

## PRESS STATEMENT

### In observance of International Youth Day

**Freetown: 12<sup>th</sup> August 2021.** The Youth Partnership for Peace and Development, a youth empowerment think tank that enhances the capacity of young people and their communities and the inclusion of marginalized groups in the creation of open societies that promote sustainable development, joins the world's young people and advocates in marking this year's International Youth Day.

**We are delighted** as partners in organizing the 4<sup>th</sup> edition of the Sierra Leone National Youth Leadership Summit 2021 in observance of the International Youth Day. The event gives youth the opportunity, more especially Sierra Leoneans and their policy-makers as well as youth-serving agencies, an opportunity to recognize the potentials of youth, to celebrate their achievements, and plan for ways to better engage young people to successfully take action in the development of their societies. It presents a unique opportunity for stakeholders to rally together in ensuring that young people are included in decision-making and effective participation at all levels. The imagination, ideals and energies of young men and women are vital for the continuing development of the societies in which they live.

International Youth Day theme for this year is "**Transforming Food Systems: Youth Innovation for Human and Planetary Health,**" – but food systems can be only transformed where conflict, violence and fragility are adequately managed. During the 2021 ECOSOC Youth Forum (EYF), the issues and priorities highlighted by young participants included the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly related to its effect on human health, the environment, and food systems. As part of the official outcome recommendations of the EYF, young participants stressed the importance of working towards more equitable food systems.

**Acknowledging** the ardent role of the Government of Sierra Leone in repositioning how youth and their complex challenges are addressed, we thank the Ministry of Youth Affairs, the National Youth Commission and the Ministry of Finance for their leadership and supports in providing a roadmap for youth inclusion, empowerment and development through the finalization of the National Youth Policy. The Blue Print for Sierra Leonean youth is welcome, and we sincerely thank the GOSL and its development partners for the commitment to catalyzing results.

**But more needs to be done.** Sierra Leonean young people deserve to be empowered, and on this International Youth Day, we at YPPD and our partners are seeking the support of our allies and government to ensure that this is fulfilled. Now more than ever, we are calling on the government and partners to invest more in advancing youth empowerment, creativity, inclusion and active participation. More life needs to be put into revamping and expanding the Youth Farms and a clear strategy for accelerated returns that will directly benefit young people and by extension, the country as a whole.

**On this special day** where we come together to celebrate youth and renew our commitments to do all that we can to support them in stepping forward. And on this day, YPPD would like to renew its commitment to doing all that we can to accompany the change and empowerment processes that Sierra Leonean youth requires. This is especially important at a time when violence is increasingly becoming an everyday part of communities today.

Addressing food security is a significant step to fostering peace, reducing fragility, conflicts and violence, which primarily emanates due to lack /or availability of it. These are some complex challenges that the ***Inclusive Conflict Prevention and Peacebuilding Project or the Kolhat Barray*** seeks to address with young women and men as catalysts for change. To successfully manage this, we need holistic and

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integrated approaches, more significant policy, coherence, and do more to popularize the National Youth Policy and fully have it implemented.

We also need to build better and more robust partnerships and collaborate closely with all partners and stakeholders in conflict prevention, mediation and peacebuilding efforts in Sierra Leone.

***Reaffirming*** our dedication and commitment to delivering sustainable interventions seeking to empower young people, it is evident that the debate is no longer on the reactivity of government to promptly respond in addressing the growing challenges Sierra Leonean youth are faced with, but a collective call for to cooperate and demonstrate our resolve to tapping into the numbers that young people present.

**We call upon** all stakeholders to mainstream youth across all programs from inception through programming and implementation and invest in the young generation and appropriately consider them ‘as assets for transformation and development’.

Thank you

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