**Human Rights Council**

**First Session of the Forum on Human Rights, Democracy and the Rule of Law**

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

*Panel:* ***Refugee, displaced and stateless youth: their specific challenges and their contributions***

The young people that UNHCR works with and for (asylum seekers and refugees, internally displaced, and stateless) consistently demonstrate capacities and capabilities that enable them to make substantive contributions to protection and development of their communities. Forced displacement often compels young people to take on new roles and responsibilities to ensure their own and their families’ basic needs are met. Statelessness meanwhile can be both a cause and consequence of displacement creating and exacerbating situations of vulnerability. Newly adopted roles and responsibilities may put these young people at risk, for example girls and young women are often at an increased risk of harmful coping strategies such as survival sex and early marriage, while boys and young men may face an increased risk of forced recruitment into armed groups and exploitation in the labour market. In reality, these risks cross over genders and often overlap. Despite the adversity they face, and often against the odds, forcibly displaced and/or stateless young people regularly demonstrate great resilience in challenging situations, finding the ability to adapt and exercise agency. Individually and as part of groups they display unique talents, utilising skills and resources which can assist them not only in their own transition to adulthood, but also to make considerable contributions to challenging situations including to humanitarian and development responses.

Forcibly displaced and stateless young people are often perceived through different lenses, as a threat to stability and security and as vulnerable victims in need of protection. While yearning to have their voices heard, many experience feelings of disenfranchisement. Many of these young people, due to displacement or undocumented nationality, are denied the chance to exercise the full set of rights they are entitled to.

An inability to participate in decision-making processes at individual, community and country levels, can create a situation, perceived or genuine, where young people feel they are unable to influence their own futures. It is also a challenge for them to link into existing national, regional and international networks aimed at supporting the voices of youth, especially in the areas of human rights, democracy and the rule of law. This is especially pertinent to the young people UNHCR works with: young people trapped in or escaping conflict, young people crossing international boundaries and young people who through no fault of their own are stateless. Providing these young people with a voice, opportunities to influence their own futures, and participation in decision-making are especially important given that reconstruction and reconciliation processes rely heavily on youth returning after conflict.

Several recent initiatives provided a platform for the voices and ideas of youth, providing opportunities to influence policy and decision-makers: UNHCR’s Global Refugee Youth Consultations, UNHCR’s Consultations with Stateless Children and Youth, and the High Level Special Session on Youth in Humanitarian Contexts at the World Humanitarian Summit, to name a few. UNHCR therefore suggests, in keeping with these efforts, that the first session of the Forum have a panel discussion focussing on the challenges of refugee, displaced youth and stateless youth and the many contributions they make to the respect of human rights, democracy and the rule of law.