

Forum on Minority Issues 10th Session

Statement by the Delegation of the United States of America

November 30 - December 1, 2017

Thank you, Chairperson.

The United States welcomes this opportunity to address the Tenth Forum on Minority Issues. We look forward to a productive and meaningful exchange of ideas and best practices over the next two days on efforts that States can take to address the important concerns of minorities, particularly minority youth.

While recognizing that every state, including the United States, has a lot of work to do, we would like to highlight some of the steps, among many, that the United States has been taking in the areas that are the focus of this forum: inclusive education, participation in public and political life, media in the digital age, and sustaining peace and stability. In recognition of the limited time and a large number of participants in this forum, we will limit our interventions to this statement, which addresses the themes to be discussed by the panels.

INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

The mission of the U.S. Department of Education is to promote student achievement and preparation for global competitiveness by fostering educational excellence and ensuring equal access. As part of its mission, the Department administers both longstanding and new grant programs that encourage and support inclusive education.

For example, the Magnet Schools Assistance Program is a federal program “designed to bring students from different social, economic, ethnic and racial backgrounds together.” Forty school districts currently receive magnet school grants.

In 2017, the Department of Education made the first grants under a new program enacted by Congress called the Native American Language program. It supports schools that use Native American and Alaska Native languages as the primary language of instruction. The program supports efforts of Native Americans and Alaska Natives to use, practice, maintain, and revitalize their languages. The program also supports the Nation’s First Peoples’ efforts to maintain and revitalize

their languages and cultures, and to improve educational opportunities and student outcomes within Native American and Alaska Native communities.

The Department of Education also supports four Equity Assistance Centers that provide technical assistance (including training) at the request of school boards and other governmental agencies in the preparation, adoption, and implementation of plans for equitable access to education for all students.

Another U.S. initiative, the College Horizons Outreach Program, has promoted social inclusion and increased access to higher education for over 2,600 African descendant and indigenous high school students in Latin America through diverse (American) English teaching, academic advising, and mentoring in a culturally supportive environment since 2006. The two-year program reaches students who have been marginalized from accessing quality educational opportunities, particularly for those without family and mentor support/experience, and offers them a support network to navigate the complexities of the college preparation process locally or in the United States.

In addition to those examples and other programs, the United States vigorously enforces civil rights in schools by thoroughly evaluating, and, where appropriate, investigating and resolving, each complaint received.

PARTICIPATION IN PUBLIC AND POLITICAL LIFE

The United States is firmly committed to ensuring that youth around the world can be active participants in civil society organizations, political parties, innovation, and community action at every level and in all areas. Productive youth engagement with governments promotes global and cultural competencies that drive innovation, promote diversity and tolerance, and build stronger, more inclusive democracies. Conversely, when youth are repressed, confidence in government recedes and can generate frustration that makes youth vulnerable to dangerous narratives that espouse disenfranchisement and violence.

We recognize the ongoing disparities in access to quality educational outcomes specifically faced by youth from racial, ethnic, and other minority groups. We support inclusive educational opportunities that produce greater academic outcomes, build economic prosperity, and lead to stronger democratic institutions. We realize that many institutional barriers continue and minority youth engagement must be specific and deliberate in order to produce significant results that have an impact on access to educational outcomes.

In the United States, youth are actively engaged with government officials to discuss both challenges and ideas for change, and we are stronger for it.

MEDIA IN THE DIGITAL AGE

The United States is committed to protecting and upholding the human rights of young people around the globe and empowering youth voices to advocate for their rights. We recognize the global and open nature of the internet as a driving force in accelerating progress towards development in its various forms, and in particular its importance to minority youth's advocacy and connectedness. The internet and other forms of media have contributed to empowering today's youth, who are the most interconnected, well-educated, and healthiest generation in history, as noted by the Deputy High Commissioner in September 2016.

The internet is a critical tool allowing greater involvement in public and political life for minority youth, particular as a platform for outreach and advocacy. The United States and its partners work to ensure that credible local voices opposed to violence and extremism have the tools and platforms to do their own outreach, to highlight the deceptions of violent extremist narratives, and to voice peaceful alternatives.

The greatest investment a nation can make is enabling and equipping its young people to become the leaders of today and tomorrow. In recognition of the importance of this task, the United States affirms that quality education plays a decisive role in development, and encourages the promotion of digital literacy and the facilitation of access to information on the internet, which can be an important tool in facilitating the promotion of the right to education.

As the rapid pace of technological development enables individuals all over the world to use new information and communication technologies, it remains important to continue to respect human rights. The same rights that people have offline must also be protected online, in particular freedom of expression, which is applicable regardless of frontiers and through any media of one's choice, in accordance with articles 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

SUSTAINING PEACE AND STABILITY

We recognize that youth from historically marginalized communities are disproportionately affected by conflict and violence and must be equal partners in, and beneficiaries of, the pursuit of peace and security. Social exclusion, impunity, acute citizen insecurity, and weak institutions are challenges to reducing violence. Research and practice of countering violent extremism emphasize the vital role empowered youth can play in shaping peace and stability outcomes at the local level. Combatting transnational organized crime and violence can only be achieved with comprehensive policies that address the impact of violence on the most vulnerable populations, including youth from historically marginalized communities. Participation of vulnerable groups, including minority youth, in security efforts is essential to ensure effectiveness and long-term security.

In an effort to promote minority youth involvement with peace and stability, the United States supports several programs globally. In Colombia, the U.S. Agency for International Development's (USAID) Inclusion for Peace Activity, which began in 2016 and continues until 2020, increases economic and social inclusion of Afro-Colombians and indigenous communities in targeted regions to advance peace and reconciliation. The Beca Scholarship program for Colombian National Police Academies has trained more than 2,800 Afro-Colombian and indigenous police officers. In 2017, the program reached a new high of 960 new scholarships for minority Beca recipients.

In Myanmar, the United States is funding a peace education program that will train teachers and, by extension, their students on how to think critically about conflict-related issues and how to work with others to find mutually agreeable solutions to those issues. This program will empower youth of all backgrounds to promote peace and stability in their communities.

Engaging and empowering minority youth is the best means to ensure youth-focused stabilization and countering violent extremism efforts are relevant, credible, and sustainable. In efforts to promote peace, the United States is funding a variety of pilot programs to counter violent extremism in Bangladesh. In several of these programs, we are engaging youth about mental health and other topics to build resiliencies and promote an increased sense of community to counter this threat.

The United States recognizes that minority youth navigating cultures may be uniquely positioned to recognize warning signs of coming instability among their communities. Capitalizing on the experiences and attitudes of young women and

men from minority groups should inform community-led initiatives aimed at local stabilization, and to address grievances productively.

Chairperson,

The programs we have just mentioned are some of the many steps the United States is taking to support minority youth in the areas that are the focus of this forum: inclusive education, participation in public and political life, media in the digital age, and sustaining peace and stability.

From our global interactions with youth, it is clear that they have common hopes and desires; among them are fairness and an equal opportunity to succeed. They expect their human rights to be respected; their leaders to be inclusive; and their institutions to be transparent. Governments have an important role to play as partners in this global effort to create an enabling environment for youth around the world to have their human rights upheld and to realize their dreams. As part of this work, we encourage and support young people to engage in understanding, promoting, and protecting human rights, and further, to participate in and lead the creation of more just, secure, and inclusive societies.

Thank you.