

Youth Recommendations to the International Colloquium on Women's Empowerment, Leadership Development, International Peace and Security Monrovia, Liberia, 7 March 2009

On behalf of the youth of the world, through the voices of those present at the just concluded Youth Forum, I am honoured to affirm the leadership of young women and young men in advancing development, peace and security in our world. **Not only are we the leaders of tomorrow, we are leaders of today.**

We come in our diversity or rural and urban; young mothers and young fathers; leaders with disabilities; survivors of violence; living positively with HIV and AIDS; in and out of school; employed and unemployed; entrepreneurs and innovators; married, widowed, separated, divorced and single; speaking in solidarity with our Liberian brothers and sisters.

We congratulate President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf and President Tarja Hallonen for creating a space for young women and young men on the agenda of the Colloquium.

We affirm that the issues being discussed at the Colloquium are interrelated: issues that build on global human rights and development obligations and commitments.

Young women's leadership is essential to economic empowerment, peace and security of the person and the community, education, climate justice, women's empowerment and gender equality.

After deliberating on the causes and situations of young women and young men worldwide, we therefore make the following recommendations on the themes of this Colloquium.

On the theme of **education**, we recommend:

- Establish mechanisms to address harassment of girls and young women in schools;
- Motivate and enable young women to go to school and stay in school;
- Ensure youth participation in the achievement of MDG 3 for women's empowerment and gender equality.

In relation to **sexual and reproductive health and rights and HIV and AIDS**, we recommend:

- Promotion of youth leadership through peer education, mentoring and responsible behavior;
- Comprehensive sex education in schools;
- Integrated and youth-friendly sexual and reproductive health and rights services.

We need to take a collective responsibility: church leaders, family members, media and community leaders must talk openly and accurately about sex. Young men must take responsibility for respectful relationships with women, including sexual relationships. We need comprehensive information and services in order to make good decisions that are right for us.

To achieve **economic empowerment and decent work**, we recommend:

- The support of youth entrepreneurship and business growth, for example, through training, skills development and financial planning;
- Provide community entry points for economic activity, especially for youth women, through financing, access to credit and employment opportunities;
- Develop fair international trade policies which deliver best practice and achieve economic well-being for young people.

We understand the different cause, dynamics and consequences of **migration**. We recommend:

- Countries of origin need policies and programmes to enable youth development and economic empowerment, including through better wages;
- Receiving countries need youth friendly migration policies and practices.

To respond to the challenge of **climate change**, we recommend:

- Youth participation in climate justice;
- Increase young people's incentives to respond to climate change;
- Develop alternate and cleaner energy resources;
- Develop curriculum on environmental issues at all education levels.

For **peace and security** in the context of **UN Security Council Resolution 1325**, we recommend:

- Translation into more languages and develop versions appropriate for illiterate groups;
- Police and justice services which respond to the experiences of young women during and after armed conflict based on evidence gathering with young women;
- Establish an Ellen Johnson Sirleaf Young Women's Leadership Programme that incorporates Peace and Security Issues in the Angie Brooks Centre.

Lastly in relation to **women's leadership**, we recommend:

- Investment in young women's leadership through training, mentoring, sports programmes and creating safe spaces;
- Provide positive gender socialization for men and boys for shared responsibilities in decision-making and in care giving. For women to participate in public life, men must do their fair share in the household and with childcare.

In conclusion, we invite you to protect us, but not smother us. Weep with us, but do not pity us. Educate us, but do not judge us. Include us, do not patronize us. Give us space to make our own mistakes. Listen to us. Trust us. Respect us. Invest in us.

Whatever you say here, act on it. Whatever promises you make, deliver on them. Lead by example today: create space for young women's voices; mentor a young woman; greet and talk with young people around you. Remember when you were a young person.

As women, let us empower and encourage each other.

Prepared by the World YWCA and delivered by Ms. Latoya Smith from the recommendations of the participants of the Youth Event of the International Colloquium