

Advisory board on YPS: steps for global governance reform

By Jorge Valderrábano

Youth, peace and security is a global social movement that is increasing the participation of young people in peacebuilding, mediation and conflict-resolution. The United Nations (UN) has recognized this through the adoption of three resolutions that comprise the agenda: Resolution 2250 on Youth, Peace and Security, Resolution 2419 on Children and Armed Conflict, and Resolution 2535 on the Rights of the Child.

Resolution 2250 on Youth, Peace and Security, adopted in 2015, is the first-ever UN resolution to specifically address the role of young people in the maintenance and promotion of peace and security. The resolution recognizes that young people have a unique perspective on the causes of violence and conflict, and that they have the potential to play a positive role in preventing and resolving conflicts. The resolution calls on all UN Member States to involve young people in topics related to peace and security, and to provide them with the necessary skills and support to do so¹.

Resolution 2419 on Children and Armed Conflict, adopted in 2018, focuses on the protection of children affected by armed conflict. The resolution calls on all parties to armed conflicts to take all necessary measures to protect children from the effects of conflict, including their recruitment and use in hostilities, sexual violence, and attacks on schools and hospitals. It also calls on Member States to take measures to prevent the recruitment and use of children by armed groups, and to provide assistance to children affected by armed conflict².

Resolution 2535 on the Rights of the Child, adopted in 2019, reaffirms the rights of children to be protected from all forms of violence, including in situations of armed conflict, and calls on Member States to take measures to prevent and respond to such violence. It also calls to aid children affected by armed conflict, and to take all necessary measures to ensure that children are not recruited or used in hostilities³.

The involvement of young people in peace and security efforts is not only a moral imperative, but it is also a practical one. Young people are often disproportionately affected by conflicts, and their participation in peacebuilding and conflict resolution efforts can help to ensure that their needs and perspectives are taken into account. Additionally, involving young people in these efforts can help to build a more sustainable peace and can contribute to the prevention of future conflicts.

¹ UN Security Council. (2015). Resolution 2250: S/RES/2250 (2015). Retrieved from [https://undocs.org/S/RES/2250\(2015\)](https://undocs.org/S/RES/2250(2015))

² UN Security Council. (2018). Resolution 2419: S/RES/2419 (2018). Retrieved from [https://undocs.org/S/RES/2419\(2018\)](https://undocs.org/S/RES/2419(2018))

³ UN Security Council. (2020). Resolution 2535: S/RES/2535 (2020). Retrieved from [https://undocs.org/S/RES/2535\(2020\)](https://undocs.org/S/RES/2535(2020))

The importance of creating mechanisms for institutionalizing the youth peace and security agenda cannot be overstated. Therefore, it is key for Member States to create and support programs and policies for these objectives, which should be inclusive, representative, and responsive to the needs of young people, and provide young people with the necessary skills, resources, and support to effectively participate in peacebuilding and conflict resolution efforts.

What is an Advisory Board at the UN?

An advisory board is a group of individuals appointed to provide expert advice and recommendations to an organization or government body. The United Nations (UN) has several advisory boards that take many forms and serve different purposes. Advisory boards at the United Nations are typically created by specific agencies or departments and their members are appointed by the head of that agency or department. These advisory boards are not necessarily elected by the General Assembly or any other main body in the UN.

Advisory boards play a crucial role in providing expert advice and recommendations to the United Nations on various issues, including sustainable development, climate change, and digital cooperation, among others. Some examples include:

1. The Scientific and Technical Advisory Panel (STAP) of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC)
2. The United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination (CEB)
3. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Independent Evaluation Office's Advisory Committee
4. The United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) External Advisory Board
5. The United Nations Global Pulse Advisory Board

The process for appointing members to advisory boards at the United Nations can vary depending on the specific board. However, in general, members are appointed by the head of the relevant agency or department, often with inputs from other stakeholders such as member states or relevant experts. For example, the Scientific and Technical Advisory Panel (STAP) of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) is a board whose members are appointed by the Executive Secretary of the UNFCCC, based on nominations by Parties to the Convention and other stakeholders⁴. However, in most cases, the director of each agency appoints the members of the advisory board based on their expertise in the area, as it happens with the UNDP

⁴ United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. (1992). Scientific and Technical Advisory Panel. <https://unfccc.int/topics/science/workstreams/scientific-and-technical-advisory-panel>

Independent Evaluation Office's Advisory Committee⁵, and the UNIDO External Advisory Board⁶.

Advisory Boards created by mandate

Under Article 97 of the UN Charter, the UN may establish subsidiary bodies, which may include advisory bodies, to assist in carrying out its functions. The Charter also gives the General Assembly and other bodies the authority to establish special committees and other bodies as necessary to perform specific tasks⁷.

In practice, advisory boards are typically established by a Secretary-General directive or by a General Assembly resolution. The legal instrument creating the advisory board may specify the number and qualifications of its members, the duration of their appointments, and the scope of their work. The instrument may also provide for the advisory board's reporting requirements and procedures for the review of its recommendations.

While both a mandate from a directive of the Secretary-General and from the General Assembly or any other subsidiary body can be used to establish advisory boards, it is generally better to establish them through a mandate in a resolution by a subsidiary body, if the goal is to ensure that the board is taken seriously by member states. A mandate from the General Assembly is seen more legitimate, it is more likely to have a broader base of support among member states, and is subject to greater scrutiny and accountability, which makes it more likely to be effective in providing expert advice and recommendations.

There are some examples of UN legal instruments that mention the establishment of advisory boards, committees, or expert groups to provide guidance or support on specific issues. The Convention on the Rights of the Child from 1989 calls for the establishment of a Committee on the Rights of the Child to monitor the implementation of the Convention by States Parties. The Committee is composed of independent experts who provide guidance and recommendations to States on fulfilling their obligations under the Convention⁸. Another example would be the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights from 1966, calls for the establishment of a Human Rights Committee to monitor the implementation of the Covenant by States Parties, which is composed of independent

⁵ United Nations Development Programme. (2021). Independent Evaluation Office Advisory Committee. <https://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/evaluation/evaluation-advisory-committee.html>

⁶ United Nations Industrial Development Organization. (2021). External Advisory Board. <https://www.unido.org/who-we-are/external-advisory-board>

⁷ United Nations. (1945). Charter of the United Nations.

⁸ Convention on the Rights of the Child. (1989). United Nations Treaty Series, 1577, 3. <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/crc.aspx>

experts who provide guidance and recommendations to States on fulfilling their obligations under the Covenant⁹.

One of the key benefits of establishing advisory boards by mandate is that it provides a clear framework for their operation and ensures that they have the necessary resources to carry out their work effectively. When an advisory board is established through a binding legal instrument, such as a convention or a treaty, member states are obligated to provide the necessary support to ensure that the board can carry out its mandate effectively. However, their effectiveness can also be limited by factors such as political pressure, inadequate funding or staffing, and resistance with these bodies if they perceive them as infringing on their sovereignty or if they do not agree with their recommendations.

Advisory Group of Experts on Youth, Peace and Security

Youth, peace and security is an agenda that must be covered by every area in the UN system, meaning that there have been important efforts to establish groups that can support the implementation of this agenda, and to align the objectives of their projects and activities towards these goals.

Resolution 2250 requests the Secretary-General of the United Nations “to carry out a progress study on the youth’s positive contribution to peace processes and conflict resolution, in order to recommend effective responses at local, national, regional and international levels”, and to present the results of the Study to the United Nations Security Council and Member States. The UN Secretary-General appointed in August 2016 an independent lead author, Graeme Simpson, to develop the Progress Study, as well as an Advisory Group of Experts (AGE), including 21 scholars, practitioners and young leaders¹⁰.

Since its establishment, the AGE has made several key achievements. The group's global study, which was published in 2018, provided the first comprehensive analysis of the role of young people in peacebuilding and conflict prevention efforts. The study made a number of recommendations to the United Nations, including the need to increase youth participation in decision-making processes, and to invest in youth-led initiatives and organizations. The AGE has also provided technical assistance to the United Nations and other stakeholders on youth, peace, and security issues, and has played an important role in raising awareness about the importance of youth participation in peace processes.

It is not specified how the Advisory Group of Experts (AGE) for the Progress Study on Youth, Peace and Security, is specifically funded. However, it is common for UN bodies and expert groups to be funded through the regular budget of the United Nations. The

⁹ International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. (1966). United Nations Treaty Series, 999, 171. <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/ccpr.aspx>

¹⁰ UN Security Council. (2015). Resolution 2250: S/RES/2250 (2015). Retrieved from [https://undocs.org/S/RES/2250\(2015\)](https://undocs.org/S/RES/2250(2015))

regular budget is financed through assessed contributions from Member States, which are calculated on the basis of their capacity to pay. In addition to the regular budget, the UN also receives voluntary contributions from Member States, as well as from other organizations and individuals. These contributions can be earmarked for specific programs or activities, such as the progress study on youth, peace and security. The group has played an important role in raising awareness about the importance of youth participation in peace processes, and in advocating for the rights of young people affected by armed conflict. The group's co-chair has also presented progress reports to the United Nations Security Council, highlighting the achievements and challenges of youth, peace, and security efforts.

Other examples of groups monitoring and providing guidance on peace and security are the Group of Friends of SDG16 and the UN Global Alliance for Reporting Progress on Peaceful, Just and Inclusive Societies, although these are informal groups promoting evidence-based policymaking and tracking progress of the SDG 16, but lacking decision-making power or legal legitimacy.

Although the AGE represents important efforts, they are not enough for ensuring the implementation of the agenda at different levels, and to mainstream the necessities of youth in peace and security throughout all the decisions and actions of the UN system and their Member States. Resolution 2250 mandates the creation of a progress study, but it is not considering the existence of a group whose activities can support the work of the Security Council, or other subsidiary bodies, in other areas such as assessment, engagement, oversight and outreach.

Mandating the creation of an advisory board at the General Assembly or ECOSOC, for example, may provide a more inclusive and holistic approach to addressing youth-related issues on peace and security. These bodies have broader mandates and are more representative of the diverse interests and perspectives of UN member states. An Advisory Board born at any of these bodies will be able to assess resolutions covering wider topics related to development and human rights, that are key for international peace and security.

Towards an Advisory Board about Youth, Peace and Security created by mandate at the UN

Youth peace and security is a critical agenda that requires action from the international community, and little progress has been made so far. The United Nations (UN) has an opportunity move a step forward by establishing an advisory board on youth peace and security that can provide expert advice and recommendations to the UN on how to effectively engage and empower young people in the pursuit of peace and security.

The advisory board would have to be composed of experts in the field of youth peace and security, including youth government representatives, academics, civil society and practitioners. The board would be responsible for providing advice and recommendations

to the UN on a range of issues related to youth peace and security, including the development of policies and programs that promote the participation of young people in peacebuilding and conflict resolution, and advice on decisions taken regarding topics related to peace and security, including disarmament, drug policy, climate change and other issues.

This board could also play an important role in promoting the participation of young people in peace and security decision-making at the national and international levels. This could include the development of mechanisms for young people to provide input into the work of the UN and other international organizations, such as through youth consultations and youth-led research. Another important function of the advisory board would be to provide guidance on how to address the specific needs and concerns of young people affected by conflict and violence. This could include the development of proposals at the international level that can facilitate providing psychosocial support, education, and livelihood opportunities to young people affected by conflict at the local level. Finally, the board would also be useful to guide how to build partnerships and collaboration between UN agencies and other actors working on youth peace and security, such as youth-led organizations, civil society, and the private sector.

Creating an advisory board, or elevating an existing board at the UN, to a mandate level would require a decision by the General Assembly or another subsidiary body with the authority to establish new bodies or modify existing ones. In order to make such a decision, there would need to be a proposal put forward by a UN member state or a UN agency to establish the new body or modify an existing one. The proposal would need to be supported by a sufficient number of member states or other relevant stakeholders, and it would need to be in line with the principles and objectives of the UN charter. As progress is made towards the SDG 16, it is possible that there may be increased interest in formalizing the work of these groups or creating new bodies to support the implementation of the goal.

An advisory board with the aforementioned characteristics could increase transparency in international security governance and architecture in several ways, by providing expertise, advice and guidance to relevant bodies to ensure their decisions are informed by the best available expertise and that the decision-making process is focused on the current local necessities. Also, it could provide oversight of the UN's operations, monitoring and evaluating their effectiveness and making recommendations for improvements, increasing transparency by holding the UN accountable for its actions and ensuring that it operates in accordance with its principles. Finally, the board could increase engagement with the population and other stakeholders, and promote best practices and collaboration with key sectors.

Technology innovation can support the activities of the board in various ways, including the improvement of communication between members, by using video conferencing tools to hold virtual meetings and exchange ideas regardless their location. The board could use social media platforms to collect information for research, and to interact with the public, enabling to raise awareness of important issues and build support for their

recommendations. Moreover, it can use tools such as data visualization to track progress towards the goals in peace and security, and identify areas for improvement.

The creation of this board by mandate could potentially reduce vertical inequalities by promoting more transparent and inclusive decision-making processes, in turn, reducing the variables that create conflict by addressing the root of causes of inequalities and promoting more equitable and just policies. Vertical inequalities can be derived from differences in power and resources between different groups in society, including those based on race, ethnicity, gender, class or nationality. In the context of international security, inequalities can arise from the dominance of powerful countries or groups over others, as well as from exclusionary policies and practices. By providing expert advice, oversight and engagement with stakeholders, an advisory board could help to address some of these inequalities and promote more inclusive and equitable decision-making processes. Tackling this issue requires a complex and long-term process where it is necessary to focus on institutional changes in global governance reform.

In summary, an advisory board on youth peace and security for the UN would be an important step in effectively engaging and empowering young people in the pursuit of peace and security. By providing expert advice and recommendations on how to address the specific needs and concerns of young people affected by conflict and violence, such board would help to ensure that the UN is able to take effective action to promote the participation of young people in peacebuilding and decision-making at all levels. There are important efforts already being carried out towards these goals, and now, it is time to give space to young people at the UN to propose and monitor the decisions and actions of Member States to ensure the full implementation of this agenda at all levels.

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