

Joint Submission by
The Foundation for Law and International Affairs (FLIA)
and
The Coalition for Peace and Ethics (CPE)
on the
Side Event for the First Session of the Forum on
Human Rights, Democracy, and the Rule of Law



COALITION FOR
PEACE AND ETHICS



Side Event: “Political Participation and the Global Civic Education of Youth”

Based on on-going academic research on civic education and social movements, the proposed panel will consider the development of appropriate modalities for broadening and deepening the process of building capacity among youth for active participation within their own political systems. The panel will be structured around academic presentations, as an interactive session in which presenters will lead a discussion around the issue of modalities of capacity building grounded in the lived experiences of target populations within the context of their own systems. The session would be divided into three parts.

A. The State of Academic and Empirical Knowledge on the Global Civic Education of the Youth (about 20 minutes):

Based on their on-going work, presentations will provide a solid academic assessment of inputs from youth across the globe, which respect the youth’s experiences and their approach to education and its value. A second object of the presentation will be introducing the spiraling clusters method of knowledge production and dissemination, within the context of technological possibilities and realities on the ground. The spiraling clusters method of knowledge production provides a further and broader theorization of doctoral work by participants to the panel.

B. Case Study Exercise (about 50 minutes): panelists would lead a modelling exercise with session participants considering three contextualized problems: Western Europe; East Asia and Middle East. The object would be to develop ideas about the need to bend learning by doing to the specific context in which youth are placed. That requires both the identification of the means of communication and their forms. The object is to see how the state of knowledge may be effectively applied in quite different contexts.

C. Final Reflections (about 20 minutes): panel participants would consider the ramifications and consequences for the project of enhancing the ability of youth to learn from each other across the globe, to share ideas, and then to contextualize them within the political communities in which it is sought to be applied. The object is to use the knowledge gained to begin to develop transnational networks of knowledge production and dissemination, of youth to youth contact that builds capacity and solidarity.

Background/Concept Note

In a letter dated June 13, 2016, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) invited academics, experts, and NGOs to participate in the inaugural session of the Forum on Human Rights, Democracy, and the Rule of Law, on “Widening the Democratic Space: the Role of Youth in Public Participation.” The Foundation for Law and International Affairs (FLIA) and the Coalition for Peace and Ethics (CPE) welcomed the invitation, extended in a letter from the Secretariat of the Forum, dated June 23, 2016, to reach out to their respective networks to identify possible topics for discussion at the Forum’s inaugural session.

Responding to the Forum's call, FLIA and the CPE attempted to make the Secretariat's call for input an effective and inclusive exercise in public consultation and participation, by reaching out to a total of 42 academic institutions, and 1,000 individual stakeholders.¹ On July 4, 2016, FLIA and the CPE were pleased to submit a set of six suggestions on topics to be discussed at the Forum, based on the thrust of the reactions of all supporting stakeholders. It in the same spirit that we are now honored to submit the present concept note for a discussion panel to be organized during the inaugural session of the Forum on Democracy, Human Rights, and the Rule of Law.

In the framework adopted by the United Nations over the last several years, democracy has assumed a paramount role. Resolution 19/36 has noted how democracy, respect for human rights and fundamental freedom are independent and mutually reinforcing. Democracy can be realized only if all the members of a people, organized in nation-states, enjoy the freedom to express their will to determine their political, social, economic, and cultural system. The responsibility and obligation to ensure the protection and expression of this popular will rests primarily with the state, which fulfills it through its obligation to ensure good governance. Yet, international organizations play a fundamental role in protecting the broader framework of democracy, human rights, and the rule of law, and in advancing them through the elimination of discrimination. As emphasized in Resolutions 28/4 and 19/36 State parties to the Human Rights Council (PRC) are encouraged to build democratic societies where individuals enjoy the opportunity to shape their own destiny. Democracy is a universal value, and as such it does not belong to any people or region. While there exists no single model of democracy, various peoples and regions share common conceptions of democracy.

Coherent with the mandate of Resolution 28/4, FLIA and the CPE believe that the task of widening democratic spaces is as much the responsibility of youth as it is the rest of the polity of every state. That responsibility can be better exercised, within the political context of states, through effective educational, training, and capacity-building initiatives. The proposed roundtable discussion will provide a space to discuss the theme of a deeper engagement of the global youth in political participation through innovative educational, training, and capacity building initiatives.

Our goals in proposing to open up a space for discussion among young members of civil society organizations hailing from China, the Middle East, and Europe are as follows:

(1) in the face of a systematic restriction of the domestic space for civil society, and the harassment of young democracy advocates, the youth needs to create new and alternative channels for producing and disseminating knowledge about political participation. **The roundtable will provide a forum where members of not-for-profit organizations will have an opportunity to convene, and develop a new knowledge creation and management tool to empower the youth through advancing education on democracy, human rights, and the rule of law.**

(2) Digital and information technologies are playing a fundamental role in allowing new forms of political participation by the youth. In a near future such a role will witness an exponential growth, as a result of restrictions on civil society, and obstructions to initiatives launched by the youth.

¹ Joint Submission by the Foundation for Law and International Affairs and the Coalition for Peace and Ethics on the Themes for the First Session of the Forum on Human Rights, Democracy, and the Rule of Law. 4 July 2016.

Thus far the role of digital and information technology has been limited to grassroots mobilization. We believe digital and information technology can play a broader, and more effective role, as a channel of human rights education.

(3) The process of promoting education of the youth in human rights, democracy, and the rule of law is a process where knowledge is not static. Knowledge is produced by the youth, in a continuous process of capacity-building which involves civil society organizations, and individuals. Knowledge is more effective when it freely flows among individuals, coalescing into highly-resilient, polycentric transnational networks of information which cross national borders and the four walls of traditional classrooms. These knowledge networks are self-regulating, and self-managing. They promote the empowerment and autonomy of young persons engaged in processes of knowledge-production and knowledge-circulation. **The roundtable will provide a practical demonstration of this knowledge-production tool, and involve all participants in the further development of the tool, and its adaptation to local civil society.**

Young members of the Foundation for Law and International Affairs and the Coalition for Peace and Ethics have been using the “Spiraling Clusters” knowledge tool to produce, manage, and disseminate knowledge across national, ideological, institutional, and ethnic divides since 2006. Our knowledge will be shared with panel participants through short introductions where members of FLIA and their CPE will articulate their experience and know-how, followed by joint consideration of context specific problems, and finally through joint analysis of next steps and a final reflection.

The “State of Knowledge” portion of the session will set the stage for the discussion that follows. It will introduce basic concepts, objectives and the state of research and information that is now available. It will also suggest the context in which the work of the Forum is taking place, and the structures within which useful discussion might proceed.

The “Case Study” exercise will provide workshop participants an opportunity to draw on their own explicit and implicitly knowledge, and experience, through learning by doing. Together with members of FLIA and the CPE, young persons attending the workshop will become aware of their implicit knowledge on human rights, democracy, and the rule of law, and of the community of competence and knowledge they belong to through “learning-by-doing”. They will trace that knowledge and community on-site, through the use of digital technology and other means, and share the knowledge produced through their participation to the Forum on Human Rights, Democracy, and the Rule of Law.

The “Final Reflections” portion of the session will be structured as an open discussion on the most appropriate strategies and methodologies to adapt the “Spiraling Clusters” tool to diverse social, economic, political, educational contexts. The discussion will be held by workshop participants, with FLIA and the CPE acting as facilitators, and will result in participants owning the Spiraling Clusters tool, modifying it according to their needs, and promoting the active use of the tool in educational initiatives on human rights, democracy, and the rule of law.

Participants

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