarisation and misinformation;
- Facilitate stronger partnerships and resource-sharing between global institutions and local peacebuilders, ensuring local expertise informs global peacebuilding strategies.
- Empower youth economically through job creation and accessible financing for youth-led initiatives.

These are the issues the PBC can discuss within its convening capacity.

Building on the 10th of December co-creation discussions on YPS brought forward additional priorities for UN peacebuilding actors. These include:

1. Localisation is key to turning policies and resolutions into action. For this to happen, **National Action Plans (NAPs) and regional strategies on YPS must be practical, evidence-based, and include accountability measures.**

The 2025 Peacebuilding Architecture Review and the second YPS progress study are great opportunities to reflect on the agenda's successes and challenges. To make this reflection meaningful, we should:

- Include national and regional YPS networks and coalitions, in designing and implementing the progress study.
 - Collaborate with these coalitions to map and analyse youth-led peacebuilding efforts, ensuring a deeper understanding of the challenges and opportunities.
 - Strengthen coordination between the UN peacebuilding system and local, regional, and national organisations to create stronger, more effective synergies on prevention and YPS
2. **Ensure quality financing (accessible and sustainable financing) for youth-led structures in all of their formats.** This includes dedicated core funding and simplified processes.
 3. **Reimagine the role of intermediaries to empower grassroots actors.** This includes supporting global peacebuilding networks like GPPAC, which connect local expertise to global policy spaces, ensuring that grassroots voices are amplified and integrated into decision-making processes.
 4. **The UN should focus on strengthening its role as an enabler,** connecting youth with governments and other stakeholders while fostering informal spaces and dialogues beyond structured workshops and consultations. To achieve this, the capacities of UN Country Teams must be strengthened by establishing dedicated youth teams instead of relying on a single focal point to handle all the youth portfolios.
 5. **Stop treating youth participation as a checkbox.** It's time we embrace youth-centred peacebuilding approaches.

Change begins with dialogue, but dialogue alone is not enough. True change happens when we turn conversations into commitments and commitments into action. Conflict prevention, as we've discussed today, demands a whole-of-government and whole-of-society approach. This means every one of us youth-led CSOs included, has a responsibility to lead by example.

Let's make the choice to act boldly and intentionally.

Stop working "for" young people, work "with" them: recognise each other's mandates, capacities and limitations to work complementary. The complementarity, as well as the

responsibilities of all actors, must be outlined in the outcome document of the PBAR. This includes:

- Supporting structures that already exist and work with them without redefining them, while encouraging the creation of networks where they do not exist
- Ensuring coordination through joint and multi-stakeholder action plans. There is a need for concrete mechanisms to do so. We should clearly define that coordination entails the ability to work together, not just learn and exchange.

As we conclude today's discussion, we call on Member States to act on these recommendations and support our views in the 2025 PBAR outcome document.

Peace isn't something that will be handed down to us, it is a personal and collective commitment, let's not fall into the trap of work avoidance, it is something we create by refusing to surrender to fear and believing in a tomorrow that is worth fighting for.

I thank you.