

CIVICUS YOUTH ASSEMBLY STATEMENT

International Civil Society Week 2016

Bogota, Colombia

24 April 2016
CIVICUS 7th Youth Assembly
Presented on 28th April at 13th CIVICUS World Assembly, Bogota, Colombia

BACKGROUND

Since 2007 in Glasgow, successful Youth Assemblies have been held in 2008 (Glasgow), 2010, 2011, [2012](#) (Montreal), and [2014](#) (Johannesburg). The Youth Assembly is now an established and globally recognised space for analysing current practices and strengthening youth participation in civil society discussions.


At the 2014 CIVICUS Rustler's Valley Youth Retreat, delegates produced a [Statement](#), outlining several **key topics for civil society to focus on and fight for**, including: eliminating discrimination based on race, gender and sexual orientation, democratization of civil society organisations and power structures, and rethinking relationships between civil society and donor organisations, grassroots and NGOs.

In September 2015, the international community agreed upon 17 new Sustainable Development Goals to be achieved over the next 15 years. Last December in Paris at COP21, global leaders also set new targets for climate change reduction.

Youth will be the most affected demographic by the new development agenda and climate change objectives. Young people today will not only deal with the impact of these goals throughout their lives, but will also be responsible for setting the next agenda in 2030. **Without the critical engagement of civil society, and especially youth, these new goals and targets will remain an empty promise.** Take the example of Oregon, USA where judge rules that kids can sue the US government for inaction on climate change. [Should we sue our failing civil society?](#)

Today, the world has the largest youth population in history. In some parts of the world, the number is still rising, but in other areas it's beginning to plateau. Both of these realities – the growth or plateauing of **youth populations** – have serious and interesting implications for not only current and future youth, but the future global economy, environment and governance system as well.



When it comes to holding leaders accountable and collectively determining what comes next, young people are both key stakeholders and active participants. Now, more than ever, civil society needs youth voices. **We are not a checkbox** 

Having met on 24 April 2016, ninety delegates from over 25 different countries have agreed on the following priorities to enable youth voices and participation in decision-making processes.

PRIORITIES FOR YOUTH CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

PEACE

We must create positive pathways to affect durable and non-violent social change, and upholding universal human rights commitments. To do so,



- We need a **strategy that promotes intergenerational peace building**.

- We must **treasure and respect diversity**; accepting difference should be at the core of all peace discussions.

- We emphasize that peace and peace building is only possible when we have **justice, memory, and reconciliation**.

- **Peace builders must be protected** from abuses by the government and/or private interests, so cases like the kidnapping and murder of 43 Youth in Mexico do not happen again.

INCLUSION & PARTICIPATION

We must embrace multiple voices and exercise principled courage in addressing controversial issues for true representation and legitimate actions.

We must create opportunities for meaningful youth engagement in governance and decision-making processes, and holding power-bearers to account. To do so,

- We must **make our struggles more intersectional**. We need to develop new masculinities, and build bridges between different actors. When we try to understand what other people live and suffer through, we broaden our perspective and strengthen our collaboration.
- The role of activism in dismantling gender stereotypes should be through the decolonization of our language and constantly reflecting on daily life perspectives, not only in our work environment. We should **provide an open space to adapt the gender perspective**.
- Participation should be understood as a means and an end. When participation becomes an end in itself, rather than means of advancing change, young people may distance themselves from it.

While the use of social media and technology for social change within a new format of citizenship can be pertinent, **we should try to foster active participation for all**. We must open a conversation about creative ways to include youth voices in all regions, including those with little to **no access to social media**.



Photo by: Luis Enrique Sierra

SUPPORT TO BUILD AN ENABLING ENVIRONMENT

We must demand the spaces and protect the right to come together, take action and speak out, while acknowledging our roles, responsibilities and enhancing our effectiveness.

- We all must **prioritize the support from donors and civil society organisations in reaching and consistently including the voices of diverse, underrepresented, and marginalized young people**. Both donors and youth participants need to assure **sustainability on funding** so we do not rely on donors 100%. **Participatory funding is not exclusive or inclusive of community involvement**.
- We should work for mainstreaming better youth participation in CIVICUS and CSOs.



Hip Hoppers 4 Peace – YA2016 opening. Photo by Luis Enrique Sierra

CREATIVE STRATEGIES TO RAISE CONSCIOUSNESS AND COLLABORATION

To foster creative strategies, to raise consciousness and to collaborate, **we must promote non-violent strategies in communication and act as positive change makers**. To do this we will establish unifying mechanisms in commonalities shared by issues and solutions.

We will focus on global collaborations on how to learn from various cultures and contexts. International networks and the mobilization of speed & numbers are of vital importance.

In terms of advocacy for belonging, **we see creativity as a tool for civic engagement at every level** to create new norms and become more conscious of how information is disseminated. We would like it to engage on every level without questioning professionalism, in short, **to be fun!**

We hope that we will inspire social inclusion through the mobilization of creative ideas that involve all stakeholders in solutions, finding strengths in our weaknesses. In these, we ask that you, the CIVICUS World Assembly join u. So we are one and we are united.

We would like to connect with you to hear your thoughts, come and find us in our Facebook group [CIVICUS Youth Assembly 2016](#) or write to CIVICUS Youth Action Team: cyat2016-2019@googlegroups.com

Thank you!

