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ADVISORY COUNCIL ON YOUTH (CCJ)

English only

CCJ statement on International Day of Peace 2026

Peace requires courage: not only the courage to end wars, but the courage to confront division, defend human dignity, and build a different future. As we mark the International Day of Peace, wars and conflicts continue to affect communities across Europe, and all across the world. While some dominate international attention, others have become long-running, frozen or forgotten. Yet for the young people living within them, these conflicts have very substantial impacts and consequences.

Young people continue to grow up in the shadow of violence, displacement, insecurity and division. They face the consequences of conflicts they did not create, and should not be expected to carry the unresolved tensions, divisions and trauma of previous generations. A young person born into a conflict-affected or divided society should not have to accept division as inevitable, nor should another generation be asked to carry the consequences of inherited conflicts.

Peace is more than the absence of war, and the absence of active warfare must not be confused with the presence of peace. A ceasefire may silence weapons, but it does not by itself create justice, dignity, security, or reconciliation. Peace cannot exist where violence, repression, discrimination or intimidation persist within societies, or where civil society and young people are prevented from speaking, organising, and participating freely. Peace requires human rights, democracy, the rule of law, social justice, and the space for people to take part without restraints in shaping their societies. Shrinking civic space in Europe and beyond threatens all that.

This understanding also requires us to recognise the role of young people in peacebuilding. The United Nations Security Council Resolution 2250 on Youth, Peace and Security recognised that young people are not only affected by conflict and in need of protection but should also be an active part in shaping a peaceful coexistence. They are not simply waiting for peace to be handed to them: across communities and borders, in exile and conflict-affected environments and communities, they work as mediators, community leaders, activists, educators, and human rights defenders, actively building and keeping peace.

Young people are the everyday architects of peace, and it is our responsibility to ensure they have the space, resources, and power to do so.

Peace cannot be built for young people, without being built with young people. Therefore, youth participation must be systemic, not symbolic. Young people should not simply be invited to speak about peace; they must have a meaningful role in shaping the decisions that determine it. Their participation should extend beyond consultation, to leadership, decision-making and ownership in conflict prevention, peacebuilding, reconciliation, recovery, and democratic life. A seat at the table matters only when young people have a voice that matters.

This is also what it means to invest in peace. This year's International Day of Peace theme, "Invest in Peace – For Everyone, Everywhere, Every Day", reminds us that peace is not something to invest in only after violence breaks out. Investing in peace means investing in human rights, democracy, education, dialogue, reconciliation, social cohesion, and civic space. It also means investing sustainably in young people and youth organisations, whose work to build trust and bridge divides is often carried out with limited and short-term support. Supporting this work is an investment in lasting peace.

The adoption of the Recommendation CM/Rec(2026)11 on Peace Education by, with and for young people in July this year is an important step forward. In adopting the recommendation, member states recognise that peace must not only be negotiated at the highest political level, but learned, practised and built in our schools, communities, and everyday lives. It also places young people at the centre of peace education, recognising them as partners and actors in shaping peaceful societies. Now that we have these commitments on paper, we must translate them into action.

We call on member States to move beyond approaching young people as passive stakeholders in peacebuilding but to ensure their meaningful participation, leadership, and ownership. This means protecting civic spaces, investing sustainably in youth organisations and peace education, supporting youth-led dialogue and reconciliation, and creating meaningful opportunities for young people to shape decisions on peace and security.

Let us not ask another generation of young people to inherit unresolved conflicts and divisions. Let us invest in them as the peacebuilders they already are. Peace cannot be postponed to another generation. It must be built by everyone, everywhere, every day.

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