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IX ECPD GLOBAL YOUTH FORUM YOUTH POWER FOR THE COMMON FUTURE

WITH THE MAIN TOPIC

BUILDING FORWARD TOGETHER

(BELGRADE, CITY HALL 23–24 OCTOBER 2021)

CONCEPT NOTE

The world is facing multiple crises, all interconnected. The health crisis is interacting with the environmental crises of climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution, leading to economic and social crises as well. On the economic side, we must transform the energy systems driving our economy, while facing growing unemployment, an increase in extreme wealth while failing to address poverty, the growing power and monopoly position of giant multinational profit-driven corporations with no international regulation to protect the common good, powerful lobbies and vested interests blocking progress, and widespread corruption. Technological innovation goes as much to support bad as good ends. Socially we face failures of trust and trustworthiness, fragmentation and loss of social cohesion, failure to achieve gender equality, the neglect of marginalized groups, and manipulation by the new media. We see increasing failures in governance, the retreat of peace and security, and religion used to fan hatred. All these express fundamental failures in ethics, values, morality and spirituality.

How, then, can the youth of today build forward to a better future for all? How can we navigate through the old systems that are disintegrating, and become forces for a new integration? What knowledge, skills and experiences do we need? How do we maintain our idealism and hope for the future? What visions and scenarios can we develop for a better future and the world we would like to live in?

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This ECPD Youth Forum will address these global trends with potentially irreversible and inter-generational consequences and consider our responsibility to take urgent individual, collective and multilateral action – BUILDING FORWARD TOGETHER.

Starting this process of Building Forward Together, we need to address the youth, but also consider the potential for intergenerational dialogues with the rest of society. Youth should be featured as keynote and guest speakers at conferences and other events. The aim should be to imagine a different and better future, since the present system has clearly failed. This future should be built forward together because that gives us more power and energy. We should especially plan to include marginalised groups whose voices are not often heard. This effort should start from the Youth Forum on, with a continuing Youth Network, but also how we can build forward every day. We can just smile towards a stranger and create a more welcoming atmosphere. If we see daily injustices, we can say something.

Four subtopics have been identified by the youth as of particular interest, where youth can contribute a positive vision and creative thinking, and can bring a more holistic vision including the perspectives of the global South, along with some questions that could stimulate the discussion.

Climate change

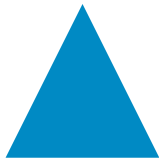
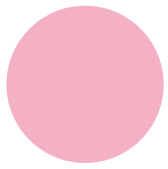
Climate change is acknowledged as an existential threat to our future that is accelerating and requires an urgent response with a fundamental transformation of all aspects of society from its sources of energy and modes of transport to food production and human habitats, all the while remaining within the boundaries of the biosphere and the requirements of the natural systems upon which all life depends. The UN Conference on Climate Change (COP26) will take place one week after the Youth Forum, so this is the time to anticipate how to respond to the decisions taken at the conference.

How might we design a local project or community consultation to make climate change and environmental rehabilitation integral to all local initiatives?

How can we ensure that our own decisions address the cumulative, long-term, indirect, long distance, and global consequences of our activities on the climate and the biosphere?

Justice

The world is plagued by so many examples of injustice, from racism and gender discrimination to xenophobia and other forms of intolerance, especially towards marginalized groups. With social breakdown and even civil war, not to mention terrorist and criminal groups, many are forced to migrate to try to escape. How should we imagine a society in which justice is the ruling principle, and how should society be organized to put this into practice?



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What practical efforts can we make to recognize the ignored, protect the vulnerable, serve those who suffer, and enable them to develop their capacities and to pursue their aspirations?

What further efforts can we make in our own lives to eliminate discrimination in all its forms, such as that based on race, colour, sex, sexual orientation, religion, language, and national, ethnic or social origin?

How can we help our generation to recognize that peace is the wholeness created by right relationships with oneself, other persons, other cultures, other life, Earth, and the larger whole of which all are a part?

Economics

The neoclassical economic paradigm of the consumer society assumes that the market can solve all problems, while excluding environmental and social issues as externalities, yet the market considers everything as property to generate profit and favours those with the ability to pay, and thus the rich over the poor. It consumes natural resources according to the rate of return, not regeneration, and thus raping the planet, with economic accounting ignoring human wellbeing or what people really care for. The result is an extreme concentration of wealth while half the world population struggles to make ends meet, as well as persistent poverty. We need to explore the possibilities of a sustainable economic system that is socially responsible, altruistic and cooperative, creating meaningful employment for all and eliminating poverty.

What might be other ways of considering the meaning of work, and the new occupations necessary for a better world?

How can we adopt a lifestyle that emphasizes our quality of life and material sufficiency in a finite world?

Politics

Every organized society needs good governance reflecting justice and care for the common good, from the local and national to the global levels. Yet too much of politics today is based on fragmentation and conflict rather than building unity and concord. Are there alternatives to partisan politics that draw on the strengths of human social and cultural diversity? Too often established elites, the rich and powerful, corrupt kleptocrats and especially old men, dominate the political scene and youth are marginalized. Yet the young have acquired through modern media and education great capacities to lead constructive change. What are some positive ways forward?

Which kind of future do we want to build forward together? How can we involve many people in the change?



What can youth do to earn a place at the table?

Some approaches to explore in building forward are:

- Drawing strength from spiritual and ethical ideals like the Earth Charter, and the fundamental truth underlying all religions.
- Using the power of science and the complementary need for ethics and values.
- Going beyond words to acts.
- Finding new constructive and responsible ways to make a living, with careers coherent with our values.
- Creating and being open to innovation, and alternative business models.
- Working around the forces of resistance in peaceful, constructive ways forward.
- Turning to older generations and their wisdom for accompaniment and finding ways to organize this.
- Building partnerships and momentum through the new media.
- Rethinking lifestyles and consumption patterns, resisting recuperation.
- Helping everyone to find their own place.
- Working to create a new reality starting in our own neighbourhood or community.
- Helping the coming generation of youth and children.

ORGANIZATION

Given the uncertainty around the pandemic, the youth would prefer to organize the Forum as an online event which could have global reach and would have less environmental impact. The ECPD Youth Network is already operating at this scale, with participation from Asia, Africa and Latin America. If the ECPD insists that there be a Youth Forum in person in Belgrade, it should be hybrid with an online component to include this larger circle, which would require the necessary technological arrangements at the meeting location. The format both days should be more interactive.

Short opening presentations by a representative of EPCD, perhaps with a report on the preceding ECPD conference on “The future is to be invented”, as well as on the conclusions of the previous Youth Forum on the Earth Charter, and on the ECPD Youth Network, would provide a good background for creative exchanges among the participants. A keynote could introduce the Forum theme, “Building Forward Together”, followed by panels of selected youth to give short (10 minute) presentations on key provisions of the four subtopics: climate change, justice, economics and politics, leading to some questions, followed by small group generative dialogues. Some training



and workshops on generative dialogue and facilitation by Professors Redekop and Leffkof and collaboration with their projects, perhaps at the end of Saturday afternoon or in the evening, would give the youth some tools to work with on Sunday.

The second day would follow the model of last year. Participants propose their own topics for discussion, these will be amalgamated to identify the most popular, and two sets of three discussion groups will prepare and present to the whole forum their conclusions on each topic. If the number of participants is larger, it may be necessary to go to four parallel discussion groups to keep their size reasonable, and then allow more time for presentations. The discussion groups could be mixed in-person and online if the technology allows, or there could be some of each.

September 2021