

WIDENING SPACE BY YOUNG HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS

Brief Report



Side-event to the:



United Nations Forum on
**HUMAN RIGHTS, DEMOCRACY
and the RULE OF LAW**

GENEVA, 21-22 NOVEMBER 2016

Organised by:



**Defence for
Children International**
the worldwide movement for children's rights



**KIDS
RIGHTS**



With the support of:



Office of the
**Secretary-General's
Envoy on Youth**



UNITED NATIONS
HUMAN RIGHTS
OFFICE OF THE HIGH COMMISSIONER



CONTENTS

widening space BY young human rights defenders	1
Promotional flyer	3
Background.....	4
Overview	4
speakers	5
Opening.....	6
panel 1: Realities & challenges as young human rights defenders.....	8
panel 2: Solutions towards a wider space for young human rights defenders	13
Contributions from the floor.....	18
Annex 1: Participants list.....	20
Annex 2: Livestream recording	21

PROMOTIONAL FLYER

WIDENING SPACE BY YOUNG HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS

**SIDE-EVENT
21 NOVEMBER
13:15-14:45 CET**

PALAIS DES NATIONS
GENEVA
ROOM XXIII

Young leaders share their experiences standing up for human rights and creating an environment where young people can participate in public decision-making



"All young people have potential, if we realise this we can move forward together, creating a world of endless opportunity and possibilities."

Chaeli Mycroft
Ability activist from
South Africa



"Only when the last tree has died and the last river been poisoned and the last fish been caught will we realise we cannot eat money – Cree Proverb."

Carlos Andres Santiago
Environmental rights
defender from Colombia



"I advocate for the people who have no voice. My strength comes from my people, and for the future of my people."

Madeline Wells
Indigenous Peoples
rights defender from
Australia's Aboriginal
Community





"I have laughed with and I have cried with them. This is what I want to do with my life until that day comes when no girl is left out ever again."

Ayesha Munu
Girls' human rights
defender from Sierra
Leone

Joined by **Mr Ahmad Alhendawi**, UN Secretary General's Special Envoy on Youth and **Ms Peggy Hicks**, Director of the Thematic Engagement, Special Procedures and Right to Development Division at OHCHR

Moderated by **Jane Connors** Director of International Advocacy of Amnesty International's International Advocacy Programme

 Livestream on the CIVICUS Facebook page
 Questions to #YoungHRDs

- Sandwiches provided
- French/Spanish interpretation available

Organized by:



With the support of:



BACKGROUND

The ability of civil society to influence national, regional and international action has strengthened since the foundation of the United Nations (UN). Through youth-led and youth-serving organisations, young people are taking part in civil society spaces and making an impact on national, regional and international levels. The first session of the [Forum on Human Rights, Democracy and the Rule of Law](#) focussed on “Widening the Democratic Space: the role of youth in public decision-making.” The full and effective participation of young people can only take place in an environment where human rights are respected. Human rights defenders play a key role in creating this environment; therefore this forum provided a platform for young human rights defenders to share their experiences and for their work to be recognised.

Far from being bystanders or victims, young people are powerful agents of change. However, there are increasing reports of aggression directed at those who stand up against human rights violations which leads to a shrinking of the civil society spaces in which they operate. Young human rights defenders face specific risks including age-based discrimination which intersects with other forms of discrimination, such as discrimination based on gender, race and socio-economic status. Those who have the courage to speak out can be silenced or oppressed by intimidation, threats, attacks on their community and families, stigmatisation and reprisals. A lack of representation or inclusion in political processes mean that young people are often denied due recognition, respect, access and security. This has significant implications for their participation in civil society, public decision-making processes and institutions at the local level. To achieve Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 16 to ‘*promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels*’ there is a need to strengthen the protection and recognition of young human rights defenders.

OVERVIEW

The event contributed to the Forum on Human Rights, Democracy and the Rule of Law on “*Widening the Democratic Space: the role of youth in public decision-making*” by strengthening recognition and deepening the understanding among participants of how young human rights defenders play a key role in widening the space for young people in public decision-making and thereby contribute to sustainable peace and development. The event allowed young human rights defenders to share their local realities and the ways in which they contribute to the protection and promotion of human rights, in their communities and globally.

In particular the event aimed to:

- Contribute to a strengthened understanding of the realities of young human rights defenders and the barriers they might face in claiming their rights as protected and recognised agents of change;
- Contribute to a strengthened understanding of how young human rights defenders are playing a key role in creating an enabling environment for the participation of youth in decision-making, thereby allowing themselves and others to contribute to sustainable peace and development;
- Generate critical discussions with participants in the room and online about best possible mechanisms to be enhanced by UN agencies and member states to ensure meaningful youth participation and the accomplishment of SDG 16.

The event was directed at representatives of the Permanent Missions of UN member states in Geneva, states’ representatives from capitals, members of relevant UN human rights treaty bodies, Special Procedures, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) staff, Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) and civil society.

SPEAKERS

The following speakers spoke at the event, which was moderated by **Jane Connors**, Director of International Advocacy of Amnesty International's International Advocacy Programme:



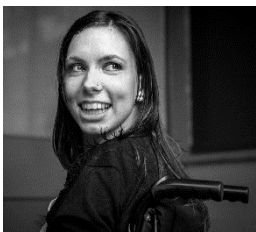
UN Secretary-General's Envoy on Youth. **Ahmad Alhendawi** is a youth expert and advocate at the national, regional and international levels. As the Envoy on Youth Ahmad Alhendawi is mandated to harmonise the efforts of the UN on youth issues and bring the voices of young people to the UN system.



Girls' Rights Defender **Ayesha Munu** from Sierra Leone joined the event through video message. She has been a child advocate since she was an infant and has championing programmes for children within and outside Sierra Leone since pre-school. Aisha currently supports organisations working on girls and young women's issues to implement activities in schools and communities.



Environmental Rights Defender, **Carlos Andres Santiago** from Colombia, is the leader of the [Anti-Fracking Campaign](#) in San Martin, Colombia, co-facilitator of the regional network: [Youth Network of the Americas](#) (RJA) and head of the creation of the National Young Person Act. He is an inspiring young civil society activist, working for the rights of young people to participate in public affairs and access to a healthy environment, peace and education.



Ability activist **Chaeli Mycroft** from South Africa, winner of the [International Children's Peace Prize](#) 2011 and founding member of [The KidsRights Youngsters](#), founder of the [Chaeli Campaign](#). Chaeli is a charismatic young *changemaker*, whose major objective is to act and advocate for children and youth with disabilities. Chaeli became the first female quadriplegic to summit Mount Kilimanjaro in August 2015. Where others see limitations, she sees possibilities; with her positive attitude and tireless ability activism, she is an inspiration to many people.



Since January 2016, **Peggy Hicks** has served as the director of the Thematic Engagement, Special Procedures and Right to Development Division at the UN's Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. From 2005 to 2015, she was global advocacy director at Human Rights Watch. She previously served as director of the Office of Returns and Communities in the UN mission in Kosovo and as Deputy High Representative for Human Rights in Bosnia and Herzegovina.



Indigenous Peoples Rights Defender **Madeline Wells** is a young trawlwoolway & Wemba Wemba woman from Tasmania, Australia, with significant experience within the Australian Indigenous youth network both locally and nationally. She has acted as a mentor to young women within her community, empowering them to speak up on social issues, specifically domestic violence. Madeline has participated in Amnesty International's *Community is Everything* campaign, speaking at activist workshops about Incarceration rates of Indigenous youth in Australia.

OPENING

Jane Connors welcomed everyone to the panel and laid out the objectives for the side event, specifically inviting young human rights defenders to provide a snapshot of the work they have been doing so we could learn how they contribute to their communities both locally and globally. She pointed out that there are currently 3.1 billion people in the world under the age of 25 and highlighted that those youth who seek to defend rights are often silenced based on age and other forms of discrimination. **She noted that young people are not a homogenous group and are not only the future but the here and now.**

Many young people are fighting for free speech association and assembly and challenge racism, sexism, homophobia, discrimination and torture. Some states and faith-based groups and business enterprises may feel threatened by young human rights defenders and try to portray them as threats to security, development and tradition and therefore seek to limit their actions. Jane indicated that the objective of the side event is to strengthen our understanding of the barriers faced by young people and how can they be involved in sustainable development and decision-making. She hoped that the UN member states and entities can encourage meaningful participation of youth in all areas of decision-making.



Ahmad Alhendawi pointed out that we sometimes forget that widening democratic space does not happen automatically and that people are often on the front-lines in attempts to claim that space. He shared the fact that he has personally known many young people and human rights defenders who have ended up behind bars for standing up for rights. He had spent 18 days in Tahrir square in Cairo in 2011 and witnessed the remarkable change that happened there. The phenomena of denying youth access to decision-making processes is not limited to countries which are struggling to democratise, but happens all over the world. **Young human rights defenders often are affected by mainstream misconceptions that side line them as trouble makers. He emphasised that it is important to acknowledge the bravery of young people who are defending human rights.** The Universal Declaration of Human Rights gives rights to everyone, but unfortunately the reality is that not everyone can exercise them. Observing and safeguarding rights should be the norm and is even more important under circumstances of conflict. Lack of security, peace and stability in some countries is a critical concern. It is important to consider young people as agents of change, not as trouble makers.



If we are to achieve the SDGs in the next 14 years, focusing on human rights is the way forward. He called on the Forum to celebrate the young people who are risking so much to advance the rights of all, and to focus not only on new ways to widen the space and also to appreciate the efforts of young human rights defenders in that endeavour.

PANEL 1: REALITIES & CHALLENGES AS YOUNG HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS

Panel one focussed on the realities and challenges young human rights defenders face in their daily work.

Chaeli Mycroft made clear that: “As an ability activist I face many challenges. Often people with disabilities are not seen to have a voice, or are not given the opportunity to make decisions for themselves. Especially as an ability activist, this is highly problematic because people may think that I don’t know what I’m talking about or that I’m not really aware of what my needs are. There is also an assumption that by being a wheelchair user, I must face other challenges too - intellectual impairment, inability to speak, etc. This is the basis of our problem. As ability activists we need the able-bodied community to start trusting in our knowledge and experience. **We know what we need, we just need the space for you to listen. I take a bit longer to say things than my able-bodied counterparts, so I may need you to be more patient to hear my thoughts, but I have things to say that are just as important as an able-bodied opinion.** My views should not matter less because I say them sitting down.



My disability also impacts the practicality of my activism because limited accessible infrastructure – public transport, inaccessible buildings, etc. creates challenges for my actual inclusion in events where I can be an activist in the common understanding of the word. This is especially a problem in my country, South Africa. **I went to an inclusion conference a few years ago and I was the only person with a disability at this conference. I was presenting at the conference and the venue where I was supposed to speak was on the 2nd floor and on that particular day, the lifts were out of order.** If this kind of basic accessibility is not on the radar of the people who are supposed to be creating a framework for understanding, how are we to expect other people to understand? In order for me to be an effective activist on mainstream platforms, I need people to be understanding, and I need people to accommodate my needs. For example, I might need a little more than two minutes to get my point across here. I’m constantly aware that in order for my voice to be heard, I need

other people to make this space open for me; I need people to be aware before I can create more awareness - it's a bit of a complicated issue. I live in a chicken and egg situation."

Ayesha Munu talked about the issue of self-confidence: "It means a lot to actually be that person standing there advocating for millions of other young girls and young boys. It is actually a tremendous job. A lot of young human right advocates in Sierra Leone do not have the self-confidence to go out there and do the talking. They have the passion, the want to do it, but when it's time to face the crowd and say what's on their minds that's when the real issue comes up." Ayesha Munu also spoke about managing her time: **"Young human right defenders like me who are advocates actually have other things that we have to focus on. We have to focus on school and we have to focus on our homes.** We come from homes in Sierra Leone where children are given chores and we must complete them no matter the challenges or consequences, we have to juggle our chores, study for exams, make time to attend meetings, we have to go on the radio, on TV, we have to go to communities to talk about issues so it's really a lot when have to juggle all these things, you have to learn to manage your time.



Ayesha also spoke about the Justice System in Sierra Leone: "Our countries, like Sierra Leone, also do not have an effective justice system for children. The very first time I worked with Defence for Children International was when we were organising a symposium to commemorate the International Day of the Girl Child. We learnt about the child justice system in Sierra Leone and that it has not being able to ensure that children have access to fair justice whilst they are going through the system. We have the Child Court in Sierra Leone, but it's not really doing much in practice to enhance proper rehabilitation and reintegration for children, as a result so many young offenders who end up going through the system end up with a bleak future.

There is also no child jury in Sierra Leone which could help children become better advocates. In countries like Switzerland, for example, there is a child jury and the World's Children Prize is organised by the child jury. The child jury in Switzerland is a whole house for all other child advocates. If we had this in Sierra Leone where all child advocates are actually housed together and they had this overall body that ensures that laws are being implemented; it would takes a lot of pressure of work from we advocates."

Ayesha closed by saying: “There is a lack of capacity-building. **There is a lack of life- skills building programmes that will help to build capacity of young human right defenders which will help us to overcome challenges we face**, identify our potential and help us to work towards that. In a nutshell these are some of the major challenges young human right defenders face.”

Carlos Andres Santiago began by thanking CIVICUS and the other organisers for the opportunity to describe what is going on in Colombia, the country with the oldest conflict in the world. Colombia has been engaged in a peace process with the FARC in recent years to close this dark page in the country’s history. For this effort, President Juan Manuel Santos was awarded the 2016 Nobel Peace Prize. In this cycle of violence that has spread to many regions of the country, San Martin, located in the department of Cesar, was one of the places where these events were experienced, with thousands of victims bearing the consequence. This municipality of 21 thousand inhabitants, with an economy based on livestock and agriculture has suffered many attacks.



As a post-conflict strategy, and in an effort to increase oil reserves, the Government of President Santos signed a contract with oil exploring companies, allowing them to explore fracking opportunities in Colombia. This is a technique that has been forbidden in many regions, such as New York State and France. The processes used can contaminate the underground water and are hazardous to the health of the people. Methane gas has a greenhouse effect twice the amount of c02 and is one of the great threats to humanity.

Fracking and dependence on fossil fuels are amongst the main challenges to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals and other UN initiatives. **Civil society in many countries is fighting against fracking, and in our country not only in my community but all over the country. However, the government does not listen to protests and there has been no consultation with local communities.** President Santos is not listening to our claims or other citizens against fracking. Police are violating social and civil rights through harassing and sometimes detaining civilians, and leaders have been threatened. The government has not taken any measures to protect the life of the citizens in the region. It is now big news and serves as an example for other communities in the seven other departments of the country to fight against fracking. Fracking will be very bad for all the wetlands in the country. There are many meetings to protest. We will go to Parliament in Bogota for the first time on the 30 November 2016. Fracking goes against the Constitution of our country. We

are fighting to protect the environment and life of the people. In Colombia many social leaders have been killed for defending their people. On the one hand, the government has signed the treaty with the FARC, but on the other they are sending the police to end all of these protests. We are inviting the international community to show solidarity with us in Colombia and support our dreams and address our President who is the peace prize laureate this year because there are going to be devastating effects on the environment of my country.



Madeline Wells stated that she is from a town of 5,500 people in Tasmania, Australia. She is a young trawlwoolway & Wemba Wemba woman which means “the land in which I belong to and have the duty to protect”. She said that “my culture is a part of those places in Australia as well as many indigenous people in Australia.” She works with BigHart, Seed and Amnesty International, advocating for the protection of indigenous people, the importance of education on indigenous rights and the protection, specifically, of young indigenous people. Young people are deeply affected by injustices. **Barriers are far too large. Young indigenous people are 25 times more likely to go to prison than to finish school. One in five indigenous people will die in prison.** Indigenous communities feel disempowered. Systems were not created to include indigenous people and indigenous rights. The movement is large and important. Personal barriers she has experienced in her work are racism and discrimination in everyday life, in the media and in education systems. Young people should be learning about history and current issues and how to protect themselves. **She shared the fact that as a young indigenous woman in an isolated community she does not have the support to bring dialogues to the national stage.** One example of the daily life experience of racism and discrimination is in primary school where she was taught that aboriginal people did not exist in Tasmania. At 21 years of age, she saw this as showing how rooted in the culture that racism truly is. How do you figure out your identity when you are taught you don’t exist? Young indigenous people are often refused services, public transport, or seating in restaurants. There are limited safe spaces, especially for young people. Youth-led organisations are not acknowledged or supported.

Peggy Hicks reflected on the challenges shared by the young human rights defenders on the panel: **“The reality is that today’s youth are very much a source of societal change and change in any society encounters resistance.”** Peggy spoke about resolution 27/31, in which the UN Human Rights Council recognises the “crucial importance of the active involvement of civil society, at all levels, in promoting good governance,

including through transparency and accountability, which is indispensable for building peaceful, prosperous and democratic societies.” The Secretary-General cautioned that “[i]f leaders do not listen to their people, they will hear from them – in the streets, the squares, or, as we see far too often, on the battlefield. There is a better way. More participation. More democracy. More engagement and openness. That means maximum space for civil society.”

She said that: “Civil society space is a threshold issue for protection of human rights – when civil society has a seat at the table, all rights can be advanced more effectively. Conversely, where civil society engagement is restricted, our responses to security threats, development challenges and other issues are ill-informed and weaker. **We are living in a world faced with huge social challenges and young people have been more active than ever in promoting human rights, gender equality, fair and equitable economic development, labour rights and environmental rights.** The challenges we all face are also unprecedented – from climate change to unemployment to multiple forms of inequalities and exclusions. While new technologies and interconnectedness have greatly facilitated the expansion of civil society networks, including across borders, they have also created new avenues and excuses for control of civil society movements and speech, often under security pretexts.”



Peggy also spoke about the tide against civil society which is strong, with violations specifically targeting the physical and psychological integrity of human rights defenders and their families, such as targeted killings, death threats, kidnapping, arbitrary arrest and detention. Also, **restrictions on registration and funding for civil society are growing, and counter-terrorism, security and public morality concerns are invoked as justifications for legal and policy constraints.** There is a trend in the introduction of laws curtailing the legitimate exercise and enjoyment of those rights that are a precondition for protecting the right to defend human rights, including the rights to freedom of opinion and expression, religious belief, association and movement. At the same time, members of the public often do not fully appreciate the critical role of civil society in preserving public freedoms, defending diversity, and ensuring state accountability. Of particular concern for the Office is the situation of women who act to promote or protect human rights and individuals who defend the human rights of women or work for gender equality are often targeted using specific forms of violence and harassment.

PANEL 2: SOLUTIONS TOWARDS A WIDER SPACE FOR YOUNG HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS

The second panel focussed on solutions which the young human rights defenders have crafted themselves to create a wider space for young human rights defenders in public-decision making and what participants in the room could do to support similar initiatives.

Ayesha Munu highlighted examples of what could be done to create a wider space for young human rights defenders: “For one thing, Defence for Children International (DCI) in their Girls Advocacy Alliance (GAA) project has a special segment wherein communities and school work hand-in-hand with young girls who are advocates, giving them the platform to identify their issues and to seek out solutions to these issues. **So a project like this allows young girls to build their capacity, to build their confidence level, to identify their weakness and to build their strength.** It also creates professionalism because they know that they have the support of key players in their schools and their communities so they are actually taken seriously. They are doing something that is professional, that has the support of these people. The trainers are the young girls, the advocates, who are out there advocating; what they need is more supervision, more training from these people good impacts that we get from good achievers”



Interventions focusing on empowering young human right defenders can transform victims to victors. **We actually report abuse. We know that we cannot keep silent about these things it is our right to say something, and we know how to resist abuse because we know abuse when we see it and we know how to protect ourselves.** The girls’ decision-making skills are enhanced: projects which achieve this are the Girls Advocacy Alliance project, and projects that Defence for Children and other organisations like Girl Child Network deliver.

Another activity which creates a wider space for we young human rights defenders is counselling. **Counselling builds our strength and our resilience. It gives us an opportunity to voice our issues. Not just the issues that**

we are campaigning for, but the issues that we and other girls feel within ourselves. I talked about human right defenders living double lives that we are sometimes not even aware of these because we have deep psychological issues that we need help to identify; when young girls like us are given the opportunity to connect with other girls around the provinces, be they advocates or victims, we learn how to share experiences, how to make mistakes and learn from them. Support groups, counselling sessions: we make recommendations and we negotiate on how to build the best solutions towards our problems.

Carlos Andres Santiago stated that **we have to follow up with organisations and governments to make sure of what they are doing to defend human rights.** In San Martin, the police were patrolling the streets during protests, but when the representative from the UN arrived, there was not a single policeperson that day. And that happened because they felt that people from the UN could see what was going on. That is just an example of what happens when people from organisations like yours take action.



Madeline Wells shared two examples of opening up the space: Amnesty's campaign 'Community is Everything,' aimed at reducing incarceration rates of indigenous young people and working on how to keep kids in communities and strong in their culture. **This initiative works on making sure young people feel safe to go out into the world and do things they believe in and on protecting young people in detention centres as well.** In Tasmania, aboriginal legal services were cut, communication was cut. Juvenile detention relates to those between 10 and 16 and a law was recently changed so 17 year olds will no longer be in adult prisons. It's great that an organisation can work towards those sort of targets. Her experience with **Amnesty International on that campaign showed that it provided intergenerational space where youth rights are prioritised in campaigning as well.**

Secondly, Seed is youth led, codirected by two young women and focusses on the protection of traditional lands. However, youth-led organisations need more support from governments which should recognise the impact that training young people to become advocates can have. Expanding on her role with indigenous communities, she and her colleagues at Seed looked at protecting areas such as the Great Barrier Reef. **Within Seed we also had the opportunity to attend a leadership camp and met with politicians and lobbied on things that are important to us. It's great to have those movements of young people.** It comes down to the great work

people are doing and how they share that knowledge non-formally. Building up my confidence as a young person to go to my workplace where I mentor young people is important too, “and for them to see someone like me from the same town, who went to the same school as they did come to Geneva to go to the UN, they feel that they are able to do things that they believe in, and that they can make changes and that their voice is important and valid.”



Chaeli Mycroft said: “Activism has been a part of my life since I can remember, I have been raised to see my disability as an opportunity – for people to learn and gain more understanding of disability. You could say that I ‘officially’ started my ability activism when I was nine years old, when we started The Chaeli Campaign. I believe once a person becomes an activist, it’s impossible to stop because your eyes have been opened to the many injustices that exist in our society. I’m so lucky to have an incredibly supportive family which has expectations of me and has never allowed my disability to be an excuse for not getting involved or not achieving my goals. I think this is where my passion comes from – I have experienced what is possible with a disability, when it is framed positively. Disability is something that not everybody is exposed to, and so it often makes people uncomfortable. People do not understand disability and are not willing to acknowledge their ignorance. Many people with disabilities, as a result, keep their disability and the resulting challenges and needs very private. Only recently have I become more open about sharing these things. **I’ve realised that I can’t expect people to understand my disability if I’m not willing to share more personal information. I think that because of my disability and the way it’s shaped my life it has also shaped my approach to activism.** My approach to widening my space as a human rights defender is three-fold.

- 1) **I make it very personal, by opening up my life as it is to a lot of people I meet.** I allow others to help me and see how I live day-to-day life with all its obstacles, to ensure people truly experience disability. From this experience understanding flourishes and awareness is created.
- 2) **I do things that many people regard as being somewhat crazy.** I showcase my ability to the world, by competing for gold medals in the World Cup Wheelchair Dancing with my able-bodied partner, Damian. Last year I summited Mount Kilimanjaro, and this year I successfully advocated for wheelchair athletes to participate in the Comrades Marathon and completed the 89 km in 10:51.

- 3) **I join forces with like-minded spirits.** My mother is a main driving force for me and my activism as well as our non-profit organisation, The Chaeli Campaign. The KidsRights Youngsters is a platform where the International Children's Peace Prize winners speak out to world leaders on local realities of children, each with our different contexts and causes; and more locally, with my friends where we focus on creating a more inclusive environment at our university, the University of Cape Town.

Peggy Hicks spoke about how the UN has long recognised that young people are a major human resource for development and key agents for social change and innovation: "participation in decision-making is a key priority area of the UN agenda on youth and the Organisation needs to work in partnership with youth to ensure that they are meaningfully engaged and their human rights are respected, fulfilled and protected. To guarantee this right, States must take all appropriate measures to ensure that this right is fully realised for all children. This means that the necessary legislation and policies must be in place to enable all children to exercise their right to be heard. Additional measures also need to be put into place to ensure that all children, including those likely to experience social exclusion, are afforded equal rights to be heard."

She said that at the national level: "**Governments need to establish mechanisms for engaging with children and youth in order that legislative, policy, planning and service development and implementation can reflect children's and youth's concerns and experiences.** Governments should also create a supportive environment for the creation of child- and youth-led organisations, such as student unions, parliaments, clubs and other bodies. **Children and youth should be acknowledged and accepted as strategic partners with recognition of their roles and essential resources for community development and positive social change.**"



She spoke about what else needs to be done to extend civil society space and how OHCHR can contribute.

- "We need to build public support for civil society – and hopefully today's event and the new Forum contribute to this. We need to make civil society efforts more relevant to the general public and build the evidentiary case for why civic space is better for societies (stability, economics)"
- **We should explore avenues for more systematic monitoring of civic space – building on the many existing tools. Doing so will increase visibility of the issue and, ultimately, accountability.**

- We have to see how different segments of civil society can work together more effectively, overcoming “silos”. No matter whether you work on economic issues, the environment, women’s equality or human rights – the need to have civil society space is the same – this interest needs to be made more explicit.
- Lastly, more effective protection mechanisms are needed. At the UN and OHCHR we are working on trying to enhance the consistency, effectiveness and sustainability engagement on behalf of threatened civil society activists and groups.”

CONTRIBUTIONS FROM THE FLOOR

The representative of **Child Rights International Network** spoke about how most young activists are not well-known and work alone. Her Network is aware of the many barriers youth face, one of them being age discrimination. For example, civil and political human rights apply to everyone, including youth and children; however, these rights are often denied. While political rights extend to the population as a whole, often children, but not adults, are excluded from participating in protests and forming and/or joining associations simply because of their age.



These types of exclusions/restrictions rest upon two opposing, but equally discriminatory, perceptions of children: first, there is an assumption that children are not capable of making informed choices and must be protected by adults; and second, that the collective identity of children is seen a threat, which has led to a range of measures to restrict children's use of public spaces. Amongst the most obvious examples are curfew laws which only apply to children. These stigmatise and criminalise young people and restrict them from building relationships and getting involved in society. This reflects the idea of children being incapable of making informed decisions.

The representative from **Plan International** asked the panellists: "How can NGOs increase their support for activism and the work human rights defenders are doing?" and "What can they do to ensure that young people actually stand up for positions of power, or e.g. run for office, or undertake other sorts of actions?"

The representative from **Ariel Foundation International** spoke about youth access to decision-making spaces. Not many young people are afforded access to participate in decision-making; but even when provided access to participate; there are a lot of young people who do not feel the need to participate. Thus the question raised is how can we find ways to engage people in politics, beyond simply handing out flyers to vote e.g.; how can we truly reach out to them?



The representative from the **Permanent Mission of El Salvador** made clear that youth is very important for El Salvador. It promoted this topic in the Human Rights Council, spearheading a resolution at the thirty-second session of the Human Rights Council, marking the first time that the Council talked about youth and human rights. The problems/issues relating to youth are not a concern for youth only, but are issues for society as a whole. The representative asked: how can we deepen consideration of the item on youth in the Human Rights Council? How can the Human Rights Council deal with the participation of youth?

The representative from **Permanent Mission of Portugal** spoke about how the fight for widening space for human rights defenders should be a daily endeavour; not only something which occurs when we go to vote for example. The representative pointed out what democracy is today, what human rights means today is that: “if there are violations of human rights, we will fight them”. The representative also said that we cannot wait for the people in power to take measures; we have to fight ourselves.

ANNEX 1: PARTICIPANTS LIST

ORGANISATION	NAME
ACEI	Justine Heckmann
Africa IT Women	Axelle Tcyhadjet Nzia
Algeria (Permanent Mission)	Anton Hassani
Alma MUN Society	Pietro Fochi
Amnesty International	Assia Moharram
Amnesty International	Kacper Gwardecki
Amnesty International	Stephanie Carneiro Nunes
Amnesty International	Dana Vigran
Amnesty International	Sara Vida Coumans
Ariel Foundation International	Luthien Leenders
Ariel Foundation International	Margarete McInerney
Australian Permanent Mission	Alex Chapman
AYUDH/MAM	Andreas Hirsch
AYUDH/MAM	Darcie Anderson
CFJ - Committee for Justice	Ahmed Mefreh
Child Rights Connect	Elmaleh
Child Rights International Network (CRIN)	Isabelle Kolebinov
Civic Chamber of Russia	Albin Krganov
Civic Chamber of Russia	Veronika Krasheninnikova
CIVICUS	Renate Bloem
CIVICUS/World Democratic Forum	Manuel Guzman
CIVICUS: World Alliance for Citizens	Miriam Gosling
CODAP	Arunjeer Arunthavarajah
CODAP	Chatelanat Cedric
CODAP	Hippolyte Kila
CODAP	Metraux Zelda
CODAP	Mickael Repellin
Colleftif-Jeunes Ambassadeurs d'Afrique	Tracy Ntumba Busanga
Common West	Dadoun Yael
Common West	Vicon Lorraine
DCI	Laure Salamolard
European Union Delegation	Maria Dolores Picot
Geneva for Human Rights	Maryna Yazianok
Greek Mission in Geneva	Michail Manousakis
Inter African Committee	Bisi Adebayo
IPPF	Catarina Cauvclho
ISMUN	Jan Lonn
IWGIA	Alejandro Parellado
IWGIA-GAPK	Maria Alcantara
KidsRights	Laura Lasance
Malaysian Youth Council	Izzat Afifi
Mission Permanente d'El Salvador	Carmen Elena Castillo
Mission Permanente du Togo	Koinzi Awaki

Mission the Netherlands	Jamila Benzakour
Mission the Netherlands	Kirsten Hommes
National Youth Affairs Coordinators of Lithuania	Laura Stasianskiene
Official UN Youth Representative of the Netherlands: Dutch Youth Council	Sahar Afzal
OHCHR	Anna Lochhead-Sperling
OHCHR	Brad Smith
OHCHR	Cristina Azzarello
OHCHR	Eric Mongalaro
OHCHR - CARO	Bruno Atangana
Permanent Mission of Portugal	Nuno Cabral
Plan International	Adam Vink
Plan International	Flore-Anne Bourgeois
Save the Children	Diarra Diop
Swiss UN Youth Delegate	Noemi Grutter
The Chaeli Campaign	Zelda Mycroft
UAE Permanent Mission to the UN	Salma Al Darmaki
UNICEF	Nadia Kadhim
UNOCA	Kim Turcotte
US Mission to the UN HRC	Sheila Leonard
World Evangelical Alliance	Albert Hengelaar
World Organisation of the Scout Movement	Julius Kramer
World Uyghur Congress	Dolkun Isa
World Vision International	Constanza Martinez
World Vision UK	Madeleine Askham
World YWCA	Cassandra Troman
World YWCA	Mabagala, Joyce Robert
World YWCA	Minala China
World YWCA	Nhaca, Maria Amelia Hagas
World YWCA	Nirmala Gurung
World YWCA	Sophia Pierre-Antoine
World YWCA	Vanessa Anyoti
Youth Advocacy Network	Hassaan Malik
Youth Advocacy Network	Qasim Farasat
Youth Coalition for Sexual and Reproductive Rights	Jose Maria Nunag
YWCA World	Rita Muyambo

ANNEX 2: LIVESTREAM RECORDING

The side event was livestreamed on the CIVICUS Facebook page. A week after the side event the video had reached 16.474 people and was viewed 3030 times. The recording can be viewed on this web link:

<https://www.facebook.com/CIVICUS/videos/10154239430708315/>