Youth Declaration and Plan of Action for Youth Development in the Caribbean Region and Canada

Caribbean Region Commonwealth Youth Ministers Meeting
Youth Leaders Forum
28 April 2015 | St. John’s, Antigua and Barbuda

‘Youth Participation at the heart of national and sustainable development’

We, Youth Leaders from across the Caribbean region and Canada gathered at the Caribbean Region Commonwealth Youth Ministers Meeting’s Youth Leaders Forum, held in St. John’s, Antigua and Barbuda, on the 28th April, 2015 to deliberate on fundamental issues of regional and global youth development issues and also to reflect on the negotiation process for the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) in the context of youth development priorities for the Caribbean.

At our Youth Leaders Forum, we noted that:

1. For too long, our governments have been reluctant to allocate the required resources to youth development, consequently negatively affecting the efficiency of youth Ministries and departments across the region and their ability to respond to the growing needs of youth.

2. We have learned from previous meetings that setting goals is a crucial step. With goals, we have something to strive for. Without them, we have no way of measuring our successes and failures in our efforts to put Youth Participation at the heart of National and Sustainable Development.

3. This Youth Declaration is our call to action for Commonwealth youth Ministers to put ‘Youth Participation at the heart of National and Sustainable Development’ and work to achieving the Post 2015 Sustainable Development Goals.

4. This Youth Declaration and Plan of Action reaffirms our commitment, to work in partnership with Ministers in the region, and call upon ministers to support the empowerment and development of young people, in the context of article 13 of the Commonwealth Charter on the importance of young people.
Youth in the Post-2015 Development Agenda

We call on Youth Ministers to:

1. Reinforce their commitment to the resolutions agreed at the 8CYMM, where they resolved to take further practical action, especially in the area of youth policy design and implementation, strengthening youth participation mechanisms, and youth employment and entrepreneurship.

2. Be resolute in their advocacy for stronger recognition of young people in the Post-2015 Development Agenda, and strive to honor the existing youth-specific targets in the draft SDGs, and to lobby the inclusion of additional youth targets that are crucial to member states of our region.

Specifically, we call on Youth Ministers to develop policies to:

a. Ensure that all young people have access to opportunities to participate effectively in peace-building and the civic life of our societies, and in decision-making and monitoring across all sectors of national development.

b. 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.

c. Ensure young people have opportunities for sustained participation, ownership and leadership in local, regional and international mechanisms that seek to prevent, manage and resolve conflict and maintain peace.

d. Ensure 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 youth.

e. Ensure equal access for young women to all employment opportunities, and encourage their participation in traditionally male-dominated professions and strive towards gender equality.

3. Support and embrace evidence based policy development, implementation and monitoring mechanisms such as the commonwealth youth development index (YDI) for the SDGs and other regional youth development targets.

Youth Participation in National Development

Given the resource constraints faced by youth-led organisations such as National Youth Councils and student associations, and recognising the critical role and relevance of national youth-led organisations in representing the voices of young people and the importance of youth participation in national development, we call on Youth Ministers to:

4. Support the establishment of functional National Youth Councils in all member states where they don’t currently exist by 2017, and ensure that they are supported legitimately by an act of parliament, thereby securing the effective participation of youth in national development and ensuring that National Youth Councils are truly representative of all youth and youth-led organisations nationally. Furthermore, youth councils should be free from political interference and victimisation.
5. Endorse and provide support to the Caribbean Regional Youth Council (CRYC) as the legitimate and representative institution for the Caribbean region and Canada and also support the CRYC to be sanctioned as an entity within Caribbean Region Community (CARICOM).

6. Recognise and support the work of the Commonwealth Youth Council (CYC) in engaging youth organisations in the Commonwealth, by ensuring the full and effective participation of youth in the Caribbean region and Canada in decision making and other relevant international forums.

7. Support the inclusion of a youth representative as an ‘independent senator’ in national governance in member states which specific focus on youth development issues and challenges.

8. Provide greater support for building their capacity through legislation, financial assistance and/or other measures. This work can and should be supported by the CYC, CRYC and the Commonwealth Students Association (CSA).

9. To periodically convene youth leaders in the region to interact and agree on the priorities for young people in member states. The input of youth into development of those priorities is key to the sustainability of youth development policy implementation in the regions.

10. To provide financial and technical support for the promotion and attendance of youth and student leaders in the upcoming 19th Conference of Commonwealth Education Ministers to be held in the Bahamas on 22-26 June 2015, thereby enabling young people to contribute to shaping Education policies in the Commonwealth.

11. To support the participation of youth in the upcoming Commonwealth Youth Forum and 2nd CYC and CRYC General Assembly as part of the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in Malta, in November 2015, thereby enabling young people to help build the world we want, where youth are empowered and supported.

12. To support the attendance and participation of all countries in all future Youth Ministers Meetings.

**Strengthening the Implementing of National Youth Policies**

Recognising the regional challenges and opportunities for the implementation of national youth policies, we call on Youth Ministers to:

13. Work together to strengthen national youth policy frameworks across the region, ensuring that such policies are inclusive of, and relevant to young people’s needs and capabilities. In particular, Ministers should also give priority to the mobilisation of resources for ensuring effective implementation of National Youth Policy Action Plans.

14. Explore the harmonisation of the multiple policy frameworks existing in the Commonwealth, thereby fostering a broader and more effective policy environment.

**Youth in Peace Building**

Given the involvement of young people in violence and crimes in the region, and recognising that youth are and can be agents of peace and advocates of change, we call on Ministers to:
15. Commit to the United Nations inter-agency ‘Guiding Principles on Young People’s Participation in Peace-building’ and use these principles, where relevant, to guide programme design and delivery in dealing with crime and violence.

16. Establish a mechanism and programme of action to enhance collaboration in the region to address crime and violence, including development of strategies to promote safety and security of young people.

**Youth Employment and Entrepreneurship**

We call on Youth Ministers to:

17. Endorse the newly established youth-led Commonwealth Alliance of Young Entrepreneurs - Caribbean and Canada (CAYE-C&C), and provide support to the network, thereby helping young people to contribute to economic growth and youth employment in member countries.

18. Support youth entrepreneurship by facilitating easier access to technology and start-up finance for young people, particularly those unable to furnish collateral.

19. Advocate for entrepreneurship education to be included as part of the curriculum in schools and universities across member states.

20. Support the Commonwealth ‘Bright Ideas’ initiative for ‘A Young Commonwealth’ theme 2015, by investing in our ‘bright ideas’ projects and provide pilot grants, thereby enabling young people to be able to contribute and be economically empowered.

**Youth Work Professionalisation**

Given the importance of education and training for youth workers, we call on youth ministers to:

21. Support young people to become effective youth workers who are able to contribute to the enabling environment that underpins effective youth development, and recognise youth workers at the national and regional level.

22. Support youth work education across the Commonwealth and promote the formalisation of youth work as a profession. Furthermore, we call for the inclusion of youth development work as a priority area for scholarships and remuneration.

**We further call on youth Ministers to:**

23. Facilitate and promote inter-ministerial partnership to reduce duplication and enhance productivity through the creating of a programme action for partnership in youth development.

24. Develop policies and programmes that will empower young people with disabilities by ensuring they have equal access to information, opportunities and facilities for their development, and ensure the representation of disabled youths in policy making decisions.
25. We commit to taking up our responsibilities and act as productive citizens of the region, in promoting national, regional and global development.

26. We commit to working with our ministries of youth in the planning, implementation and monitoring of this Youth Declaration.

27. We commit to ensuring that youth of the region are informed and engaged around the implementation of this Youth Declaration.

28. We commit to cooperating in the mechanisms for the strengthening of our youth-led organisations.

29. We commit to supporting the work of the Commonwealth and our member governments in youth development.

30. We commit to our role as youth leaders and as partners in promoting and achieving the Sustainable Development Goals.

31. We commit to creating a media network to promote our issues, and call on ministers to support this effort including providing support to the Commonwealth Correspondents.

We believe that youth can be used as effective tools to address the fundamental issues facing the Caribbean region.

We believe that youth can be drivers of trade, development, innovation, agricultural technological advancement.

We believe that our region cannot succeed unless it utilises, encourages and engages the youth in our vision for change.

We believe that our challenges are so great that it would take the combined efforts of all generations (both old and young) to create sustainable development and build the Caribbean we want.

Closing

We express our appreciation to the Government and the people of the Antigua and Barbuda for their hospitality in hosting the CR-CYMM, and the Commonwealth Secretariat, the Commonwealth Youth Council, Caribbean Regional Youth Council and the Antigua and Barbuda Ambassadors Corp for the organisation of this important event.