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**REPORT OF THE LATIN AMERICAN AND CARIBBEAN
REGIONAL YOUTH MEETING PREPARATORY TO
THE THIRD SESSION OF THE WORLD YOUTH FORUM**

(Santiago, Chile, 1-3 June 1998)

This document has not been formally edited.

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A. ATTENDANCE AND ORGANIZATION OF WORK

Place and date of meeting

1. The Latin American and Caribbean Regional Youth Meeting preparatory to the third session of the World Youth Forum was held at the headquarters of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) in Santiago, Chile, from 1 to 3 June 1998.
2. The basic purpose of the meeting was to give youth leaders in the region the opportunity to exchange views on priority issues to be addressed at the third session of the World Youth Forum, scheduled to be held by the United Nations in Braga, Portugal, from 2 to 6 August 1998, held under the auspices of the United Nations Youth Fund and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the meeting was organized jointly by ECLAC and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), with cooperation from the Ibero-American Youth Organization and the Latin American Youth Forum (FLAJ).

Attendance

3. The meeting was attended by representatives of 42 Ibero-American and Caribbean youth organizations, for the most part leaders who were expected to play an active role at the third session of the World Youth Forum (see annex 2).

B. AGENDA

4. The meeting was structured around the following agenda:
 1. Education and youth
 2. Youth participation
 3. Economic, social and cultural rights of young people
 4. Government policies on youth
 5. Regional dimensions of the United Nations World Programme of Action for Youth to the year 2000 and beyond
 6. Activities of the United Nations on issues of interest for the youth of Latin America and the Caribbean.

C. SUMMARY OF PROCEEDINGS

Education and youth (agenda item 1)

5. The representative of the UNESCO Regional Office for Education in Latin America and the Caribbean recalled that the education of youth was a way of responding to the principal challenges facing the region with respect to economic growth and human development in order to enable them to take their place in a world undergoing profound changes. Education must be improved to meet the needs of young people in the poorest segments of the population, who are forced to enter the job market at an early age.

6. Education was recognized as the key to progress and it was therefore essential that educational coverage should be expanded at all levels. That fact had been demonstrated in a number of major studies published recently, including *Education and Knowledge: Basic Pillars of Changing Production Patterns with Social Equity*, prepared jointly with ECLAC and *Learning: the treasure within, Report to UNESCO of the International Commission on Education for the Twenty-first Century*, issued under the chairmanship of Jacques Delors (1996). Moreover, it had been echoed at the Summit of Heads of State and Government of the Americas held in Santiago, Chile (April 1998).

7. Speaking on behalf of the youth organizations, the representative of the Inter-American Scout Office referred to the four pillars of education identified in the "Delors Report" —learning to know, learning to do, learning to live together and learning to be— which were the basis for the activities of many non-governmental organizations. Such organizations could make a valuable contribution in the area of non-formal education and there could be beneficial spill-over effects on the formal education system.

Youth participation (agenda item 2)

8. In his presentation on the above item, the Social Affairs Officer of ECLAC said that young people attempting to find a place in the job market faced stiff competition from older persons who already had a foothold in the market, and that a similar situation arose with respect to decision-making. One of the major consequences of that was the problem of long-term unemployment affecting a significant number of young people in the region, many of whom were giving up their studies in the hope of finding a job.

9. Youth organizations should strive to counteract inequality of educational opportunities —as well as discrimination based on ethnic origin, sex or social class— and the resulting inequality of opportunities for socio-occupational mobility by adopting an independent position on public policy relating to employment and training. Furthermore, they should not be content to condemn high rates of youth unemployment but should demand a thorough analysis of

unemployment as it affected each subgroup and advocate policies that would provide solutions appropriate to the situation in each country.

10. With respect to youth participation in decision-making, he declared that the so-called “political apathy among young people” was a myth, since, when given a real chance to fight for a just cause or to bring about radical changes in the society, young people continued to demonstrate an ability to act as responsible citizens. What was lacking was the opportunity to adopt new forms of political participation, expression and leadership. The starting point was the acquisition of democratic institutions, which called for the reform of educational establishments governed by the authoritarian tradition. At the local level, many young people identified strongly with their local environment and were prepared to work for the good of the community. At the national and international level, it was important for youth organizations to provide greater stability to make up for the loss of continuity arising from the changeover in leadership from one generation to the next. In addition, in such organizations, women and frequently marginalized ethnic and social groups should be given proportional representation, even at the international level.

Rights of young people (agenda item 3)

11. A representative of the ECLAC secretariat presented a paper on the above item and stated that in modern societies in general —especially those where resource allocation was governed by competitive markets—, access to certain social goods, including education, health care, information and work training, was vital, not only in terms of consumption, but also as a means of acquiring autonomy and, above all, income. Therefore, ensuring a minimum level of respect for the economic, social and cultural rights of young people would facilitate the latter’s integration in society; of all the rights identified, the right to education would, for the vast majority of young people, have the most significant impact on their future, in the same way as the right to life and health.

12. The most important reason for recognizing the rights of young people was that such recognition would enhance their ability to intervene as social actors, that is to say, to modify their social environment, which, in turn, was contingent on the existence of democratic institutions. There seemed to be a virtuous circle between recognition and the effective exercise of rights, between opportunities for participating and awareness of the personal responsibility for decisions and such recognition would provide a possible path to the development of ethical and cultural trends in Latin American and Caribbean societies, which gave priority to decisions designed to deepen democracy and overcome the manifestations of lack of equity.

Government policies on youth (agenda item 4)

13. The Executive Secretary of the Ibero-American Youth Organization gave a brief account of the development of policies on youth in Ibero-America, which could not be dissociated from the social, political and economic development of the region, since they were closely linked to the democratic system.

14. He identified five action plans which could be used to systematize a comprehensive approach to the formulation of policies relating to youth and drew attention to possible adjustments to public policies in the light of the analysis of each of them: public institutions, parliamentary and legislative level, cross-disciplinary policies or mechanisms for interministerial coordination, a policy for youth as part of a forward-looking programme and consideration of young people as important interlocutors.

D. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

15. Delegations from youth organizations participating in the meeting adopted the declaration presented in annex 1 as the region's contribution to the third session of the World Youth Forum.

Annex 1

FINAL DECLARATION**PREAMBLE**

We, the representatives of youth organizations and national platforms for Argentina, Belize, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, Dominica, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Haiti, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Trinidad and Tobago, Uruguay and Venezuela and representatives of the regional youth platforms, the Caribbean Youth Council and the Latin American Youth Forum, gathered together with representatives of the United Nations at the headquarters of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), in Santiago, Chile, from 1 to 3 June 1998,

Bearing in mind that:

- the young people of Latin America and the Caribbean between the ages of 12 and 30 account for 29% of the population of the region;
- the young people of the region, especially those from the rural areas and marginal sectors, are facing problems such as poverty, unequal access to appropriate, quality education, lack of risk-free, well-paid, productive jobs that offer prospects for future promotion, and social violence and exclusion above all of groups of marginalized young people;
- such conditions make youth more susceptible to lifestyles that increase their exposure to disease, drug-addiction and delinquency and restrict their chances of enjoying recreational, sports and cultural activities;

Recognizing also the social disintegration, lack of recognition of and insight into, the issues confronting young people and lack of an integrated and concerted, sectoral policy which recognizes local, national and international youth platforms.

And aware that:

- as young people, we must play a more active role in the design of policies that determine our future living conditions and which enable us to build and raise our own families;

and that:

- sustained and sustainable development will be dependent on the generations of young people available in each country and which each country produces,

RESOLVE

To urge our Governments:

1. To create governing bodies to regulate concerted public policies relating to youth, by common consent and on an equal and participatory basis with the government entities responsible for education, work, health, social welfare and human development; national, local, student and voluntary youth organizations and other actors and institutions connected with youth development in each country (non-governmental organizations, entrepreneurs and educators, among others).
2. To draft and apply integrated legislation on youth wherein young people are recognized as actors and consideration is given to the need to introduce the institutional reforms in government offices responsible for youth affairs and to legitimize and strengthen youth organizations, recognize their participation and guarantee suitable conditions for awareness of and respect for the economic, social, environmental, cultural and political rights as well as the specific rights of young men and women as enshrined in the draft Youth Rights Charter.
3. To facilitate the intervention of young men and women in the discussions and decisions taken on priority government issues which strengthen sovereignty and self-determination, with respect to issues such as external debt, excessive military spending, environmental degradation and unemployment and also in the formulation of government policy especially in the area of education and health.
4. To adopt the Youth Rights Charter and foster national activities that contribute to recognition of those rights.
5. To recognize the rights of young men and women and the provisions of the World Programme of Action for Youth to the year 2000 and beyond, as an integral part of the indivisible, interdependent and universal rights of all human persons.

6. To establish mechanisms which permit young men and women to exercise fully their economic, social, environmental, cultural and political rights; to recognize the importance of such rights for the enjoyment of a full and decent life, especially those relating to conscientious objection, planning for responsible parenthood, sexual preference, gender equity, participation in decision-making, recognition and respect for cultural and ethnic identity, access to information, availability of leisure time, opportunities for recreation and freedom of organization and association.
7. To create mechanisms for informing young people adequately of their rights and how to exercise them.
8. To identify and construct indicators, with the participation of young men and women, for evaluating the effective observance of such rights.
9. To be mindful of their duty to provide all children and young people, both male and female, with equitable, quality education, the tools and skills necessary for their development as citizens and full human beings, who play an active role in their personal lives and within their respective communities.
10. To involve all actors (students, parents, teachers, government, the relevant intergovernmental bodies and non-governmental organizations) in the educational process, especially in the development of study programmes.
11. To prepare training programmes to transmit the information and know-how required for coordinating and facilitating decision-making in communities, developing the skills necessary for the establishment of micro-enterprises and access to credit, participating as full citizens on the issues affecting young people at the local, national and international levels and controlling their lives and persons.
12. To halt the progressive loss of cultural identity by recognizing the mother tongue of communities and establishing legislation requiring the use thereof in education, along with other major languages, with a view to the full development of young men and women.
13. To recognize and promote the non-formal education provided by non-governmental youth organizations, as a complementary and innovative strategy in formal education systems.
14. To establish cross-disciplinary lines of action within the education system to promote the discussion and analysis of issues such as human rights, gender, sports, sexuality, the environment, equity and identity.
15. To establish flexible upgrading mechanisms for the completion of basic, secondary and higher studies.

16. To create and improve areas where marginalized young men and women (indigenous persons, prisoners, gang-members and homosexuals, among others) can have a voice bearing in mind factors such as conscience and identity.
17. To foster the development of youth leaders, through training centres and by providing the resources necessary for disseminating the activities of youth organizations in reviews, and newsletters, on the Internet and through other media.
18. To involve young people in the development of mechanisms to facilitate their participation in political forums (Congress, the Legislative Assembly, Parliament and others) and to amend legislation on the minimum age for holding specific public offices.
19. To give legal recognition to existing youth councils and platforms and to allocate a percentage of the national budget to youth organizations for the development of their programmes.

To request the United Nations system:

20. To give guidance to youth organizations in their participation in national and international activities while recognizing existing youth platforms.
21. To give technical support to existing youth organizations for the creation of joint communication networks.

Furthermore, we commit ourselves to the following:

22. To value the democratic system as the most appropriate framework for ensuring the full respect of the rights of young people.
23. To carry out activities that contribute to the development of equitable, quality education at the global level and to reduce illiteracy rates in our region by the year 2010.
24. To undertake self-evaluation exercises to assess the performance of youth organizations and thus to improve youth activities at the local, municipal, national and international levels.
25. To seek creative and innovative mechanisms for enabling those young people not already involved in the process of change to participate therein.
26. To foster recognition of values such as responsibility among young people and to emphasize the importance of organization and follow-up activity for the achievement of objectives.

Annex 2

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