



Paris, 24 March 2005

Mr. Johan Schölvinck  
Director  
Division for Social Policy and Development  
Department of Economic and Social Affairs,  
United Nations, DC2-1320,  
New York, NY 10017, USA

Dear Mr. Schölvinck,

Following the Consultative Meeting on 10-Year Review of the World Program of Action for Youth (WPAY) in Coimbra, Portugal (31 January to 4 February 2005). IMCS-Pax Romana would like to comment on the progress made since 1995 on the global situation of youth.

As you may know, since receiving consultative status with ECOSOC in 1949 IMCS-Pax Romana has maintained an active role in a number of the major national, regional and global projects relating to youth. The global situation of youth (with a focus on university students) has been a central focus for us since our founding in 1921. IMCS-Pax Romana played an active role in the four World Youth Forums. Most recently, for example, we have been active as the Vice-Chair and Chair of the NGO Committee on Youth in New York (1996-2002), a member of the Youth Consultative Group of the Youth Employment Network and one of the four NGO members of the World Bank taskforce on the Youth, Development and Peace Network.

IMCS-Pax Romana was happy to actively participate in the Coimbra consultation. IMCS-Pax Romana is grateful to the UN and the government of Portugal for helping to organize this event. We also feel that it is important to mention the central logistical and financial role of the Portuguese National Youth Council and the Students' Association of Coimbra. Although we cannot endorse the entire document (especially some of the sections in the "youth at risk" cluster), we feel it reflects the discussions of the youth NGOs present. We hope that the Secretariat will consider the evaluations and serious concerns of the participants as reflected in the evaluation forms.

IMCS-Pax Romana read with great interest the World Youth Report 2005 (A/60/61 – E/2005/7). We recognize that it is perhaps too late to change the document that will be presented before the General Assembly but we have a number of concerns that we wish to bring to your attention.

#### **Poverty (§ 11-18)**

We believe that the wording in paragraph 15 is far too positive about the PRSP process. The consultation of young people has been very limited and needs much improvement. This has been recognized by the World Bank.

#### **Education (§ 19-30)**

As a student movement this topic is very important to our members. In the entire section, the importance of higher (tertiary) education is hardly mentioned. From our perspective, we would disagree with the assumptions made in paragraph 22. Although it is true the funding of schools has an impact on the quality of education, the responsibility to fund the schools should not be on the students but on the state. If we believe in *quality* Education for All, students cannot bear the burden of funding the educational system. Paragraph 22 should also focus on the responsibility of the state. In paragraph 26 it is mentioned that many states have included the right to education in their constitutions but no mention is made of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (article 26).



Both paragraphs 22 and 27 talk about the quality of education. In paragraph 27 it is recognized that education can take place outside the classroom. This paragraph should make mention of the important role of non-formal and informal education. We also believe that it is not enough to say "quality education" or "life competencies" but reference should be made to the importance of "holistic" or "integral" education.

#### **Leisure (§ 42- 49)**

We agree strongly with the proposal of the Coimbra meeting to change the name of this priority area to "Personal Development." Involvement in youth NGOs and volunteer service really cannot fit under the heading of "leisure."

It should be recognized in paragraph 44 that many young people are volunteering for extended periods of time in development work. It should also be noted that many youth NGOs, including IMCS-Pax Romana depend upon young people to give up extended periods of time as volunteers at the national, regional and global levels.

Paragraphs 48 and 49 talk about the important role of ICT. Many of our national groups, especially in Europe, North America, and Asia depend greatly on ICT. ICT has also been an important tool for us at the global and regional levels. We are however, disappointed to see that there is no mention of digital divide. The two paragraphs give three examples which are far different than the reality in many parts of the world (especially Africa). This section should reference the fact that a large portion of young people in the world do not have access to ICT. The Millennium Report of the Secretary General has a strong section on this.

We were surprised to see no reference to spirituality in this section. Young people play a central role in all faiths. For millions of young people, spirituality is extremely important in their personal development. This has been manifested in recent years by some of the largest gatherings of young people in history at the World Youth Days. Spirituality should be mentioned as part of the reality of young people.

#### **Youth and Participation in Decision-Making (§ 50- 56)**

We are pleased with the emphasis in paragraphs 50 and 53. The first sentence in paragraph 53 should be supported by data if it is true. There is however a conflict between paragraph 53 that references the important role of student movements in political processes and the efforts of student groups to combat social problems and promote development and paragraph 55. 2004 marked a number of examples around the globe where student and youth organizations played a key role in elections. This contradicts paragraph 55 which states that young people are joining youth organizations for a "pragmatic interest rather than an ideological interest." It is difficult to understand how the strong global concerns of student groups and their "progressive social action" (#53) is a "pragmatic interest" (#55). Paragraph 55 does not reflect our experience in most of the world. This analysis is very weak with no references or data and seems to reflect a strong western point of view.

Paragraph 56 seems to also contradict paragraph 53. Most of the student movements that have played a significant role in recent years have been the so called "formal" or "traditional" youth organizations. Furthermore, paragraph 56 says there has been a decrease in "civil engagement" yet paragraph 53 suggests the opposite.

Again paragraph 56 speaks of ICT without reference to the reality of the digital divide. ICT must be seen as a tool and not a solution for youth participation. The paragraph also seems to place "traditional organizations" in opposition to "internet-based activities." Most of our national groups use ICT in some form in their day to day work. Furthermore, there is no reference to the recent emergence of the World Social Forums which draw millions of young people to large gathering that make very little use of ICTs.



We strongly urge a revision of the analysis of this section that is based on data and a global perspective.

**Health (§ 58-67) and HIV/AIDS (§ 118-124)**

In these two sections there is no mention of the young people who make the difficult choice to abstain from sex. These young people should be supported. As has been noted by many the only form of safe sex is abstinence.

**Information and Communication Technologies (§ 108-117)**

We appreciate the attention paid to ICT in this document but wish to again emphasize that ICT is a powerful and positive tool but it cannot be seen as a solution to any problem. As long as millions of young people find themselves on the wrong side of the digital divide, ICT will exclude them.

**Youth and Conflict (§ 125-132)**

Our name of Pax Romana is a result of our interest and focus on this area. We especially appreciate paragraph 126. We would like to highlight two areas that are not directly mentioned in the document. The first is the right to conscientious objection to military service. The second area that should be addressed more directly is the important role of youth organizations in peace building and reconciliation. Both of these issues are also highlighted by the outcome document of the Coimbra meeting.

**Integration of Youth Processes**

One issue we feel that is not addressed in the document is role of the UN and the UN Agencies in relating to youth. We believe that the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the WPAY is a good opportunity to evaluate and strengthen the proactive engagement of the UN with youth. Recent years have seen the emergence of several separate youth initiatives of UN Agencies. As an organization who has and continues to participate in several of these consultations and events, we believe that greater coordination is necessary to avoid duplication of work and to ensure that the resources that are available are used to benefit as many young people as possible.

We were happy that the UN Agencies could take advantage of the Coimbra meeting to have a meeting among themselves and we hope this can become an annual event coordinated by the Focal Point. We believe this will go a long way in the spirit of UN Reform to avoid the duplication of work.

We hope that on the occasion of the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary, the General Assembly and the member states will strengthen the financial, logistical, and political support for the Focal Point. This support can help the secretariat better coordinate and integrate the different processes and can help outreach to as many young people and youth organizations as possible.

Sincerely,

Kevin Ahern  
International President

CC: Mr Joop Theunissen, Focal Point on Youth