

Statement by the Secretary General Thomas E. Garrett on International Youth Day

We are marking the 2020 International Youth Day at a time of global pandemic. With its impact on all spheres of life, including education, employment, and mental health, every nation has suffered. Youth has been disproportionately affected. Because so much is at stake for them, we see young people – with their courage, energy, and determination - at the forefront of fighting the impact of COVID-19.

Effective responses to the coronavirus are found in the democratic and human rights principles of the Warsaw Declaration, such core rights as equal access to public service, education, freedom of opinion and of expression, and freedom to peaceful protest and assembly. The #CoDYouthLeads campaign, launched to celebrate the 20th anniversary of the Warsaw Declaration, emphasizes the importance of these values to youth. Young democracy leaders, from Romania to the United States of America, from El Salvador to Nepal, share their personal stories in this campaign, highlighting that the desire for freedom and democracy is universal and applies across the boundaries of age, gender, and national backgrounds. Recent protests in Belarus, Hong Kong, Zimbabwe and many other countries serve as a daily reminder of this.

Young people want and should be meaningfully engaged in the discussions on vital issues affecting democracy and the state of the world. The CoD Youth Forum, held in July of this year, provided a global platform for representatives of youth-led organizations to discuss political and civic participation, share best practices, and exchange ideas of advancing youth inclusion in public life. The Youth Forum Statement called on governments to adhere to democratic values and fundamental rights, which are essential to youth and in line with the Warsaw Declaration principles, including equality, inclusion, and diversity.

On today's International Youth Day, I encourage young people to sign up to the Youth Forum Statement, and I am pleased to share the International Youth Day messages received from some of the CoD Youth Leads:

“It's global solidarity that matters, and I believe that the synergy of youth can ensure peace and security for all in the world!”- Tinatin Oboladze, Georgia;

“Youth activists should be encouraged to transcend activism when the opportunity presents itself so that they can meaningfully participate in the legislative and institutional processes. This would, in turn, mean that both the youth and adults are involved in paving the way for the future as well as learning from the past.”- Reyaaz Scharneck, South Africa;

“Young people's education and mental health should be prioritized to improve youth meaningful participation in all spheres.”- Salimatou Fatty, The Gambia;

"Funding has become a huge challenge for youth leaders around the world. We need states and non-state actors to invest in us and our initiatives increasingly."- Walter Corzo, Guatemala;

"Intergenerational partnership and adequate resourcing is key to sustainable peace and development."- Rafiu Lawal, Nigeria;

"Young people bring different perspectives and new ideas, which we know improves decision-making: they need to be included."- Pippa McCue, United Kingdom;

"As we celebrate International Youth Day, let's get motivated to keep speaking out, continue to stand up and keep challenging the status quo for a fair and equal world that would secure a sustainable future for all."- Samuel Amofa Asante, Ghana.