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### **Guiding Principles on Young People's Participation in Peacebuilding Received Official Launch at International Peace Institute**

The Guiding Principles on Young People's Participation in Peacebuilding were officially launched on April 24<sup>th</sup> 2014, in New York, alongside the UN General Assembly Thematic Debate on Ensuring Stable and Peaceful Societies. The release of these Guiding Principles marks a concerted effort by the United Nations and non-governmental organizations to promote youth as active stakeholders, participants, leaders and partners in peace processes.

Today's generation of young people, at 1.2 billion, is the largest the world has ever known. The growing youth demographic is particularly prominent in developing countries in sub-Saharan Africa, South Asia, and in the Middle East and North Africa. One of the most critical challenges faced by this generation of young people is armed conflict. Many young people live amidst violent conflict and see their chances for a healthy and productive development compromised.

Yet the largest youth cohort the world has ever seen offers an unprecedented opportunity for innovation, development and peacebuilding. Young people can be active agents of a peaceful transition toward socially-inclusive societies, for example when young women and men are successfully integrated into decision-making and given a chance to meaningfully contribute to political, social and economic activities.

The Guiding Principles provide guidance to Governments, UN entities, donors, national and international non-governmental organizations and civil society on meaningful youth engagement and participation, especially in conflict or transition settings. They are designed to inform peacebuilding strategies and programmes that are participative, inclusive and intergenerational. They aim at systematically promoting the participation of young people in challenging contexts where violence has become the norm.

Panelists at the launch of the Principles shared examples of how young people's involvement has made the difference in building lasting peace.

*"In the aftermath of the genocide, the Government recognized and engaged the youth in every aspect of society and gave them a voice in rebuilding our then shattered country, including by reserving two seats in the Parliament for youth organizations", explained Olivier Nduhungirehe, Deputy Permanent Representative of Rwanda to the United Nation. He added that "today, the Rwandan youth are at the forefront of peace mechanisms, through their involvement in different peace initiatives, like human rights organizations and youth councils, from the grassroots to national level."*

In his remarks, Ambassador Paul Seger, Permanent Representative of Switzerland to the United Nations, discussed how young people can be instrumentalized by political parties, such as in Burundi, and stressed the need to find constructive ways to engage these young people.

Ahmad Alhendawi, UN Secretary-General's Envoy on Youth, highlighted that *“for countries coming out of conflict, young people can be a unique opportunity, a reservoir of dynamism and creativity. Young people have a role to play in preventing and resolving conflict, in building peaceful, democratic communities.”*

*“My generation wants peace”* said Nour Nahas, a 15-year old girl from Lebanon, who eloquently described the work of the Lebanon Children’s Council, such as the organization of a Festival of Hope, which brought together people from different religions to work on accepting differences. She also described how young Syrian refugees and young Lebanese work together in their hopes for a better future.

Over 1,000 people contributed to the development of these Guiding Principles. The process was led by the UN Peacebuilding Support Office and Search for Common Ground, as co-chairs of a dedicated working group on these issues. This group is part of the UN Inter-Agency Network on Youth Development, and includes UN entities, non-governmental organizations, donors, academics and youth-led organizations. Saji Prelis, Director for Children & Youth Programs, Search for Common Ground, described the collaborative efforts that led to the Principles. Henk-Jan Brinkman, Chief of the Policy, Planning and Application Branch of the UN Peacebuilding Support Office, summarized the heart of the Principles and their approach to young people in peacebuilding: *“Find them. Value them. Learn from them. Support them. Engage them. Create opportunities and an enabling environment. And be sensitive to divides, gender, victims, their safety and to those who committed violence.”*

Search for Common Ground is facilitating an inter-agency process for national-level launches of the Principles in 16 countries, including the Democratic Republic of Congo, Indonesia, Liberia, Nepal, Niger, Pakistan, Palestine, Sri Lanka and Yemen.

**Website:**

<https://www.sfcg.org/guidingprinciples/>

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