



## **Economic and Social Council Youth Forum**

**“Youth shaping sustainable and innovative solutions:  
Reinforcing the 2030 Agenda and eradicating poverty in  
times of crises”**

### **SIDE EVENT AT THE 2024 ECOSOC YOUTH FORUM**

**“What Kind of Empowerment is Needed for Youth Associated with  
Non-state Armed Groups?: Exploring Unseen Youths in WPS and  
YPS.”**

**Organized by** Accept International, in collaboration with Permanent Mission of Japan to the United Nations, Permanent Mission of Sierra Leone to the United Nations, Agency for Reincorporation and Normalization, the Office of the President of the Republic of Colombia

**[17<sup>th</sup> April 2024, 1:30 pm to 2:45pm, NY Time/EST]**

**1. Background on the event**

Youth associated with non-state armed groups (YANSAG) often face significant challenges, including a lack of education and opportunities for empowerment. These youth are frequently overlooked in peacebuilding and development efforts, particularly in conflict-affected countries. They have not been acknowledged and discussed well in policy-making agendas of Women, Peace, Security (WPS) and Youth, Peace, Security (YPS). Recognizing the importance of addressing the needs of YANSAG and unpacking their unique potential as agents of peace, this side event aims to shed light on their empowerment and education, particularly in alignment with SDGs 4 and 16.

**2. Key issues to be discussed**

- Challenges faced by YANSAGs in terms of access to education and opportunities for empowerment:
  - Shifting security of a state prevents citizens from attaining consistent education. When non-state armed group members take control over local areas, they completely change the mechanism and contents of education while denying the legitimacy of the education that had been provided by the former authority.
  - Education is used to romanticize and justify the ongoing conflict by describing fighters as “defenders” or “heroes”.

- Within conflict zones, job opportunities are severely limited and it is economically rational to be a fighter, which promises a decent salary.
- Stigmatization hinders social reintegration of ex-combatants. They will be afforded less access to education, jobs, housing, and other life-sustaining resources, when their history of involvement with non-state armed groups is revealed.
- Education for empowering youths affected by conflict and violence, especially female disengaged combatants:
  - Women are deprived of opportunities in conflict zones, especially when the people in power hold attitudes unfavorable to gender equality. In Somalia, Al Shabaab members do not allow women basic education and leave them illiterate. Even when women are successful in escaping from conflict zones, they have to catch up on learning all the knowledge and skills necessary to sustain their lives.
  - In many local contexts, women are expected to take roles in care giving. There are many mothers who hope to save their children from painful experiences that they have had to survive. They have potential to stop their family members from being radicalized, thereby breaking the chains of violence.
- As the YPS agenda illustrates, youth can contribute to transforming societies and to peace and conflict prevention when they are equipped with appropriate knowledge and tools. Considering the different needs of youth in conflict situations, a comprehensive, holistic approach is needed.
- Even in the discussion of WPS agenda, female combatants/ex-combatants are often unseen.
- The UN Security Council plays a pivotal role in ensuring the active participation of youth and women and their empowerment in peace and politics. Civil society also has a crucial role in advocating and implementing initiatives that can transform communities and foster a peaceful and inclusive society.
- The YPS and WPS are interlinked and serve as complementary frameworks. It is crucial not only to recognize their unique needs and obstacles is important, but to adopt intersectional approaches.

### 3. Key recommendations for action

- Laws and national action plans should be made to ensure effective and comprehensive approaches that invite different actors.
- Economic empowerment is crucial to prevent radicalization and deradicalization of youth and women in conflict zones, as well as to support their self-realization. Economic, social, political and other diverse factors are to be taken into consideration.
- In many occasions, rural areas possess higher risks of radicalization. Extending the educational opportunities in certain local areas can empower the community and effectively promote peace. Financial assistance for educational fee and living expenses worth consideration.
- Education should address gender-specific needs. When deemed necessary and appropriate to promote independence and resilience, women should be separate from men to make the most of educational opportunities.