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JOINT DECLARATION OF UNITED NATIONS BODIES AND OTHER  
INTERGOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS ON POLICIES RELATING  
TO YOUTH IN LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN

1992



1. In this, the final decade of the century, characterized in Latin America and the Caribbean by the restoration of democracy and by economic integration both within the region and with the rest of the world, the situation of Latin American and Caribbean youth constitutes one of the principal challenges for the future. The following bodies of the United Nations system and other intergovernmental organizations are aware that the prolonged development crisis and the profound changes under way in the economic structures of countries are making it still more difficult for Governments to formulate policies through which the urgent needs of young people of this and future generations may be met: the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (UNCHS); the Inter-American Research and Documentation Centre on Vocational Training (CINTERFOR); the Latin American Demographic Centre (CELADE); the Latin American Centre for Economic and Social Documentation (CLADES); the Latin American Centre on Youth (CELAJU); the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF); the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA); the Latin American and Caribbean Institute for Economic and Social Planning (ILPES); the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR); the Organization of American States (OAS); the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO); the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO); the International Organization for Migration (IOM); the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO/WHO); the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP); and the Regional Employment Programme for Latin America and the Caribbean of the International Labour Organisation (PREALC/ILO).

2. Although the nature of their unmet needs may vary in the different countries of the region, young people have a number of basic problems and deprivations in common, such as their insufficiently active participation in the design of policies that will determine their conditions of life as adults; poverty and inequality of access, particularly among rural youth and marginalized urban sectors, to appropriate, high-quality education and to productive employment offering adequate remuneration and prospects for future advancement; the danger of falling into lifestyles which increase the risk of illness and drug addiction; the serious emotional deprivation suffered by young people from households in conflict and their growing difficulty in forming and consolidating their own families; and the absence of opportunities and facilities for enjoying recreational and sporting activities and means of cultural expression.

3. These common problems have worsened in recent years. In some countries of the region, for example, functional illiteracy is on the rise owing to the rapid growth of the population of school-age children. In almost all cases, education systems are proving inadequate to meet the new requirements of economies being opened up to the outside world. Furthermore, drug addiction, delinquency and other forms of anomic behaviour are spreading with growing rapidity among young people, while increasing numbers of teenage pregnancies and births out of wedlock constitute serious obstacles to the foundation of stable households.

4. Currently, many young people in the region are undergoing an acute process of social exclusion, reflected particularly in the high unemployment and underemployment rates for juveniles and young adults; in the erosion of the quality of education, precipitated by reduced public spending and a

deterioration in teacher training and evinced by increasing drop-out and repetition rates; in the growing number of young people belonging to poor households (ranging from 20% to 70% depending on the country); in the large volume of migration from rural areas to cities and to other countries recorded in much of the region, which is draining the area of its most dynamic and best qualified youth; and in the low participation rate of young people in social, economic, political and cultural organizations.

5. Concern about the health of young people has grown in recent years, owing to an increased awareness that the habits formed at this stage in their lives can affect their future health. Advances in the area of public health have meant that health problems arising from infectious diseases are becoming rarer; instead, such problems are more often related to factors conditioned by the behaviour and lifestyles of individuals.

6. In a similar vein, greater attention is being paid to the basic social conditions required for the establishment and consolidation of families. Among the main reasons for this trend are, on the one hand, the growing proportion of births out of wedlock and teenage pregnancies, together with the increasing number of female-headed households, single-parent families and unstable, casual unions; and, on the other, the realization that these phenomena, which manifest the disintegration of the family, are contributing significantly to the propagation of poverty and of social inequalities.

7. Notwithstanding the foregoing, other changes in the situation of young people in the region are raising hopes about their ability to deal successfully with the great challenges of the end of this century. In all of the countries, the advances of previous decades in the area of education have continued to bear fruit for the benefit of almost all subgroups of young people. Compared to previous generations, today's youth show a greatly reduced tendency towards dogmatism and violent ideological confrontation. In general, young people are demonstrating a growing capacity to contribute to the incipient changes in production patterns and to the democratic political life which is once again flourishing in the region. For these reasons, young people are a human resource of immense value in supporting society's efforts to apply more productive and equitable development models.

8. Generally speaking, past policies to cope with the economic crisis have relied on orthodox measures designed to restore macroeconomic equilibria, to restructure the economy, to create opportunities for attracting investment and to stimulate medium-term economic growth. To date, only in exceptional cases have countries opted for plans to change production patterns with the aim of absorbing technical progress through a systemic approach, thereby achieving a more competitive integration of the countries of the region into the world economy while also ensuring for new generations more equitable participation in the benefits of the growth produced by such economic transformation. In the future, it will be even more urgent for young people and countries in the region to band together to face the common challenge of introducing development models oriented towards the satisfaction of basic human needs and the reduction of extreme poverty through environmentally sustainable and increasingly democratic means and results.

9. The United Nations bodies and intergovernmental organizations here present,

Deeply concerned about the critical situation of young people in Latin America and the Caribbean,

Affirming the need to formulate sectoral and social services policies from an integrated perspective, establishing a common strategy for addressing the poverty and inequity syndromes affecting large segments of the youth population in Latin America and the Caribbean, and

Taking into account the mandate issued by the Governments of the region, upon the unanimous adoption of the Regional Plan of Action for Latin America and the Caribbean for the International Youth Year,<sup>1</sup> to foster collaboration, coordination and cooperation for the benefit of youth among the competent international bodies,

a) Declare that they share a common perception of the challenges posed by integrated planning in areas concerning youth, and assert their joint willingness to face them;

b) Maintain that the traditional approach of youth-related policies should be revised so as to involve a broader spectrum of institutional actors and a perspective in which young people are regarded not only as beneficiaries of the policies and a sector particularly affected by the crisis, but also as active agents in the alternative, innovative development strategies to be applied in the future, since they constitute a key factor in this regard, especially as skilled human resources. The active participation of youth and the revision of current approaches are therefore essential factors in the success of these efforts and in the determination of priorities for future policies and programmes, with a view to achieving the universality or substantial broadening of the latter. Moreover, all sectors of society must be made aware of the principal unmet needs of young people which have been identified in this Declaration;

c) Pledge their coordinated support to efforts by the Governments of the region to design integrated strategies to benefit youth in their respective countries and to establish or strengthen the institutional framework needed to carry out actions through which young people can participate in the management of development in their countries and to equalize access for all subsectors of the youth population—such as low-income urban and rural strata—to productive employment and to the enjoyment of the benefits of development;

d) Also pledge their joint support to the design and implementation of complementary policy packages aimed at combating the main types of problems affecting youth, particularly in the interrelated and mutually reinforcing areas of education and work, institutional and informational structure, participation in decision-making processes and dissemination and support of healthy lifestyles;

e) Agree to carry out cooperative activities in the following five priority areas for the purpose of meeting, in the near future, their common objectives in the area of concrete action:

- i) In the field of education, training and employment, where the main impediments to the normal structural integration of youth into society originate and, therefore, where their most urgent demands are concentrated, it is proposed that priority be given to the formulation and execution of a training and employment programme for Latin American and Caribbean youth. Programmes of this type can offer young people a chance to earn

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<sup>1</sup> Regional Plan of Action in connection with the International Youth Year, La Juventud en América Latina y el Caribe, Estudios e informes de la CEPAL series, No. 47, Santiago, Chile, United Nations publication, Sales No. S.85.II.G.3, paras. 93 and 94, pp. 126-128.

a steady income by carrying out productive activities, and can also facilitate their full access to other basic services, thus furthering their integration into society;

- ii) With regard to the family, it is proposed that a programme to support the formation and consolidation of the family be elaborated, targeting in particular young people in low-income urban strata. The programme would facilitate access to basic family-support services, such as family allowances, housing subsidies, mother-child health services, counseling for young fathers and mothers on early childhood stimulation, and preschool education; it would also provide guidance for structuring the family in a manner more consistent with new sociocultural realities, e.g., by stressing the need for a democratic distribution of power within the family;
- iii) With respect to participation, a programme to promote the political, social and cultural participation of youth is to be developed; this would take innovative approaches to addressing the phenomena of young people's apathy and disenchantment with respect to democracy, the significant loss of legitimacy and representativeness which they ascribe to basic social and State institutions and the various forms of anomic behaviour found in some young people (drug abuse, delinquency, etc.);
- iv) In the area of institutional and informational reinforcement, the objective would be to rationalize and substantially consolidate a wide range of support services for youth-related policies and programmes, especially with regard to the refinement of diagnostic assessments, research and studies, the training of technical personnel working in these areas and information and documentation for and about youth;
- v) In the health sector, actions would focus on improving research, education, information, training and mass communication programmes in the field of health, for the purpose of increasing young people's awareness of health risks and their structural causes; promoting the adoption of healthful lifestyles; decreasing the rates of teenage pregnancies and sexually transmitted diseases; reducing the consumption of harmful substances; and encouraging young people to participate actively in the promotion of health;

f) Decide to conclude cooperation agreements in these five priority areas and in others which may arise in the future, with the aim of strengthening and institutionalizing the regional network of international bodies concerned with the problems of youth. This institutionalization process should include the appointment, in each organization, of persons to act as coordinators in youth-related areas; the reinforcement of activities carried out by ECLAC, UNESCO, ILO and CELAJU to improve the communication and timely exchange of information; the creation of regional data banks on statistics, projects, agencies and organizations, and consultants and researchers in the field of youth; and the establishment of channels of communication and news transmission between government offices for youth and research centres concerned with the topic;

g) Lastly, undertake to meet periodically and to establish immediate contacts and exchanges for the purpose of implementing initiatives in the priority areas identified in this Joint Declaration.

Santiago, Chile, 9 September 1991



