



## Meeting of Youth of the Americas

### DECLARATION “THE VOICE OF YOUTH OF THE AMERICAS”

We, the youth representatives of the Americas, who met at San Pedro de Macorís, Dominican Republic, from June 20<sup>th</sup> to June 24<sup>th</sup> 2003, for the “Meeting of Youth of the Americas”, where we identified ourselves as members of society, freely discussed the situation of youth and the global context framing this situation, evaluated developments in the area of plans, programs and policies relating to youth and reflected purposefully about the challenges we face in achieving integrated development and in contributing to sustainable human development in the region.

The youth of the Americas visualize, demand and are committed to:

***“A united America, in which social justice, peace and respect for human rights are guaranteed, where there are equal opportunities for integrated development, allowing youth to contribute to the reduction of poverty, based on their active participation as key actors in developing and implementing in public policies, where society and government have committed to guarantee an America with living standards of greater dignity”.***

#### Whereas:

- 1) In recent decades, the importance of investing in youth has been recognized, as the economic and social development of the countries of the region depends in large measure on the steady increase of educated, healthy and economically productive populations.
- 2) We have positioned ourselves as spokespersons for youth to the states and governments of the region, demanding greater and better opportunities to undertake the role of social transformers.
- 3) The states have made commitments under international law for the implementation of programs, plans and public policies that respond to the needs of young people, but without having had a significant impact on the social, economic and cultural variables that affect youth.

## Recognizing that:

- 1) The current global context, where there are persistent situations of social injustice that threaten peace and social development, presents challenges to youth in attaining integrated development and in being able to contribute with efforts to reduce poverty.
- 2) The health situation of youth is cause for great worry: there is an increase in unplanned pregnancies among youth, associated with high rates of maternal and infant mortality; a high prevalence of sexually transmitted infections, including HIV/AIDS; and an increase in violence and in the abuse of psychoactive substances. These are included among other preventable situations, which are associated with a variety of factors that range from pressure to assume masculine and feminine roles that do not promote self-care, mutual care or an awareness of risk, making youth more susceptible to contracting sexually-transmitted infections and having unwanted pregnancies. This situation is aggravated by social structures that do not guarantee access to integrated, quality health care that responds to the needs of youth.
- 3) Educational processes are limited by inequity, a lack of access, and poor quality, as well as the urgent need to include technology as an indispensable tool to manage information.
- 4) Education and health are fundamental elements for reducing poverty in the region and the disparities in access to these basic rights has prevented youth from fulfilling their potential as agents of social change.
- 5) Families play a fundamental role in the process of socialization of individuals and on the transmission of norms and values.
- 6) Youth are the subject of rights and thus are central players in the processes of formulation, implementation and evaluation of public policies that affect their development.
- 7) The situations of poverty and social exclusion that affect our societies have a special impact on young populations, making them more vulnerable.
- 8) The current context of globalization presents great challenges, affecting the access of youth to employment, as available training does not provide the skills needed in this context.
- 9) The cultural diversity of our peoples is the basis for the regional identity of the Americas; we face the challenges of preserving our values and promoting equality of opportunity.
- 10) Healthy settings allow better sustainable human development.
- 11) Good relations depend on efficient communications based on opportunities for expression by youth and enhancing the image of youth in the communications

media.

- 12) Citizenship and justice are necessary elements for integrated development of youth.

## **As such, the youth of the Americas demand the following actions and strategic priorities:**

### **In Health:**

1, Access to quality, integrated services for adolescents and youth, provided by trained and sensitized personnel; appropriate infrastructure for youth-friendly services; and access to supplies needed for services.

2. Implementation of integrated sexual and reproductive health programs that allow the prevention of unwanted pregnancies among youth, for which we suggest the following strategies:

- Promotion of information, education and communication (IEC) activities on sexual and reproductive health to youth and other members of society, for prevention and behavior change.
- Promotion of the empowerment of the young population for the defense of their rights in sexual and reproductive health.
- Coordination with HIV/AIDS and sexually transmitted infection (STI) programs.
- Ongoing training and sensitizing of health staff in hospitals and primary health care facilities.
- Distribution of contraceptive methods at no cost, at hospitals and primary health care facilities.
- Programs for the inclusion or reinsertion of young mothers in the educational, labor and social support systems; guarantees that young mothers will not be excluded from these systems.

3. Strengthening of programs for the promotion and prevention of STIs and HIV/AIDS, for which we suggest the following strategies:

- Increasing access to and use of prenatal care to prevent vertical transmission of HIV.
- Improve the capacity of national health systems to detect HIV+ women and refer them for medical care.
- Establishment and/or implementation of health service protocols.
- Information, Education and Communication (IEC) programs
- Integrated, no-cost health care to youth living with HIV/AIDS and in high-risk situations.
- Focusing on stigma and the needs of youth living with HIV/AIDS and STIs.

### **In Education:**

1. That there be better access to quality education for youth, through the support of their families, the government, the private sector and other organizations, for which we suggest the following strategies:

- Continuous updating of existing educational programs.
- Training of teaching staff.
- Ensuring dynamic participation of youth in programs that strengthen critical staff.
- Technological, technical and vocational training for all youth, including those who are marginalized or socially excluded.

### **In the Family:**

1. Overcome the communications barriers between parents and their sons and daughters, the generation gap and the lack of economic and educational opportunities that increase social disintegration and dysfunction, through the following strategies:

- Assigning a key role in the educational process to parents and tutors.
- Provision, by government agencies, civil society, the private sector and other organizations that provide formal and informal education, of content relating to family skills and family values.
- Provision of community recreational activities, as a means of reinforcing family ties.
- Provision by the government of assistance to families threatened by poverty, through policies focused on their basic needs.

### **In Participation:**

1. Greater opportunities for the youth of the Americas to participate in forums for political, economic and social decision-making. For this, we suggest the following strategies:

- To support and promote the work carried out by young men and women toward the achievement of the goals of youth.
- To demand that governments and civil society respect and implement the rights of youth.
- To demand that the countries of the Americas prepare, strengthen and implement explicit public policies for youth.

2. Establishment of youth forums. We suggest the following strategies:

- Establishment of networks, movements and organizations for youth, and strengthening of existing local and international networks.
- Strengthening the formation of political committees that address the topic of youth, with youth participation.

3. Ensure youth representation in the powers of the state. We suggest the following strategy:

- Promotion of openings in the policymaking process that will allow youth to state their needs and demand responses to these.

### **In Labor:**

1. Strengthening of formal education within educational programs, for which we suggest the following strategies:

- Promoting and strengthening innovative programs that prioritize training of youth with skills needed to access work opportunities, and to develop their abilities and knowledge.
- Creation of educational policies that improve access to jobs and safe working conditions.
- Incorporation of technology as a tool needed to strengthen the skills of youth, in the framework of demands regarding information
- Implementation of programs that benefit youth who do not have access to education.
- Creation of non-formal technical training programs, approved and regulated by the government agencies of each country, that are directed at youth who do not have the opportunity to pursue academic studies that would enable them to work.
- Creation of, and support for, cooperative programs and technical-vocational schools for youth.
- Provision of incentives for professional studies for youth who do not have access to employment.
- Promote the establishment of institutional cooperation agreements between the states and private and/or public enterprises and universities that increase job opportunities for young professionals.
- Responding to the lack of employment for all vulnerable groups, through the creation of projects and programs for the training, financing and technical support for community development micro-enterprises, focused on high-poverty areas.

### **In Culture:**

1. Strengthening, highlighting and promoting cultural values as a basis for building the identity of our nations, for which we suggest the following strategies:

- Provision of values education in all social institutions.
- Creation and/or strengthening of youth agencies and agendas that promote a culture of peace and knowledge of the identity of the countries.
- Government recognition of the rights of minority groups, ensuring the absence of discrimination and allowing such groups to be active members of society.

### **In the Environment:**

1. Promote the protection of the natural resource of our countries. For this, we suggest the following strategies:

- Promoting awareness of the need to protect the environment, starting in primary school.
- Development and/or enforcement of laws to protect the environment, and promotion of recycling and reforestation projects.
- Ensure the ongoing active participation of youth in such projects.

### **In Communication:**

1. Create and/or strengthen places and opportunities for youth to express and address their abilities and doubts; enhance the image of youth in the communications media. We suggest:

- Promoting a relationship between youth leaders and media producers, opinion leaders and journalists.
- Supporting media programs, campaigns and presentations that strongly promote the positive actions of youth, and encourage the formation of their values.

### **In Justice, Rights and Citizenship:**

1. The generation of a process to review legal frameworks in the region, so that these make reference to youth. We suggest the following strategies:

- Advocacy with legislators and other relevant actors (social networks, government agencies, international organizations and others).
- Achieve the participation of youth groups and leaders as key actors in the review and discussion of legal norms.

2. Provide greater recognition and promotion of the rights and duties of youth regarding citizenship, in turn providing opportunities for youth. We suggest the following strategies

- Formation of strategic alliances with the mass communications media.
- Coordination and strengthening of ties with agencies responsible for social oversight.

3. Seek reinsertion of youth groups or populations that are excluded from society. We suggest the following strategies:

- Social strengthening and services programs.
- Coordination between the state and the private sector, to ensure reinsertion of excluded youth into society.

4. The discussion and establishment of common criteria regarding the age groups youth are placed in. We suggest the following strategies:

- Establishment of a standard range of ages for the application of programs, projects and public policies for youth.
- Advocacy for establishment of common criteria in dealing with the range of ages for youth within the states.

### **In Sustainability:**

To guarantee the implementation of the demands, strategies and actions agreed to by each of the representatives of the “Voice of Youth of the Americas,” it has been decided to:

**Create and achieve the sustainability of a youth organization that includes all of the countries of the Americas, and which will be committed to following up on the results of this declaration and generate new initiatives in favor of youth.**

For this, we have agreed to the following strategies:

- Creation of a Committee that will prepare a proposal for the formation and sustainability of the organization.
- Establish guidelines, objectives, methodologies and basic structures of the organization and its sustainability.
- Advocacy with government agencies, international organizations and nongovernmental organizations, to institutionalize and sustain work with the youth organization.

Based on the results of the “**Voice of Youth of the Americas**” meeting, we are confident that the priorities described here and the shared perspective of the representatives of the participating countries will be considered.

We thank the First Lady of the Dominican Republic, Sra. Rosa Gómez de Mejía, for her interest in listening to the voices of the youth of the Americas, and for her support for the content of this declaration.