



Declaration by the Young People of the Commonwealth

“Young people can and must play a vital role at the centre of sustainable and inclusive development. Investing in young people today is the foundation for a prosperous and equitable tomorrow. Therefore, it is critical to harness the creativity, leadership and social capital of young people, towards the progress and resilience of Commonwealth countries, and a more democratic and prosperous Commonwealth.”

Commonwealth Heads of Government, November 2013

Preamble

1. This declaration and supporting action plan (Annex 1) express current policy recommendations of Commonwealth young people regarding the social, political, economic and environmental agendas. These recommendations have been gathered through regional, Commonwealth and global youth leaders’ forums, and were finalised at the 10th Commonwealth Youth Forum. They represent a common framework to inform and inspire youth led-development at national, regional and Commonwealth levels.
2. We, the young people of the Commonwealth, convened in Malta from 21 - 25 November 2015 for the 10th Commonwealth Youth Forum, recommit to the values and principles enshrined in the Commonwealth Charter and the Commonwealth Youth Council Constitution. In this year, when the Commonwealth family is focused on the role and contribution of young people through the Commonwealth theme, ‘A *Young Commonwealth*’, we support the declaration of Heads enshrined in Article XIII of the Commonwealth Charter that recognises the critical role of young people in the future success of the Commonwealth¹.
3. As youth leaders, we pledge our continued support as partners and stakeholders for the economic, environmental, social and political development of our countries and the Commonwealth as defined in the Global Goals for Sustainable Development that define our generation.

By this Youth Declaration, we:

4. *Commemorate* the 20th Anniversary of The World Programme of Action for Youth (WPAY) and call on governments and stakeholders to implement and monitor the priorities therein. We also recall the Commonwealth’s Plan of Action for Youth Empowerment and call on Heads to recommit to the 13 policy priorities included in the plan.

¹ Commonwealth Charter, Article 13, Importance of Young People in the Commonwealth

5. *Recall and commit* to the African Youth Charter, the CARICOM Youth Development Action Plan, and the Pacific Youth Development Framework, in addition to the policy recommendations put forward by the young people participating in the 2015 Regional Commonwealth Youth Ministers Meetings.
6. *Acknowledge the* role and contribution of national youth councils/bodies, national student organisations, youth organisations and youth networks in building safe, stable, secure and productive societies. We also recognise the continued support of youth workers, Ministries/departments of youth, and other stakeholders in youth development.
7. We therefore call on governments, civil society organisations, NGOs, International donor partners and other stakeholders active in member states to partner with the Commonwealth Youth Council to support the following policy recommendations:

I) ECONOMIC AGENDA:

8. We, the young people of the Commonwealth, recognise that youth unemployment is one of the greatest challenges facing member states. Unemployment is detrimental at any age; but for young people, long-term unemployment has particularly significant implications. Under-employment, un-fair working conditions and involuntary work can be attributed to a lack of self-worth, social exclusion and vulnerability. Employed and entrepreneurial young people are making an enormous contribution to economic growth across the Commonwealth. Therefore, we note the importance of expanding access to entrepreneurial training, technical training, vocational training and technology, in order to improve labour market outcomes for youth, promote youth entrepreneurship and promote decent employment.

The young people of the Commonwealth therefore call on:

9. National governments to prioritise employment opportunities and inclusive labour policies for young people by adopting a national youth employment action plan, working together with the private sector, and allocating budget to its implementation. The plan must be evidence-based, developed in partnership with young people, and recognise the interrelated role of education, employment and training in preventing the marginalisation of young people and building economies.²
10. All member states to facilitate the creation of decent job opportunities for young people, particularly for those living with disabilities, displaced persons, youth of various ethnic backgrounds and indigenous communities, young migrant workers, LGBTQI+ youth, other minority groups, and homeless young people³.

² Amman Youth Declaration on Youth, Peace and Security (2015); Global Forum on Youth, Peace and Security.

³ Colombo Declaration on Youth (2014); World Conference on Youth.



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11. All member states to support youth entrepreneurship by facilitating easier access to technology and start-up finance for young people, particularly those unable to furnish collateral⁴.
12. International organisations, National Youth Councils, donors and the private sector to foster a culture of youth entrepreneurship by advocating for youth entrepreneurship skills to be included in the education curricula and the creation of national and regional networks for youth entrepreneurs⁵.
13. The Commonwealth Youth Council, National Youth Councils and Youth Ministries to encourage the use of Information and Communication Technology in education and the establishment of inter- and intra-regional youth innovation and technology centers, as a means of disseminating knowledge, skills development, innovation and connectivity, thereby enhancing infrastructure in these areas⁶.
14. All member states to develop policies to ensure universal access to information and communication technology, and achievement of targeted outcomes in education, health care, social cohesion, training and employment opportunities among the youth, through greater use of ICT. ⁷

II) ENVIRONMENT AGENDA

15. We, the young people of the Commonwealth, are concerned about the social and environmental consequences of economic and development strategies that do not take into consideration environmental sustainability. Further, we recognise that climate change continues to be a major challenge for all member states, particularly for climate vulnerable developing countries. As such, we emphasise the importance of expanding access to efficient, secure and sustainable energy sources and mitigating climate change, in accordance with national priorities.

The young people of the Commonwealth call on:

16. Commonwealth leaders to commit at COP21 to achieving a 100% renewable energy future with sustainable energy access for all. We recommend that Parties at the UNFCCC take strides to acknowledge, in a legally binding agreement, that the long-term goal of phasing out fossil fuels and transitioning to 100% renewable energy by 2050 is essential and urgently needed. We also recommend putting young people at the centre of promoting the use of

⁴ Youth Declaration and Plan of Action for Youth Development in the Caribbean Region and Canada (2015); Caribbean Region Commonwealth Youth Ministers Meeting.

⁵ Pacific Region Commonwealth Youth Ministers Meeting Communique (2015).

⁶ Colombo Declaration on Youth (2014); World Conference on Youth.

⁷ Youth Declaration and Plan of Action for Youth Development in the Caribbean Region and Canada (2015); Caribbean Region Commonwealth Youth Ministers Meeting.

renewable energy within communities all around the world, building their capacities to do so⁸.

17. National Youth Councils, Youth Leaders and youth-led organisations to advocate for the implementation or enforcement of national legislation, action plans and policies relating to climate change⁹.
18. The new Commonwealth Climate Finance Skills Hub, which is to be endorsed by Heads at CHOGM 2015, includes within its structure youth desks both at the headquarters and at the regional nodes level, as well as a youth representative to be part of the Hub's governing body¹⁰.
19. Member states and relevant institutions to provide support to young entrepreneurs for the creation of youth-led Climate-Smart Agriculture, low-carbon and social enterprises which align expertise, skills, innovation and competence towards low-carbon and 'green' economies in agricultural transformation, climate change mitigation and adaptation and development¹¹.
20. All member states to formulate and implement national policies, which enable sustainable ocean governance and better use of the 'Blue Economy' to address youth unemployment and job creation.¹²
21. International organisations and treaty bodies, and international financial institutions at the global and regional levels to support developing countries, at their request, in the implementation of the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030, with youths' support¹³.
22. All member states to enable young people to take a key role in disaster relief and recovery in times of crisis and natural disaster with sufficient resourcing¹⁴. We ask member states to support youth to create awareness on the needed changes at the grass root level in relation to climate change and disaster management¹⁵.

8 Commonwealth Youth Expert Group Meeting on Climate Change Policy (2015), Recommendations and Voluntary Commitments.

9 Pacific Region Commonwealth Youth Ministers Meeting Communique (2015).

10 Commonwealth Youth Expert Group Meeting on Climate Change Policy (2015), Recommendations and Voluntary Commitments.

11 Commonwealth Youth Expert Group Meeting on Climate Change Policy (2015), Recommendations and Voluntary Commitments.

12 Commonwealth Youth Expert Group Meeting on Climate Change Policy (2015), Recommendations and Voluntary Commitments.

13 Commonwealth Youth Expert Group Meeting on Climate Change Policy (2015), Recommendations and Voluntary Commitments.

14 1st Africa Region Commonwealth Youth Ministers Meeting Communique (2015)

15 Pacific Region Commonwealth Youth Ministers Meeting Communique (2015).



23. We, the young people of the Commonwealth, recognise that there are challenges in regards to access and quality of education by all groups of young people across the Commonwealth. While young people are key stakeholders in education, they are not always consulted when policies that directly affect them are being formulated, implemented or evaluated. Additionally, many young people are not acquiring the relevant skills they need for the changing labour market of the future, and transitions from education to full-time work are becoming more challenging. Furthermore, national youth policies need to respond to the challenges facing young people, including access to support services and information relating to Sexual and Reproductive Health, mental health and non-communicable diseases.

The young people of the Commonwealth call on:

24. All member states to extend access to free universal early childhood, primary, secondary and tertiary education of the highest quality for young people, based on the principles of equality and non-discrimination and ensuring equal and equitable access to education at all levels¹⁶. In particular, we ask states to prioritise gender responsive policies and implement programmes to promote the right of young girls to have a chance at accessing quality education and to create and/or enforce anti-discrimination legislation and enhance education policies, curricula and systems to include students with special learning needs and disabilities¹⁷.
25. All member states to increase the recognition and availability of non-formal education and vocational education, including volunteer schemes and Information and Communication Technology apprenticeships, as an effective means of empowerment and skills transfer¹⁸.
26. All member states to promote healthy lifestyles and take steps towards a sustainable framework for health financing, to make adolescent and youth friendly services that are accessible and affordable and ensure the quality of universal health coverage, including but not limited to maternal health, communicable diseases, including HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis, polio and malaria, non-communicable diseases, mental health, injuries and drug and substance abuse including alcohol¹⁹.
27. Youth leaders, youth led organisations and NGOs to advocate for early detection, treatment of and support for mental health issues and promote universal healthcare and education on sexual health and reproductive rights among adolescents and youth²⁰.

¹⁶ Colombo Declaration on Youth (2014); World Conference on Youth.

¹⁷ 19 CCEM Youth Forum Communiqué (2015) CSA.

¹⁸ Colombo Declaration on Youth (2014); World Conference on Youth.

¹⁹ Colombo Declaration on Youth (2014); World Conference on Youth.

²⁰ 1st Africa Region Commonwealth Youth Ministers Meeting Communiqué (2015).

28. All member states to develop strategies, investment and best practice to enhance youth work; promote full labour rights of youth workers; and ensure the minimum professional standards of youth work²¹.
29. All member states to support youth work education across the Commonwealth, promote the formalisation of youth work as a profession, and include youth development work as a priority area for scholarships and remuneration²².

IV) POLITICAL AGENDA

30. We, the young people of the Commonwealth, believe it is important for member states to place young people at the centre of sustainable development, given the increasingly large global youth demographic. We note that member states should take into account young people's needs, aspirations, challenges and ability to contribute. In particular, special efforts should be made to ensure that the voices of marginalised young people are taken into account. Especially, as young people work to build a peaceful world, it is important to note that reconciliation and cultural understanding are critical components of the pathway to social cohesion.

The young people of the Commonwealth therefore call on:

31. National governments and local authorities to facilitate an enabling environment in which youth actors are recognised and provided with adequate support to implement violence prevention activities in order to prevent violence and violent extremism. This space must be inclusive of youth from different social, political, economic, ethnic and religious backgrounds.²³
32. National governments, local authorities and researchers to ensure that contextual research is conducted in collaboration with young people and youth organisations to identify the drivers and enablers of violence and extremism in order to design effective responses at local, national and international levels²⁴.
33. International organisations, national governments, donors and the private sector to support youth-led and youth peace-building organisations as partners in youth employment and entrepreneurship programs, as those organisations are uniquely placed to engage marginalised young people and to promote social cohesion²⁵.

²¹ Pacific Region Commonwealth Youth Ministers Meeting Communique (2015).

²² Youth Declaration and Plan of Action for Youth Development in the Caribbean Region and Canada (2015); Caribbean Region Commonwealth Youth Ministers Meeting.

²³ Amman Youth Declaration on Youth, Peace and Security (2015); Global Forum on Youth, Peace and Security.

²⁴ Amman Youth Declaration on Youth, Peace and Security (2015); Global Forum on Youth, Peace and Security.

²⁵ Amman Youth Declaration on Youth, Peace and Security (2015); Global Forum on Youth, Peace and Security.



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34. International agencies, national governments and local authorities to establish mechanisms to meaningfully involve youth in current and future peace and reconciliation processes, including formal peace negotiations from the local to the global levels. These mechanisms need to ensure youth are engaged as equal partners and promote youth leadership²⁶.

35. Member states to address the urgent need to recognise the existence of young people's human rights, through introducing programs and policies that provide social protections to reduce the vulnerability of all young people, especially young people from marginalised backgrounds²⁷.

36. International agencies, national governments and local authorities to implement internationally agreed commitments and policies to promote and protect the rights of girls, prevent gender-based violence and end impunity for crimes such as child, early and forced marriage, sexual and domestic violence, femicide and female genital mutilation²⁸.

Conclusion

37. The delegates of the 10th Commonwealth Youth Forum thank the Government of Malta for hosting the 10th Commonwealth Youth Forum and the 2nd Commonwealth Youth Council General Assembly and look forward to the Government's continued support in promoting youth participation and engagement in the Commonwealth.

38. We welcome and encourage on-going partnership and collaboration between the Commonwealth Youth Council, Commonwealth Secretariat, member states and Commonwealth civil society in moving forward towards an inclusive and sustainable future for young people.

39. Towards a more renewed, inclusive and prosperous Commonwealth, we call on Governments, the Non-Government Organisations, agencies, donor partners, private sector, civil society organisations to partner with us to ensure that the policy priorities outlined above are implemented.

²⁶ Amman Youth Declaration on Youth, Peace and Security (2015); Global Forum on Youth, Peace and Security.

²⁷ Colombo Declaration on Youth (2014); World Conference on Youth.

²⁸ Amman Youth Declaration on Youth, Peace and Security (2015); Global Forum on Youth, Peace and Security.