



**Statement of Pax Romana,
a participating organisation of ICMYO,
during the Global Launch event of the International Year of Youth
United Nations Headquarters
12 August 2010**

Distinguished speakers, ladies and gentlemen, fellow youth,

This is truly an important beginning to an especially remarkable year. In 1985, the United Nations proclaimed the first International Year of Youth. The world we live in today is not as it was twenty-five years ago. We find that it is evermore necessary to encourage amongst young people the principles of peace and justice, the respect for Human Rights and fundamental freedoms, the realisation of our responsibilities, the necessity for active participation, and the true meaning of solidarity.

I firmly believe that this Year will be more than just a year to recognize the role youth play in helping our ailing world; it will be a year where youth everywhere will be inspired to take an active part in shaping the future for the benefit of our global society. My name is Maya Saoud, and I am proud to be here today on behalf on my now 90-year-old youth NGO, Pax Romana¹. We are a global organisation of students that works toward tearing down barriers and bridging divides. In addition to working alongside other young people, we work in collaboration with other youth NGOs and Regional Youth Platforms, such as the participating organisations of the International Coordination Meeting of Youth Organisations, or otherwise known as ICMYO², to build a culture of peace and solidarity. Our organizations have worked hard so that the world's governments may realize how much energy, potential, and passion young people have when it comes to social progress. We are grateful

¹ *Formally known as Pax Romana (International Catholic Movement for Intellectual and Cultural Affairs and the International Movement for Catholic Students). Since 1921, IMCS has aimed to promote peace and social justice through the holistic formation of students around the world. It is present in over 80 countries. For more information, please visit www.imcs-miec.org*

² <http://icmyo.wordpress.com/>

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to the United Nations for commemorating the work of so many young citizens of the world.

Ladies and gentlemen, the theme of this critical year is “Dialogue and Mutual Understanding.” I must admit, I cannot think of something that young people do better than understanding those who are different. Everywhere you look, youth from diverse ethnic and religious backgrounds come together in harmony and friendship. They shatter the taboos that older generations have instilled in so many of our minds and form bonds that are truly unbreakable.

In the spirit of kinship, love, and of course, mutual understanding, young people are paving the way for a future that is an improvement upon the mistakes of our collective past.

History has too often been recorded as a chronology of misunderstandings and conflicts. Today we will change that history. We have an opportunity today to start anew, with *our* story. In telling our story, we make a conscious effort to no longer perpetuate divides between people, but to focus the opportunities of growth and empowerment. In order to do this we must all realize and truly believe that the young are the foundation upon which we can build a better future, together.

That is why I am here to speak to you today because this future can only be achieved with your help. It humbles me to address all of you gathered here. But I will not allow my humility to diminish the urgency of my appeal. More often than not, young people are marginalized in our countries. They are pushed to the fringes of society and prevented from making a difference in times of need. Instead of being encouraged to be active agents of change, they are seen as being part of the problem, not the solution. They are silenced or simply neglected. Their skills and capacity for peace building are tragically wasted. But, I have to remind you, that participation is a right that **MUST** be respected. Participation in the political process is the essence of fairness, of equality. If young people are not treated like viable players in the field of politics then a grave injustice is being committed.

In 1995, the UN General Assembly adopted the World Programme of Action for Youth (WPAY). In recent years Pax Romana, along with other ICMYO organisations, has been invited to the various expert group meetings on goals and targets of the WPAY organised by the UN Programme on

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Youth. Many of our suggestions were taken into account. Based on this experience at the international level, we can say with a certain degree of authority that one concrete way to ensure a successful International Year is to include youth in the regional, national, and local processes. The 15 priority areas of the World Programme of Action for Youth and the means of implementation is a natural opportunity for dialogue between governments and youth organisations.

In 2008, Pax Romana had the honour of being one of the first recipients of the UN Alliance of Civilizations Youth Solidarity Fund with our project entitled, “Listening and Speaking with Respect: Students, Faith, and Dialogue”. Through this project we were able to provide much needed training to students and many valuable lessons were learned. In order to ensure that ‘mutual understanding’ takes place, a space and mechanism for fruitful ‘dialogue’ must be created. It became evident to us that young people are eager to make right what has gone wrong with previous generations. We are willing, ready, and able. What is missing, however, is the necessary investment in young people and the political will to make this happen.

The UN General Assembly resolution which proclaims the International Year of Youth, calls for a World Youth Conference under the auspices of the United Nations as the highlight of the International Year of Youth. We would like to make an open invitation to those responsible for implementing this to fully include a variety of international, regional, and national youth organisations in the planning process. We know from experience that by working hand in hand we can achieve the best possible outcome and conclusion of our International Year.

Dear friends, as we celebrate the launch of this International Year of Youth together, I ask you to remember my words. We are asking you for your help, for your understanding, and for your willingness to make available all that is necessary to ensure that young people are empowered. We are asking you to please understand the valuable natural resource that is the youth. Unlike other resources we do not spark wars and conflicts. We do not create contempt between the ‘have’s and ‘have not’s. We do not increase economic inequality, suffering, and devastation. We are the resource that does the very opposite. Utilize the youth for the sake of our collective future. Allow us to

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create a global environment where dialogue and mutual understanding are preferred over the destructiveness and terror of conflict. Like I said before, only together can a future of peace, justice, and of course, mutual understanding be achieved.

Thank you!

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