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# WIDENING SPACE BY YOUNG HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS

CONCEPT NOTE FOR SIDE-EVENT AT THE FORUM ON HUMAN RIGHTS, DEMOCRACY AND THE RULE OF LAW

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## TIME & VENUE

21 November 2016, 13:15 – 14:45  
Palais des Nations, Geneva, Room XXIII

## ORGANISED BY

Amnesty International, CIVICUS, Defence for Children International, KidsRights and World Vision

## WITH SUPPORT OF

Office of the Secretary-General's Envoy on Youth, Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, Permanent Mission of Portugal, Permanent Mission of El Salvador and World YWCA

## LOGISTICS

Sandwiches will be provided as lunch at the event and French & Spanish interpretation will be available. The event will be livestreamed through the [Facebook page of CIVICUS](#).

## REGISTRATION

If you do not have a UN badge please register for the Forum [here](#) and upload a letter of accreditation by *Wednesday, November 16, 2016 at 6 pm, Geneva time* in order to access Palais des Nations, once the accreditation is approved.

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## CONTEXT

The ability of civil society to influence national, regional and international action has expanded since the foundation of the United Nations (UN). Through youth-led and youth serving organisations, young people are taking part in civil society spaces and making impact on the national, regional and international level. The first session of the [Forum on Human Rights, Democracy and the Rule of Law](#) focusses on “Widening the Democratic Space: the role of youth in public decision-making”. The full and effective participation of young people can only take place in an environment where human rights are respected. Human rights defenders play a key role in creating this environment, therefore this forum provides an opportunity to provide a platform for young human rights defenders to share their experiences and recognise the importance of their work.

Far from being bystanders or victims, young people are powerful agents of change. However, there are increasing reports of aggression directed at those who stand up against human rights violations and the civil society spaces in which they operate. A community of defenders that face specific risks are young people. Young human rights defenders face age-based discrimination intersecting with other forms of discrimination including but not limited to discrimination based on gender, race and socio-economic status.

Those who have the courage to speak out can be silenced or met with oppression, including intimidation, threats, attacks on their community and families, stigmatisation and reprisals. A lack of inclusion in, and representation by, political processes means that young people are often denied their due recognition, respect,

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access and security. This has significant implications for their participation in civil society, public decision-making processes and institutions at the local level. To achieve Sustainable Development Goal 16 to *'promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels'* there is a need to strengthen the protection and recognition of young human rights defenders.

## OBJECTIVES

The event will contribute to the Forum on Human Rights, Democracy and the Rule of Law on “Widening the Democratic Space: the role of youth in public decision-making” by strengthening recognition and deepening the understanding among participants of how young human rights defenders play a key role in widening the role and participation of young people in public decision-making as a means to contribute to sustainable peace and development.

The event provides a platform for young human rights defenders to share what their local realities look like and how they contribute to the protection and promotion of human rights, in their communities and globally. In particular the event will:

- Contribute to a strengthened understanding of the realities of young human rights defenders and the barriers they might face in being protected and recognised as agents of change;
- Contribute to a strengthened understanding of how young human rights defenders are playing a key role in creating an enabling environment for the participation of youth in decision-making, thereby allowing themselves and others to contribute to sustainable peace and development;
- Trigger critical discussions with participants in the room and online about the best practices and possible mechanisms to be enhanced by UN agencies and member states to ensure meaningful youth participation towards the accomplishment of Sustainable Development Goal 16.

## TARGET AUDIENCE

- Representatives of the Permanent Missions of UN member states in Geneva
- States' representatives coming in from capitals
- Members of relevant UN Treaty Bodies and Special Procedures
- OHCHR staff
- NGOs and civil society

## ONLINE PARTICIPATION THROUGH SOCIAL MEDIA

The event will be livestreamed through the [Facebook page of CIVICUS](#) and will provide the opportunity for people who are not in Geneva to engage with the event and send questions. The hashtag **#YoungHRDs** will also be used on Twitter to gather inputs and solicit questions in the lead up to and during the event.

## SPEAKERS

The young human rights defenders speaking at this side-event have substantial experience working to create an enabling environment for the participation of young people in decision-making and fighting for a world where all human rights are realised without discrimination. The young human rights defenders will be joined by the United Nations Secretary General's Special Envoy on Youth and the United Nations Deputy High Commissioner for Human Rights. The event will be moderated by Jane Connors, Director of International Advocacy of Amnesty International's International Advocacy Programme.

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United Nations Secretary-General’s Envoy on Youth **Mr. Ahmad Alhendawi** is a youth expert and advocate at the national, regional and international levels. As the Envoy on Youth Mr. Alhendawi is mandated with the task of harmonizing the efforts of the United Nations on youth issues and to bring the voices of young people to the United Nations System.



Girls’ Rights Defender **Ms. Ayesha Munu** from Sierra Leone has been a child advocate since she was an infant. Since preschool, she has been championing programs for children within and outside Sierra Leone since. Aisha is currently supporting organizations working on girls and young women’s issues to implement activities in schools and communities. Ms. Munu will join the event through a video message.



Environmental Rights Defender, **Mr. Carlos Andres Santiago** from Colombia, movement leader of the [Anti-Fracking Campaign](#) in San Martin, Colombia, co-facilitator of the regional network: [Youth Network of the Americas](#) (RJA) and head of the creation of the National Young Person Act. He is an inspiring young civil society activist, working for the rights of young people to participate in public affairs and access to a healthy environment, peace and education.



Ability activist **Chaeli Mycroft** from South Africa, winner [International Children’s Peace Prize](#) 2011, founding member of [The KidsRights Youngsters](#), founder of the [Chaeli Campaign](#). Chaeli is a proven and charismatic young *changemaker*, with a major drive to act and advocate for children and youth with disabilities. Chaeli became the first female quadriplegic to summit the Kilimanjaro in August 2015. Where others see limitations, she sees possibilities; with her positive attitude and tireless ability activism, she is an inspiration to many people.



Since January 2016, **Peggy Hicks** has served as director of the Thematic Engagement, Special Procedures and Right to Development Division at the UN’s human rights office. From 2005 to 2015, she was global advocacy director at Human Rights Watch, where she was responsible for providing direction to its advocacy worldwide. Ms. Hicks previously served as director of the Office of Returns and Communities in the UN mission in Kosovo and as Deputy High Representative for Human Rights in Bosnia and Herzegovina.



Indigenous Peoples Rights Defender **Ms. Madeline Wells** is a young trawlwoolway & Wemba Wemba woman of Australia and has a lot of experience within the Australia Indigenous climate youth network locally and nationally. She has acted as a mentor to young women within her community, empowering them to speak up on social issues, specifically domestic violence. Madeline has participated in Amnesty International’s *Community is Everything* campaign, speaking at activist workshops about Incarceration rates of Indigenous youth in Australia.

