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## **Youth Participation in Parliaments and Peace and Security**

A contribution from the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) to the  
Progress Study on Youth, Peace and Security  
mandated by Security Council Resolution 2250 (2015)

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*The views expressed in this publication are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the views of the Inter-Parliamentary Union, the United Nations or any of its affiliated organizations.*

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This paper highlights linkages between youth participation in parliament and peace and security in the world. Youth are vastly underrepresented among the world's parliamentarians, only 1.9 per cent of whom are under the age of 30.<sup>1</sup> This gap in representation undermines the legitimacy of institutions, exacerbates feelings of disempowerment among youth, and limits parliaments' ability to address key issues that affect youth. In addition, the international community has increasingly recognized the political exclusion of youth as a key potential factor in youth's involvement in violent activity. UN Security Council Resolution 2250 (UNSCR 2250) specifically urges Member States to increase inclusive representation of youth in decision-making at all levels to prevent and resolve conflict.

This paper shows that youth participation in parliament has so far not been in a position to strongly impact on peace and security, a finding based on close examination of four post-conflict or transition contexts (the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Somalia, Sri Lanka, and Tunisia) as well as extensive desk research on other contexts around the globe. The low numbers of young members of parliament (MPs) and the difficulty for them to hold leadership positions within parliament limit opportunities for them (and their allies) to develop and advance a specific youth agenda, including implementation of UNSCR 2250.

At the same time, this paper identifies three areas where improved youth participation in parliament has resulted in positive outcomes that may advance peace and stability in the long run. These include:

- the establishment of new linkages between youth and parliament;
- the use of young parliamentarians as mediators; and
- the promotion of dialogue in divided societies through young parliamentarians.

While it is too early to measure their impact, these trends are promising.

Some important challenges remain. These include continuing legal (i.e. limitation of youth participation in public life due to age restrictions to run for office), political, social and other barriers for young people in getting elected and working in parliament; the fact that young MPs do not always identify with youth or defend youth interests; limited access for youth organizations to influence parliamentary decisions; possible security concerns for young people involved in politics; and a lack of confidence among young people in government institutions more generally.

It is thus essential for national governments and parliaments, together with international organizations, civil society and youth, to address these challenges in order to fulfill the potential contributions of youth participation in parliaments to peace and security efforts. Above all, these efforts should focus on:

- increasing the number and capacities of young parliamentarians;
- strengthening links between young parliamentarians and youth organizations;
- building young people's knowledge and confidence in political processes and institutions; and
- creating opportunities for youth to facilitate access to education, employment, health, sports and culture.

The findings and recommendations that emerged from this research study, and the areas requiring further research into this important topic, are described below.

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<sup>1</sup> Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), *Youth Participation in National Parliaments* (Geneva: IPU, 2016), 3. [<http://www.ipu.org/pdf/publications/youthrep-e.pdf>]

## 1 INTRODUCTION

UNSCR 2250 recognizes the important and positive contributions of youth to the maintenance and promotion of peace and security. It also urges Member States to increase inclusive representation of youth in decision-making at all levels, as well as in institutions and mechanisms to prevent and resolve conflict and counter violent extremism.

Youth's meaningful participation in parliament can serve as a potentially powerful tool for implementing UNSCR 2250, given parliaments' significant role in the promotion of peace and security. As representative institutions, parliaments can promote dialogue and reconciliation in fragmented societies. Through their legislative and oversight functions, they establish legal frameworks for peace and security-related issues and hold government to account. Parliaments often also review and/or approve major arms procurement projects and major personnel appointments. They also exert budgetary control over the security sector.

Parliaments' ability to fulfill their legislative and oversight functions, particularly in their role as forums for peaceful resolution of conflict, depends crucially on their representation of all sectors of society. Yet, youth remain vastly underrepresented in parliaments worldwide; young people under 30 make up 1.9 per cent of the world's parliamentarians.<sup>2</sup> This makes it challenging for them to contribute effectively to current peace and security efforts. Inadequate youth representation and influence in parliament and other political institutions can be a source of instability, particularly in countries where young people constitute large segments of the population.

This study thus seeks to illuminate the relationship between youth participation<sup>3</sup> in parliament and progress toward more peaceful and stable societies. Key questions in this study include:

- What are the linkages between youth-inclusive parliaments and the maintenance of peace and security?
- To what extent are youth currently represented in parliament and involved on peace and security issues?
- What impact, if any, has youth participation in parliament had on peace and security so far?
- What are the challenges for building a more youth-inclusive parliament and how can they be addressed?

## 2 METHODOLOGY

This research paper is based on: (a) a desk review of existing literature on inclusivity in parliament, youth political participation and youth's role in peace and security; and (b) a series of semi-structured interviews with 40 key respondents (including four responses in writing), including young parliamentarians and representatives of youth organizations, UN agencies, international NGOs, and civil society.

The research builds on the initial findings of the global IPU report on Youth participation in national parliaments, produced in 2014 and 2016, and in addition, focuses on four countries, namely the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Somalia, Sri Lanka, and Tunisia. The research team selected these countries for their variety and complementarity in terms of experience taking into account their level of youth participation in parliament, the high proportion of youth as a share of total population, and the role

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<sup>2</sup> IPU, *Youth Participation in National Parliaments*, 3.

<sup>3</sup> Participation of youth includes both their formal representation as members of parliament as well as their informal participation through youth parliaments, youth councils or other types of involvement. This study focuses on formal representation in parliament.

played by youth in the current political landscape. These countries also reflect varied experience due to geographical diversity (Europe, North Africa, Sub-Saharan Africa, and Asia) and different forms and stages of conflict and political transition. The research team had initially pre-selected Chile to represent Latin America but did not ultimately include it as a focus country, due to the insufficient responses received from key respondents within the specified time frame.

The research primarily concentrated on youth between the ages of 18 and 29, consistent with UNSCR 2250. It should be noted, however, that “youth” has been defined differently in different contexts. Many UN organizations define it as 15-24, but relatively few people gain public office before the age of 35. IPU defines MPs as “young” if they are under 45, due to the fact that some countries limit access to some houses of parliament to only men and women 45 years old or more.<sup>4</sup> Nevertheless the IPU collects data on young MPs in three age ranges: under 30, under 40 and under 45 years old. One of the challenges for this research was that some countries do not record information on the numbers of MPs under 30 but rather apply the IPU’s definition, or use their country’s own definition of “youth.” For example, Somalia’s definition of youth (18-34) focuses on MPs under 35.<sup>5</sup> Such differences in age definitions are noted below where relevant.

One of the main limitations of this paper relates to the lack of existing research on the intersection between youth, parliaments, political processes, and peacebuilding. There are particularly limited data on the extent to which young parliamentarians and youth engage with parliaments on peace and security issues. The low number of young parliamentarians under 30 – operating in very different political environments – also makes it difficult to draw general conclusions and highlights the need for further research, especially field-based studies.

### 3 VALUE OF YOUTH-INCLUSIVE PARLIAMENTS FOR PEACE AND SECURITY

Parliaments play a key role in preventing conflict and building lasting peace by acting as an intermediary between their constituents, the executive branch, and civil society. They have the potential to “address the divergent interests of multiple groups because of the nature of the parliamentary process and parliament’s ability to build relationships within parliament and the broader community.”<sup>6</sup> As representative institutions, parliaments offer a space for addressing conflict through dialogue as a result of the way they are composed. Inclusive and diverse parliaments guarantee representativeness and positive management of social diversity. They can also take actions “to address issues of poverty, equitable distribution of resources and economic development”, which are often at the root of violent conflicts and instability.<sup>7</sup>

However, a parliament’s ability to promote social cohesion and peace fundamentally depends on its inclusive representation of all relevant sectors of society. Inclusivity can be defined as “access to the various arenas of political settlements by all sectors of society... both by participating (directly or indirectly) in decision-making or by having their concerns addressed by the state.”<sup>8</sup> Conversely, if certain social

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<sup>4</sup> IPU, *Youth Participation in National Parliaments*, 5.

<sup>5</sup> Interview with Somali government representative, 10 May 2017. In general, definitions of youth may also vary by sociocultural context and are not always defined by age but rather based on marriage, employment status, and other factors.

<sup>6</sup> Mitchell O’Brien, *Parliaments as Peacebuilders: The Role of Parliaments in Conflict-Affected Countries*. World Bank Institute Series on Contemporary Issues in Parliamentary Development (Washington, D.C.: World Bank: 2005), 3. [<http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/809101468339866619/Parliaments-as-peacebuilders-the-role-of-parliaments-in-conflict-affected-countries>]

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Véronique Dudouet and Stina Lundström. *Post-war Political Settlements: From Participatory Transition Processes to Inclusive State-*

groups are denied access to political power they may “mobilize around claims for greater participation in political governance and socio-economic development,”<sup>9</sup> and the risk of violence or conflict is likely to increase.

Efforts to make parliaments more inclusive generally focus on groups that represent large population segments, or those with the power to influence peace processes.<sup>10</sup> In many conflict or fragile countries, youth fall into both categories, given their high proportion in the population and their role in peacebuilding as recognized by UNSCR 2250.

Building a more (youth-) inclusive parliament can help to prevent conflict and violence and promote post-conflict peacebuilding, by contributing to: 1) the legitimacy of government bodies; 2) the empowerment of marginalized segments of society, and 3) the effectiveness of institutions in addressing constituent concerns.<sup>11</sup> An inclusive parliament can also better contribute to a functioning democracy, because it is more representative, transparent, accessible, accountable, and effective, which are “key democratic values and requirements.”<sup>12</sup>

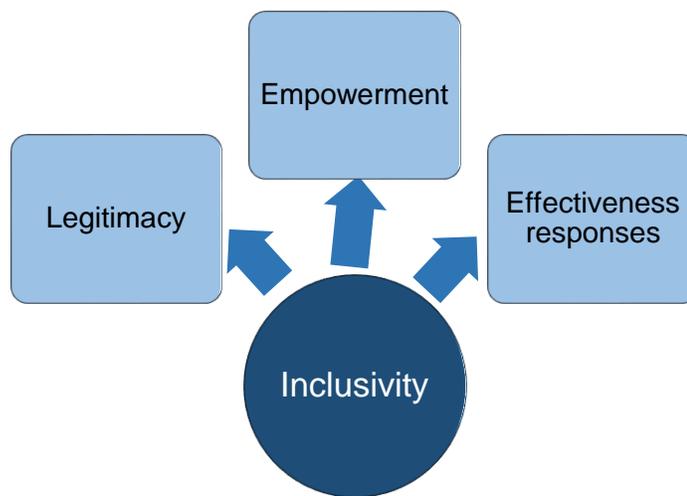


Figure 1: Benefits of inclusive parliaments (based on Dudouet/Lundström: *Post-War Political Settlements*, 9)

### 3.1 Increasing legitimacy of institutions and building trust

Trust in parliaments and other political institutions is often weak in societies recovering from violence and conflict – among young people more than other segments of the population.<sup>13</sup> Voter turnout in the 18-25

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*building and Governance*. Research Report (Berlin: Berghof Foundation, 2016)[[http://image.berghof-foundation.org/leadadmin/redaktion/Publications/Papers/IPS\\_SynthesisReport.pdf](http://image.berghof-foundation.org/leadadmin/redaktion/Publications/Papers/IPS_SynthesisReport.pdf)], 3.

<sup>9</sup> Dudouet/Lundström: *Post-War Political Settlements*, 18. Henk-Jan Brinkman, Larry Attree, and Saša Hezir, “Addressing Horizontal Inequalities as Drivers of Conflict in the Post-2015 Development Agenda.” Paper submitted for Global Thematic Consultations: Addressing Inequalities. The Heart of the Post-2015 Development Agenda and the Future We Want for All (UN Peacebuilding Office/SaferWorld, 2013. [[www.saferworld.org.uk/downloads/Inequalities-conflict-FV.pdf](http://www.saferworld.org.uk/downloads/Inequalities-conflict-FV.pdf)])

<sup>10</sup> Dudouet/Lundström: *Post-War Political Settlements*, 9.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

<sup>12</sup> IPU, *Parliament and Democracy in the Twenty-First Century: A Guide to Good Practice* (Geneva: IPU 2006). [[http://www.ipu.org/PDF/publications/democracy\\_en.pdf](http://www.ipu.org/PDF/publications/democracy_en.pdf)]

<sup>13</sup> UNDP *Youth Strategy 2014-2017* (New York: UNDP 2014), 5.

age group is lower than that in other age groups,<sup>14</sup> and such voters are less likely to participate in political parties or run for public office.<sup>15</sup>

While a lack of confidence in State institutions is not unique to young people, there is widespread “recognition that, if citizens can be engaged at a young age, they are likely to stay engaged.”<sup>16</sup> And while there are nowadays various ways for voters to raise their concerns, parliaments are the “only bodies that exist specifically to collate and articulate the interests of the nation as a whole.”<sup>17</sup> Parliaments can thus play a key role in restoring the relationship between youth and the government, especially after a conflict or political transition.

### 3.2 Voice and empowerment

A more youth-inclusive parliament can help to counter perceived or actual disempowerment, or social, political or economic exclusion of youth. More young MPs can be an effective way to give voice to young people and to empower them politically. Next to youth unemployment and lack of educational opportunities, increasing evidence suggests that negative experiences with State institutions lead many young people to join violent groups. For example, a recent study by Mercy Corps identified youthful experiences of injustice at the hands of government institutions, including “discrimination, corruption and abuse by security forces”, as one of the “principal drivers of political violence” among young people.<sup>18</sup> Promoting positive interactions with government institutions such as parliament could thus be an important step in changing this dynamic.

### 3.3 Effectiveness in addressing youth concerns

To be effective in contributing to peace, inclusiveness must take the form of “outcome inclusiveness”, which refers to a “genuine representation of interests and grievances by political parties or negotiation teams.”<sup>19</sup> This includes policies and services that are responsive to constituent needs. In other words, meaningful inclusion requires actual influence on agenda-setting and policy formulation. Inclusion of youth in parliament must therefore result in greater parliamentary attention to, and capacity to address (on the strength of inputs from youth) some of young people’s core concerns, such as higher education reforms, youth unemployment, or absence of judicial remedy for discrimination against youth.

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In sum, parliaments are well placed to promote social cohesion and peace but only to the extent that they are inclusive of all relevant sectors of society. A parliament’s efforts to be inclusive should focus particularly on youth – men and women - given their high proportion in the population and their role in peacebuilding, as recognized by UNSCR 2250. The value of building a more youth-inclusive parliament lies in its potential to increase youth’s trust in the legitimacy of government institutions, to empower them, and to address some of their key concerns more effectively.

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[[http://www.undp.org/content/dam/undp/library/Democratic%20Governance/Youth/UNDP\\_Youth-Strategy-2014-17\\_Web.pdf](http://www.undp.org/content/dam/undp/library/Democratic%20Governance/Youth/UNDP_Youth-Strategy-2014-17_Web.pdf)]

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>16</sup> IPU/UNDP, *Global Parliamentary Report. The Changing Nature of Parliamentary Representation* (Geneva/NY: IPU/UNDP, 2012), 24 [<http://www.ipu.org/pdf/publications/gpr2012-full-e.pdf>]

<sup>17</sup> IPU/UNDP, *Global Parliamentary Report*, 5.

<sup>18</sup> MercyCorps, *Youth and Consequences: Unemployment, Injustice and Violence*, 2015, 2. [[https://www.mercycorps.org/sites/default/files/MercyCorps\\_YouthConsequencesReport\\_2015.pdf](https://www.mercycorps.org/sites/default/files/MercyCorps_YouthConsequencesReport_2015.pdf)]

<sup>19</sup> Dudouet/Lundström: *Post-War Political Settlement*, 30.

## 4 YOUTH PARTICIPATION IN PARLIAMENT ON PEACE AND SECURITY

The extent to which youth participation in parliament will influence peace and security concerns in a country depends on numerous factors, from systemic questions related to the power of institutions themselves to more personal issues such as the level of political will of MPs.

For the purpose of this paper, it was decided to focus on a few select elements that impact on youth influence in parliament, such as the extent to which young people are currently being represented in parliament or participating in parliamentary decision-making processes; and the level of direct involvement of young MPs on peace and security concerns.

There is currently limited data available to systematically assess young parliamentarians' level of engagement with peace and security issues worldwide.<sup>20</sup> The IPU's recent report on "Youth participation in national parliaments" offers some insights by looking at the extent to which young MPs are included in parliamentary committees that are specifically related to or focused on youth concerns. Given the lack of specific global data on this issue, the following analysis builds mainly on the study of the four focus countries selected for this paper.

| Representation of youth (under 30)        |  |
|---|--|
| Country                                   | Representation of youth (under 30) in national parliament (percentage) |
| The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia | 6.5%   |
| Somalia                                   | 5.2%   |
| Sri Lanka                                 | 2.4%   |
| Tunisia                                   | 6.5%   |

**Source: IPU: Youth participation in national parliaments 2016. Based on data gathered from 128 countries**

### 4.1 Young parliamentarians' engagement on peace and security

#### *The challenge of being elected*

Young parliamentarians represent a small minority of the world's MPs, with only 1.9 per cent under age 30 and 14.2 per cent under 40. About 30 per cent of the world's parliaments have no members under 30. Women tend to be less represented than men across all age groups.<sup>21</sup>

The IPU's 2016 report on "Youth participation in national parliaments" attributes the underrepresentation of young people in parliament to three primary factors: 1) minimum age requirements of 25, 35 or 45, which delay young people's eligibility to run for office; 2) a lower propensity among the young to vote or join political parties; and 3) party preferences for older candidates with more political experience or longer track records.<sup>22</sup>

Consistent with the findings of IPU's 2016 report, young parliamentarians interviewed for this study cited an (assumed) lack of experience, name recognition or reputation, networks, and financial resources as some of the key challenges they face in getting elected and working in parliament.

MPs who are both young and female face additional barriers. One such MP in Tunisia described being a "woman, young and living abroad" as her three handicaps in this struggle, noting distrust for the young, due

<sup>20</sup> A number of key respondents also noted the interconnections between peace and security and larger socio-economic and development issues a country is facing. They cautioned against a narrow definition of the term. Youth unemployment and the lack of educational opportunities were seen in particular as relevant issues for building more peaceful and stable societies.

<sup>21</sup> IPU, *Youth Participation in National Parliaments*, 3, 4, 12.

<sup>22</sup> IPU, *Youth Participation in National Parliaments*, 6.

to their limited experience, among their elders.<sup>23</sup> A young Somali woman MP described the pressure of proving herself a “real politician.”<sup>24</sup> Even though women and youth face similar barriers, there is still relatively little coordination or cooperation between their respective advocates when it comes to greater representation in parliament.<sup>25</sup>

In addition to cultural barriers, physical barriers to youth’s access to parliament were highlighted especially in countries in transition. The risks and possible dangers associated with political participation by youth remains an under-researched topic that merits more attention. Further research is needed to assess to what extent conflict-related and other violence against young MPs and politically active youth organizations is based on age.

Security concerns are a serious challenge for political engagement among youth in Somalia. For example, after Somalia’s youngest cabinet minister, Abass Abdullahi Sheikh Siraji, was shot and killed by bodyguards of the auditor general in an apparent accident, several young MPs and youth organizations referred to this incident to explain why young people are reluctant to run for office or become involved in politics.<sup>26</sup> One Somali government official interviewed for this study was even reluctant to engage directly with youth organizations on peace and security issues at the national level because of potential security risks for young people, specifically attacks by the Al-Shabaab militia group.<sup>27</sup>

A Somali youth leader also identified the security situation as a serious challenge to working with parliament but he and other members of the Somali Youth Parliament are still eager to engage with young MPs on peace and security issues, including the implementation of UNSCR 2250.<sup>28</sup> Following attacks against young members by the Al-Shabaab, the group has taken various security measures, such as not announcing meetings publicly and not asking members to include names in meeting records.<sup>29</sup>

### ***Do higher numbers enhance influence?***

The small number of young parliamentarians was identified as a key impediment to their meaningful impact on behalf of youth and their interests.

To address this challenge, some governments, particularly those emerging from political transitions or conflict, have taken steps to correct these imbalances: introducing age quotas<sup>30</sup>, supporting the establishment of youth parliaments, and forming youth platforms for young parliamentarians to connect, among other things. For example, in Tunisia, Article 25 of the Organic Law 16/2014 establishes that in districts with four or more seats, one candidate under 35 years of age should be placed in one of the top

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<sup>23</sup> Interview with young MP from Tunisia, 1 May 2017.

<sup>24</sup> Interview with young MP from Somalia, 15 May 2017.

<sup>25</sup> See: IPU, Youth Participation in National Parliaments, 12. Some research suggests that there may be opportunities to take advantage of synergies between youth’s and women’s political participation. See: Mireille Affa’a Mindzie, *Building Peace and Development in the Sahel: Enhancing the Political Participation of Women and Youth* (New York: International Peace Institute, January 2015). [<https://www.ipinst.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/IPI-Rpt-Building-Peace.pdf>]

<sup>26</sup> New York Times, *Somali Public Works Minister Seen as ‘Rising Star’ Is Shot to Death*. 4 May 2017. [[https://www.nytimes.com/2017/05/04/world/africa/abbas-abdullahi-sheikh-siraji-shot-somalia.html?\\_r=0](https://www.nytimes.com/2017/05/04/world/africa/abbas-abdullahi-sheikh-siraji-shot-somalia.html?_r=0)]. Interview with representative of youth organization in Somalia, 8 May 2017; interview with Somali government representative, 10 May 2017.

<sup>27</sup> Interview with Somali government representative, 10 May 2017.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Interview with UN representative in Somalia, 10 May 2017; interview with youth leader in Somalia, 17 May 2017.

<sup>30</sup> Youth quotas can entail reserved seats for young people in parliament or require that parties nominate a certain percentage of young candidates that represents a way of increasing the proportion of young MPs.

four list positions<sup>31</sup>. This is a first step though some concerns were raised regarding the implementation of the age quota, primarily due to the reluctance of political parties to place candidates at top positions of their candidate lists.<sup>32</sup> However, such efforts remain in their early stages; the IPU survey indicated a slight increase of young parliamentarians (under age 30) worldwide, growing from 1.6 per cent in 2014 to 1.9 per cent in 2015.<sup>33</sup>

In the four focus countries, though slightly above the global average, the representation of young people (under 30) remained low as of 2015, ranging between 2.4 per cent in Sri Lanka and 6.5 per cent in Tunisia and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia – with Somalia in between at 5.2 per cent. In all four countries, young MPs participate in parliamentary committees, working groups, and other efforts related to peace and security, such as armed services, foreign relations, and reconciliation, as relevant in the specific context.<sup>34</sup> However, low levels of youth representation – combined with pressure to align their positions with their political parties and hierarchical structures – tend to prevent young MPs from taking on leadership roles in this area, whether to develop a “youth agenda” or promote UNSCR 2250.

The case of Somalia underscores the close connection between the level of youth representation and that of young parliamentarians’ engagement on peace and security: the country’s elections in 2016 produced a surge in the proportion of MPs under 35, increasing from 5.6 per cent in 2012 (15 out of 275 MPs at that time) to 19 per cent at the end of 2016 (51 aged under 35 out of 275 MPs).<sup>35</sup> This was accompanied by an increase in women elected to national parliament, from 14 per cent in 2012 to 25 per cent in 2016 (there are now 67 women MPs).<sup>36</sup>

The increase in number of young MPs has had an immediate impact. Since the elections, the Parliament’s Youth Caucus, which MPs described as fairly inactive due to the previously low membership (about 11 members), is working on a new four-year action plan and has signalled its interest in more systematic involvement with the Somali Youth Parliament. In addition, the UN has plans to get the sizable pool of young parliamentarians more involved in mediation efforts (see Section 5.2. below). To quote Hon. Sagal Issak Bihi (age 34), a female MP who is now Chair of the Committee on Human Rights, Women and Humanitarian Issues, “I am glad that now we have a lot more young ministers and parliamentarians, and it gives us young parliamentarians a chance to get involved in every aspect of peace and security”.<sup>37</sup> The revitalisation of the youth caucus bodes well; the impact of its work and influence is however also linked to the institutional power and capacities of the caucus itself within the Parliament-

This contrasts with the situation in Sri Lanka, where young parliamentarians remain relatively few in number<sup>38</sup>. Within the strict hierarchy of Sri Lanka’s parliament, young MPs are unlikely to take positions at

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<sup>31</sup> IPU: *Youth Participation in national parliament 2016*, 17

<sup>32</sup> Interview with the leader of a Tunisian youth organization; Interview, 9 May 2017.

<sup>33</sup> Note that the figures for 2014 are based on data from 76 countries, while the 2015 statistics are from 128 countries. IPU, *Youth Participation in National Parliaments*, 3.

<sup>34</sup> The research also indicated that definitions on peace and security differed in each of the contexts, depending on the political situation. For example, young MPs in Macedonia considered peace and security a lower priority concern, revolving around preventative measures, since the country had not been in a state of conflict for a long time. In contrast, young MPs in Somalia cited specific threats to peace and security, such as attacks by the Al-Shabaab militia group, as a key priority.

<sup>35</sup> Information provided by representatives of the United Nations in Somalia, 11 May 2017. There were no data available regarding young parliamentarians elected under the age of 30, since the current definition of youth in Somalia is 18-34.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>37</sup> Interview, 15 May 2017.

<sup>38</sup> According to IPU data, 36 MPs under 45 years of age, from a total of 225 seats, were elected at the last parliamentary election in 2015 in Sri Lanka.

odds with their political leaders, mostly over age 65.<sup>39</sup> The political culture prevailing in parliaments and the influence of political parties are key to unleashing youth's influence in decision-making processes.

In the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, two under-30 MPs won seats in the last parliamentary elections, in December 2016. While there have been several instances of political violence, the country has not experienced an armed conflict since 2001, so there has been little focus on peace and security issues. Issues affecting youth, on the other hand, including youth unemployment and large-scale youth emigration to other countries, have received more attention, and young politicians are increasingly recognized as an asset in addressing them.<sup>40</sup> For example, youth wings in the two major parties were largely responsible for drafting their respective political programmes, enabling them to place greater emphasis on youth concerns.<sup>41</sup>

### ***Peace and security issues: Too politically sensitive for young MPs?***

Peace and security remain extremely sensitive issues, linked to post-conflict reconciliation and transitional justice, on which younger MPs can find it hard to take their own official stance.

In more traditional societies like Somalia, peace and security issues are usually considered the domain of elder statesmen. "Traditionally, younger people were not involved in negotiations between the clans... they don't take you seriously on peace and security issues," a young former MP in Somalia recalled.<sup>42</sup>

In Sri Lanka, where influential positions tend to be filled on the basis of seniority, it is rare for young persons to be appointed to them, or to be consulted on sensitive peace and security issues. "If a young person gets into parliament the first time, (they) will not be given a portfolio. Then, the second time, (they) get made a junior minister. So, by the time a politician can become a member of the cabinet, it will probably take 15 or 20 years," a young former MP explained.<sup>43</sup> While this may also be true for all newly elected and inexperienced MPs, regardless of age, several key respondents said the emphasis on seniority was one of the main impediments for access by young MPs to leadership positions in Sri Lanka.

As one senior MP from Sri Lanka noted, "In peace and security, it is more useful for more senior people to address this issue because of their knowledge and their memory of what happened... When the reform takes place, it is those with the experience who are better equipped to deal with this".<sup>44</sup> According to parliamentarians and other experts consulted for this study, none of the representatives in positions of leadership or actively engaged with issues of transitional justice is under the age of 40.<sup>45</sup>

Efforts to promote peace and security in Tunisia have focused largely on ways to prevent youth's radicalization and engagement in violent extremism. These issues tend to be addressed less actively in

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<sup>39</sup> Interview with youth expert on Sri Lanka, 17 May 2017.

<sup>40</sup> Interview with member of youth wing of Macedonian political party, 8 May 2017; interview with representative of Macedonian NGO, 8 May 2017.

<sup>41</sup> Interview with representative of national NGO in former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, 8 May 2017; interview with youth representative of Macedonian political party, 8 May 2017; young MP from the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, 21 May 2017.

<sup>42</sup> Interview with former young MP from Somalia, 12 May 2017.

<sup>43</sup> Interview with former young MP from Sri Lanka, 12 May 2017.

<sup>44</sup> Interview with MP in Sri Lanka, 13 May 2017.

<sup>45</sup> Interview with MP in Sri Lanka, 13 May 2017; interview with MP in Sri Lanka, 15 May 2017; interview with former young MP in Sri Lanka, 19 May 2017; interview with former representative of international NGO in Sri Lanka, 19 May 2017; interview with youth expert in Sri Lanka, 17 May 2017.

parliament than within the government and civil society.<sup>46</sup> Young parliamentarians, who account for only 6.5 per cent of Tunisia's MPs, have not assumed a prominent role.<sup>47</sup>

## 4.2 Parliaments' efforts and challenges to engage youth on peace and security

### *Young people's distrust in parliament, political institutions and young parliamentarians*

The distrust of government institutions among young people poses a challenge for increasing youth participation in parliament. Tunisia's parliament, for instance, has the confidence of less than 14 per cent of young people (under 35) and political parties have that of only 7 per cent.<sup>48</sup> Though there has been a wave of activism following the revolution, most young people become active through NGOs and informal movements rather than formal politics.<sup>49</sup> On the other hand, as indicated by several youth leaders, the Tunisian parliament does not offer a "youth-friendly" environment or platform for young people to engage meaningfully in the process.<sup>50</sup>

In Sri Lanka, there is a similar scepticism among youth actors regarding the desirability for youth 'partnering' with the parliament, which according to one youth leader in the country would limit the "freedom and independence" of their organizations.<sup>51</sup> "It is hard for any youth organization/individual to have a partnership with the parliament and maintain their credibility at the same time" because "youth view it as a political agenda," according to another youth leader.<sup>52</sup> This distrust has also been evident in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, where 120 youth organizations successfully blocked a proposed new Youth Law they were not consulted on and started to form an independent National Youth Council.<sup>53</sup>

To increase youth participation and address growing distrust, several key respondents highlighted the need for more civic education and awareness among the wider population on the workings of the political system and the role of civil society. As one youth leader put it: "How can we build their [youth's] capacity so that they understand that they still have a say even though they were not elected to parliament?"<sup>54</sup> Building or restoring relations between the parliament and voters, including youth, goes beyond civic education, awareness-raising and youth participation. Broader efforts are required to make parliaments more transparent, accessible and accountable.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Interview with representatives of international NGO in Tunisia, 17 May 2017; interview with representative of youth organization in Tunisia, 9 May 2017; interview with youth and gender expert on Tunisia, 24 May 2017.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., interview with young MP from Tunisia, 16 May 2017.

<sup>48</sup> Arab Barometer Wave IV data cited in: Sarah Yerkes. *Where Have All the Revolutionaries Gone?* (Washington, D.C.: Center for Middle Eastern Policy at Brookings Institution, 2017) 25. [[https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/cmep\\_20160317\\_where\\_have\\_revolutionaries\\_gone.pdf](https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/cmep_20160317_where_have_revolutionaries_gone.pdf)]

<sup>49</sup> Sarah Smith and Amal Bourhous. *Strengthening youth engagement in post-Jasmine Revolution Tunisia* (Development Dialogue Paper no.19). Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation, August 2017), 4. [<http://www.daghammarskjold.se/publication/strengthening-youth-engagement-post-jasmine-revolution-tunisia/>]

<sup>50</sup> Interview with representative of youth organization in Tunisia, 9 May 2017; interview with youth and gender expert in Tunisia, 23 May 2017.

<sup>51</sup> Written response from youth leader in Sri Lanka, 12 May 2017.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> Interview with youth leader in Macedonia, 2 May 2017.

<sup>54</sup> Interview with UN representative in Somalia, 10 May 2017.

<sup>55</sup> IPU/UNDP, Global Parliamentary Report. *The Changing Nature of Parliamentary Representation* (Geneva/NY: IPU/UNDP, 2012), 24 [<http://www.ipu.org/pdf/publications/gpr2012-full-e.pdf>]

Young people also do not necessarily feel that young MPs speak for them or represent their interests – or those of young people generally. In Sri Lanka, for example, according to information received by the Research Division of the Parliament Library, out of the country's 45 MPs under age 35, 20 come from political families, which may limit their ability to identify with most young Sri Lankans.<sup>56</sup> “To get into politics and parliament in Sri Lanka...you need to be rich or famous or come from a political family. Although they may be young, they are not a fair representation of youth,” one parliamentarian explained.<sup>57</sup> A youth leader echoed this sentiment, suggesting that such young MPs “are actually not youth representatives; they are members who are young.”<sup>58</sup> Young MPs rarely come from Northern Sri Lanka where the armed conflict took place and grievances remain the most pressing.<sup>59</sup>

Parliamentarians may also be reluctant to identify as young in contexts where “youth” is associated with inexperience or other negative characteristics. Being young does not itself make a parliamentarian a champion for youth causes. As observed by several key respondents, young members are often far more loyal to their political party, clan, religious community, or other affiliations than to their particular age group.

The previous government of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia included a high number of young MPs and ministers under 30; yet, as noted by one respondent, “the youth agenda has not been a priority,” and youth participation has been limited.<sup>60</sup> For example, the government tried to pass a new youth law in 2011 without consulting young people,<sup>61</sup> which led to protests by 45 local youth groups opposed to the law on the grounds that it would give parliament and municipalities too much control over youth organizations.<sup>62</sup> Parliament eventually agreed to a moratorium, effectively placing the law in “limbo”.<sup>63</sup> Several Macedonian youth organizations, young MPs, and NGOs cited this as a bad example of the government's practices, but also a warning that increasing youth representation does not necessarily lead to a more youth-inclusive parliament. “The young MPs and young ministers were not... the advocates for the youth within the institutions,” a representative of an international NGO concluded.<sup>64</sup>

### ***Systematic engagement with civil society as a requirement***

In addition to direct representation as MPs, young people can also influence parliamentary decisions on peace and security through dialogue, advocacy and engagement in decision-making processes.

Structures such as national youth parliaments, when set up in an inclusive way, can provide opportunities for young people to learn about parliamentary proceedings and issues of current concern and to share their viewpoints and ideas.

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<sup>56</sup>Based on information provided by MP in Sri Lanka, 19 May 2017.

<sup>57</sup> Interview with MP from Sri Lanka, 12 May 2017.

<sup>58</sup> Interview with youth leader in Sri Lanka, 12 May 2017.

<sup>59</sup> Interview with youth leader in Sri Lanka, 4 May 2017; interview with MP from Sri Lanka, 19 May 2017.

<sup>60</sup> Interview with representatives of an international NGO in Macedonia, 10 May 2017.

<sup>61</sup> Balkan Insight, “Macedonia Shelves Controversial Youth Law,” 31 October 2011. [<http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/article/macedonia-withdraws-youth-law-amid-criticism>]

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> Interview with representatives of international NGO in Macedonia, 10 May 2017.

In all four focus countries, however, efforts by parliaments to engage with young people on issues of peace and security have so far been minimal, and none has offered a permanent mechanism enabling youth to influence the parliament's decisions on peace and security, youth, or other issues.

For their part, youth organizations have attempted to engage with the parliaments of these countries on peace and security but without achieving obvious impact. A group of youth organizations in Somalia organized a two-day forum of MPs and government officials on how to apply UNSCR 2250 in the context of that country. They put together a "Somali Youth for Peace Pact" featuring a set of specific recommendations.<sup>65</sup> One of the action points related directly to "youth participation and leadership in peace and security."<sup>66</sup> There has not, however, been any follow-up to date on the young people's recommendations by either the parliament or other government entities.<sup>67</sup>

- Several youth organizations expressed frustration at the lack of opportunities for young people to influence the parliament. A representative of a Tunisian youth organization expressed this sentiment: "When you need somebody to distribute leaflets or knock doors, they are happy to find young people. But after, when it is about giving them responsibility, they never do it."<sup>68</sup> A Tunisian Youth Parliament was organized in 2013 and 2014 by Tun'Act, a local NGO, as a five-day event for young Tunisian men and women to simulate parliamentary decision-making and resolution processes. Several young parliamentarians and political leaders attended to facilitate an exchange between youth and parliamentarians. The young people also had the opportunity to present their resolutions, addressing peace and security as well as other concerns, to the country's parliament. According to a Tun'Act representative, however, there is little evidence of the extent to which MPs have taken the recommendations into account.<sup>69</sup>
- In the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, even though there has been an acceptance of opinions, there are still few opportunities for civil society organizations to influence the parliament; some MPs still perceive them as the "opposition."<sup>70</sup> Similarly, in Somalia and Sri Lanka, youth often do not have an "entry point" to parliament. Furthermore, even if there are entry points for participation, some youth organizations remain sceptical that the parliament will actually take their views or recommendations into account.

These examples pinpoint to the need to sustain engagement and cooperation between youth and young MPs, beyond one-off initiatives. They also draw attention to the high expectations placed on young MPs.

### **Youth Parliaments**

Youth Parliaments have often been promoted as a means to enhance youth engagement with politics and parliaments. In Sri Lanka, the National Youth Parliament frequently discusses peace and security issues, and several of its members have called on the parliament to move faster with the transitional justice

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<sup>65</sup> *Somali Launch of the Amman Declaration on Youth, Peace and Security*. (Final Report, Mogadishu, 17 December 2015). [<http://so.one.un.org/content/dam/unct/somalia/docs/publications/Somali%20Youth%204%20Peace%20Pact.pdf>]

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> Interview with UN representative, 10 May 2017; interview with youth leader in Somalia, 17 May 2017.

<sup>68</sup> Interview with representative of youth organization in Tunisia, 9 May 2017.

<sup>69</sup> Interview, 9 May 2017.

<sup>70</sup> Interview with youth leader in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, 2 May 2017.

process.<sup>71</sup> They consider it critical for the parliament to be more aware of youth issues at the grassroots level but do not see any entry points for youth engagement.<sup>72</sup> In Somalia, links between the young MPs caucus and the youth parliament are strong. However, while both Sri Lanka and Somalia have active youth parliaments, these forums are not formally connected to the national parliament.<sup>73</sup> This raises the question of the actual power of such structures to effectively channel youth voices into concrete change..

Other parliaments, apart from those in the four focus countries, have taken steps to involve young people in their decision-making processes. According to a young MP from Pakistan, for example, young parliamentarians regularly participate in mock sessions of that country's Youth Parliament. "These sessions are then shared with the actual parliament to see what type of concerns youth want parliamentarians to take up," he explained, noting that youth participation is "viewed with more respect than ever."<sup>74</sup>

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In sum, there are various challenges to building youth-inclusive parliaments. These include: the continuing legal, political, social, and other barriers faced by young people in getting elected and working in parliament; young MPs not necessarily identifying as youth or defending youth interests; youth organizations lacking entry points for influencing parliamentary decisions; possible security concerns for young people involved in politics; and young people lacking confidence in government institutions more generally.

In addition, the limited scale and influence of youth parliaments in the four focus countries preclude them from meaningfully engaging on peace and security concerns or promoting a 'youth agenda' in parliament. Also lacking are mechanisms to ensure more systematic interactions between youth organizations, parliaments, and young MPs, which could make youth engagement more sustainable and effective. Lastly, the research highlighted the need for more field-based data and analysis on youth participation in political processes and linkages to peace and security.

## 5 IMPACT OF YOUTH-INCLUSIVE PARLIAMENTS ON PEACE AND SECURITY

Compared to the advancement of women's political participation, national and international efforts to promote youth representation and participation in parliament and other decision-making bodies are still in their initial stages. However, it is clear that greater representation of women generates positive impact and that despite obvious differences between women and youth as groups, greater representation of young people will also have a positive impact on policy-making for the good of the entire society.

As highlighted in the previous section, the number of young parliamentarians under age 30 (and even under 40) remains extremely low, and parliaments are still in the process of setting up viable mechanisms to effectively involve youth in their decisions. It may thus be too early to measure the impact of youth inclusion in parliament.

On the other hand, the research did identify several examples of where youth representation and participation has demonstrated potential as a positive influence on peace and stability, by: 1) increasing linkages between parliament and youth; 2) utilizing young parliamentarians as mediators; and 3) promoting

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<sup>71</sup> Interview with youth leader in Sri Lanka, 12 May 2017.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> Interview with youth leader in Sri Lanka, 12 May 2017; interview with youth leader in Somalia, 17 May 2017.

<sup>74</sup> Interview with young MP from Pakistan, 11 May 2017.

dialogue in divided societies through young parliamentarians.

### 5.1 Increased linkages between youth and parliament

Several youth organizations confirmed a preference for engaging with younger parliamentarians, whom they often consider allies in pushing for a more “youth-friendly agenda.” For example, in Tunisia, Tun’Act invited some of the country’s youngest MPs to attend the Youth Parliament session and to participate in the discussion, considering them their “most powerful support in the party.” In the words of Zied Touzani, Founder and President of Tun’Act, “You need more young MPs in parliament on the inside who will advocate on behalf of young people. The more you get young people into the parliament, the more you will get the voice of youth inside the parliament. Discussing or reaching them is easier than older members of the parliament.”<sup>75</sup>

Where parliaments have not set up formal mechanisms for civil society engagement, several young parliamentarians described how informal meetings have been arranged with youth and other civil society organizations. “Younger MPs are more accessible to raise (youth’s) arguments at a committee and plenary – the biggest benefit is that I’m on Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp – they can find you, which is not the case with older people,” a young MP from the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia confirmed.<sup>76</sup>

For some of these young parliamentarians, representing youth in parliament has become a priority. One young MP from the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, who had previously been active in student movements, said that all four of her interventions in parliament to date had been about youth issues.<sup>77</sup> Similarly, a young Tunisian MP considers herself a “link between the two generations”, saying she always seeks the views of young people, her main followers on social media, in considering legislation.<sup>78</sup>

In Somalia, young candidates for parliament worked “hand-in-hand” with other young people during their campaigns. Many of the youth representatives consulted for the study knew such young MPs personally and were enthusiastic about working with them. A UN representative described an increasing tendency for young MPs to identify as ‘youth’, or as both ‘women’ and ‘youth’ in the case of young women MPs – or as one respondent put it, “realizing that you don’t only stand for your clan or your constituency but also stand for issues of young people or for issues of women.”<sup>79</sup> The arrival of young parliamentarians has also changed the outlook of many young people as to what they are able to achieve. As one UN official put it, “Everybody will now tell you: I am a candidate in the upcoming 2020 elections.”<sup>80</sup>

As these examples highlight, the presence of young MPs can help improve the relationship between youth and their parliaments by making parliament more accessible to youth and thus laying a foundation for continuing work between young people and MPs on youth-related and other concerns, including peace and security.

### 5.2 Young parliamentarians as mediators

Having a more inclusive parliament can open opportunities for mediation. In the Somali parliament, for example, as a direct outcome of the increased representation of youth and women, the UN is now starting

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<sup>75</sup> Interview, 9 May 2017.

<sup>76</sup> Interview with young MP from the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, 21 May 2017.

<sup>77</sup> Interview with young MP from the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, 5 May 2017.

<sup>78</sup> Interview with young MP from Tunisia, 1 May 2017.

<sup>79</sup> Interview with UN representative in Somalia, 21 May 2017

<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

to engage young and female parliamentarians more proactively in task forces set up to mediate community conflicts or oversee ceasefires. Each clan involved in the conflict appoints task force members, including religious leaders, military personnel, and elders, to mediate the conflict. Even though mediation experts consider young MPs better positioned to speak to their own age group, the UN's previous mediation efforts did not specifically involve young MPs, there being very few at the time. Given the more representative composition of today's parliaments, the UN now hopes that young and women MPs can achieve "more meaningful engagement with local women and youth" for these mediation efforts.<sup>81</sup>

In Nigeria, the Young Parliamentarians Forum, established in 2014, has mediated successfully in various conflicts involving young Nigerians. As explained by Hon. Igbokwe Raphael Nnanna, a member of Nigeria's House of Representatives and President of the Young Parliamentarians' Forum, "We are here as their advocates and (go on) missions to anywhere young people have issues or problems, to assist them so that their voice can be heard by the government."<sup>82</sup> For example, when Nigerian youth in South Africa vandalized a South African company in Abuja in an apparent retaliation for anti-Nigerian violence in South Africa, the Young Parliamentarians Forum facilitated a meeting between the youth groups and the Embassy of South Africa.<sup>83</sup> "We were able to develop options that created room for peace, and that destructive action was stopped," Mr. Nnanna explained. He said such interventions demonstrate to youth that they can bring complaints to their elected officials rather than taking up arms.<sup>84</sup>

### 5.3 Promoting dialogue in divided societies through young parliamentarians

Several NGOs and other experts believe that with proper training and guidance young parliamentarians can promote dialogue and reconciliation in divided societies, precisely because of their youth and openness to new ideas. For example, the OHRID Institute for Economic Strategies and International Affairs, a Macedonian NGO, has been working with young politicians (18-30) from each political party for over 7 years. The programme encourages non-violent dialogue and aims to establish closer relations among young politicians across both party and ethnic lines, given the country's history of interethnic conflict. In contrast to their older colleagues, many of the younger MPs who participated in the programme now know each other personally and exchange information, which Program Coordinator Marija Andreeva calls "real progress."<sup>85</sup> The representative of one youth organization said there seemed to be a greater "sense of togetherness" among young parliamentarians that he hoped would lead to changes in the system and collaboration across ethnicities.<sup>86</sup>

In Somalia, one young former MP recalled "more intermingling among the new young MPs" than among older members, described as mainly sticking with their clans.<sup>87</sup> The UN now plans to promote interaction between young parliamentarians and youth from different socio-economic and cultural backgrounds, by establishing a platform between the Parliament's Youth Caucus and the Somali Youth Parliament.<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> Interview with UN representative in Somalia, 10 May 2017.

<sup>82</sup> Interview, 8 May 2017.

<sup>83</sup> VOA News, "Nigerian Protesters Vandalize MTN Head Office in Abuja". 23 February 2017). [<https://www.voanews.com/a/nigerian-protesters-vandalized-mtn-head-office-in-abuja/3736652.html>]

<sup>84</sup> Interview with Hon. Igbokwe Raphael Nnanna, young MP and President of the Young Parliamentarians' Forum in parliament in Nigeria, 8 May 2017.

<sup>85</sup> Interview, 8 May 2017

<sup>86</sup> Interview with youth leader/representative of think tank in Macedonia, 2 May 2017.

<sup>87</sup> Interview with former young MP from Somalia, 12 May 2017

<sup>88</sup> Interview with UN representative in Somalia, 21 May 2017; interview with UN representative in Somalia 10 May 2017.

Because the Somali Youth Parliament includes representatives from all 18 of the country's regions, including 50 per cent women, engagement among them may be a "reality check" for many young parliamentarians, as pointed out by one UN official.<sup>89</sup> According to several key respondents it would help young MPs understand the full range of concerns young Somalis face, while also improving their own accountability to constituents.<sup>90</sup>

In Sri Lanka, youth representatives and experts believe that young new voices could revitalize a stalemated transitional justice process by bringing "a more forward-looking approach."<sup>91</sup> After 30 years of brutal conflict, the Sri Lankan government has been slow in following up on its promises to address allegations of war crimes against both sides.<sup>92</sup> "Having more young people (gives) new perspectives to decision-making," one youth leader explained. "At one point, in the context of Sri Lanka, we have to say: no, we need to go beyond that a war happened; we need to accept where people went wrong and that both the parties are to be blamed. That kind of mind-set needs to enter the parliament." Given that the war primarily affected the minority Tamil community in the North, several young people emphasized the importance of engaging that community in the discussions: "The more their voices are not heard, the more their grievances are not represented in a decision-making body; this grievance can fester into something bad"<sup>93</sup>

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In sum, while it is too early to measure impact, youth participation in parliament has demonstrated potential as a positive influence for peace and stability. For example, the presence of young MPs can help improve the relationship between youth and parliament by making parliament more accessible to youth, thus opening opportunities for young people to work with MPs on youth-related and other concerns, including peace and security. Governments, parliaments, and international organizations are also increasingly using young MPs as mediators to resolve community and other conflicts involving youth. Finally, there are indications that young MPs are more willing to engage with members of opposing parties or holding different views, provided they receive proper training and guidance early in their careers.

## 6 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

"The majority of young people are now aspiring to become parliamentarians because they see their colleagues in the house... we can say that it will somehow improve the country's fragile state," a Somali youth leader said.<sup>94</sup>

The links between youth representation and participation in parliament and the maintenance of peace and security are indeed increasingly evident. Involving young people in parliaments' decisions can help promote social cohesion in societies affected by conflict or political instability and increase trust in the government to bring about social change through non-violent means. Though efforts to include youth are still in their early stages, improved youth participation in parliament has already generated some positive outcomes that may

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<sup>89</sup> Interview with UN representative in Somalia, 10 May 2017.

<sup>90</sup> Interview with UN representative in Somalia, 21 May 2017; interview with UN representative in Somalia, 10 May 2017; interview with representative of youth organization in Somalia, 17 May 2017.

<sup>91</sup> Interview with youth leader in Sri Lanka, 4 May 2017; interview with former representative of international organization, 19 May 2017; interview with youth leader in Sri Lanka, 12 May 2017.

<sup>92</sup> International Crisis Group. *Sri Lanka's Transition to Nowhere* (Report No. 286, 16 May 2017). [<https://www.crisisgroup.org/asia/south-asia/sri-lanka/286-sri-lanka-s-transition-nowhere>]

<sup>93</sup> Interview with youth leader in Sri Lanka, 4 May 2017.

<sup>94</sup> Interview with youth leader in Somalia, 17 May 2017.

advance peace and stability in the long run. For example, governments, parliaments, and international organizations are increasingly using young MPs as mediators to resolve community and other conflicts involving youth.

Despite these positive trends, young parliamentarians are often precluded by their limited numbers and influence from engaging more meaningfully on peace and security concerns or promoting a 'youth agenda' in parliament. In some cases, young MPs struggle with perceptions within their political parties that peace and security issues are the domain of the older generation. At the same time, young people do not necessarily feel that young parliamentarians speak for them or represent their interests or the interests of young people generally. The lack of mechanisms for young people to systematically influence parliamentary decisions and hold elected officials to account exacerbates a "trust gap" between youth and their elected officials.

The implementation of UNSCR 2250 now offers an opportunity to address these and other challenges and makes increased youth participation in parliament a priority for building more peaceful and stable societies. Provided below are recommendations that emerged from this research study, as well as notes on the need for further research into this important topic.

### **Recommendations:**

#### To national governments and parliaments:

- Ensure inclusive representation of youth in parliament working in close coordination with relevant youth bodies and other stakeholders, in accordance with UNSCR 2250 on Youth Peace and Security.
- Build legal frameworks to raise the proportion of young MPs, including through youth quotas and alignment of the voting age with the age of eligibility to run for office.<sup>95</sup>
- Support the political participation of young women within youth engagement programmes as well as strategies to engage more women in politics.<sup>96</sup>
- Create youth bodies in parliament, such as caucuses of young MPs, and establish a mechanism to ensure systematic consultations of young people in parliamentary deliberations;<sup>97</sup> this includes proper follow-up of meetings between the parliament and youth.
- Promote and recognize independent youth bodies, such as national youth parliaments, which are accountable to the government and considered by the public to be credible and nonpartisan.
- Encourage parliamentarians to engage with young people through direct interactions (e.g. school/university visits, participation in youth events) and social media.
- Support educational programmes and "youth-friendly" online platforms that familiarize youth with the workings of political institutions and increase their civic engagement.<sup>98</sup>
- Create and promote targeted opportunities for youth to facilitate access to education, employment,

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<sup>95</sup> IPU/Parliament of Sri Lanka/UNDP, *Regional Meeting of Young Parliamentarians of the Asia-Pacific* (Outcome Document). Colombo, Sri Lanka, 25-26 April 2017. [<http://www.ipu.org/splz-e/colombo17/outcome.pdf>], 2.

<sup>96</sup> IPU, *Youth Participation in National Parliaments*, 13.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

health, sports and culture.

To the UN, IPU and other international organizations:

- Provide technical support and resources for coordinating a systematic engagement between youth bodies in parliament and young people to address relevant peace and security concerns.
- Systematically monitor youth participation in parliament on peace and security issues (e.g. constitutional reforms, security sector reform, justice and reconciliation) and support field-based research to interpret existing sets of data. This includes generating age-segregated data on parliamentarians' mediation efforts and exploring specific security concerns for youth participation in political processes due to age.
- Strengthen the capacity of young parliaments to understand the political context (specifically as it relates to youth) and practical workings of the parliament, and help build their essential skills (e.g. communications, conflict management and mediation, leadership).
- Conduct more field-based research on youth participation in political processes and how it links to peace and security. This includes investigating connections, differences and synergies between youth and women in their political participation on peace and security issues.

To young people and civil society:

- Advocate for increased youth representation and participation in parliament in accordance with UNSCR 2250.
- Raise awareness among youth from different socio-economic, ethnic, and other backgrounds regarding the political system, civic responsibilities, and opportunities for youth political engagement.
- Provide discussion forums and other spaces for youth to engage with parliamentarians on current issues that affect youth.
- Encourage young politicians to act as youth advocates within their political parties and institutions.

To donors:

- Support initiatives aimed at increasing youth's political participation in parliament and other political institutions.
- Incentivize communication and collaboration between youth organizations, parliaments and young MPs by creating and promoting linkages amongst them.

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