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**UNITED NATIONS HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL**

First Annual Forum on human rights, rule of law and democracy

“Widening the democratic space: the role of youth in public decision-making”

Statement by

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On behalf of the Council of Europe

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Founded in 1949, the Council of Europe, with its 47 member states, is a political regional organization, whose mandate is to promote human rights, democracy and rule of law.

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* Young people have an important role to play in promoting human rights both as holders of rights and as active citizens, with the shared responsibility for ensuring that access to human rights is a reality for everyone.
* They also have an important role to play in ensuring that public policies encompass their needs and reflect their realities. This is why the Council of Europe has been working closely with young people for nearly half a century/nearly 50 years to build more democratic societies all over Europe.
* The Council of Europe not only co-operates with young people, it also gives them an equal say in the decision-making processes of its youth sector. Representatives from youth non-governmental organisations sit down with government officials in a joint committee to work together on programme priorities and to make recommendations for budgets.
* This approach is known as “co-management” and it has become a driving force behind the development of youth policy in Europe and enhanced young people’s participation in public decision making.
* The importance of enabling young people to take part in public decision making is enshrined in the Council of Europe’s Revised European Charter on the Participation of Young People in Local and Regional Life, which was first drafted in 1993 which considers that effective youth participation is essential to a healthy, democratic society.
* The Council of Europe also sees young people as stakeholders in education for human rights, a role that is recognised in our Charter on Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education and is promoted by our Human Rights Education Youth Programme. The Council of Europe’s training manual “Compass”, available in 35 languages, helped many youth policy agents and workers to speak the language of human rights.
* Last October, the Council of Europe organised the 3rd Compass Forum on Human Rights Education. The Forum evaluated progress in teaching and learning human rights, and shared responses to the challenges faced by youth leaders and human rights educators in a climate where scepticism about human rights weighs heavily on their motivation and freedom. In their [Message](http://rm.coe.int/CoERMPublicCommonSearchServices/DisplayDCTMContent?documentId=09000016806acdfe) to the Council of Europe, the participants drew particular attention to the Sustainable Development Goals, especially SDG 4, and asked the Council of Europe to take the lead “in advocating human rights education and support countries by sharing policy advice and best practices”.
* An example of young people’s activism for human rights is the Council of Europe’s flagship No Hate Speech Movement Campaign. While mobilising partners to counter and denounce hate speech in all its forms, the Campaign emphasises the use of human rights to protect the public on-line space. The Campaign is active in 43 countries, including beyond Europe (such as in Mexico and Morocco), as hate speech does not recognise continental boundaries.
* Young people in the Council of Europe are strongly committed to intercultural dialogue and peace building. This is reflected in our new priorities for 2018-2019 which are also placed in the framework of the Security Council Resolution on Youth, Peace and Security.
* The Council of Europe youth sector actively works with two particularly vulnerable groups of young people: young refugees, notably unaccompanied minors, and young Roma people, whose social situation and access to rights remain problematic in most of our member States.
* Finally, last month, the Committee of Ministers adopted a recommendation on young people’s access to rights as the Council of Europe considers that the unhindered and full access of young people to rights is an essential element of a culture of human rights, democracy and rule of law. Young people have a fundamental role to play in building Europe but member States’ failure to engage them fully in democratic processes is resulting in democratic deficits and a deterioration of their social situation. Ensuring young people have full access to rights can help to remedy this situation.