

Protecting Through Education

RET



3RD REGIONAL

YOUTH MEETING

WE HAVE SOMETHING TO SAY



DECLARATION

WE HAVE SOMETHING TO SAY

Youth of Latin America and the Caribbean



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Created and signed by young leaders from different countries of Latin America and the Caribbean during the 3rd Regional Youth Meeting “We Have Something to Say”

Panama City, Panama – August, 2015



Introduction

The present Declaration was produced by refugee youth groups, migrants and nationals of Colombia, Ecuador, Costa Rica, Panama and Venezuela. The ideas and proposals expressed are the result of a participative and reflective process sustained over a three-year period, from 2013-2015, promoted and driven by RET International for the Latin America & Caribbean region.

During the 3rd Regional Youth Meeting “We have Something to Say,” youth leaders from the aforementioned countries exchanged concerns, experiences and above all, demonstrated the impact that their actions have had on themselves, their environments and communities, thanks to the sustained efforts towards achieving a more complete integration and promoting constructive changes in their reality. This contributes significantly in reducing levels of violence and perception of xenophobia.

That the “youth have something to say” implies that they are recognized as having rights, that they are capable of protecting their right to have an education, to lead a life with dignity, to have access to employment and financial services, to start their own income-generating activities, and to organize and participate in matters that affect their quality of life and that of their communities.

At the moment of presenting this joint declaration, and after a sustained process of strengthening and empowerment, the youth have established four organized groups: **Madiba** of Costa Rica, **Jóvenes X¹** of Ecuador, **EACAJ²** and **Integración y Acción Juvenil³** of Panama and **Jóvenes Activos⁴** of Venezuela. Their actions are defined by themselves, according to their circumstances, the challenges that they share, their goals and vision for the future; always articulating local visions with national and regional perspectives.

Their perspectives in respect to the obstacles they face, the challenges that they continue to face, the way that they have proposed to overcome them, the commitments they have made as organized groups and, above all, the strength that they have to move forward and impact their reality in a constructive manner are evidenced in this declaration. They want to continue to inform, to sensitize and to grow their integration movement.

¹ Youth X

² Artistic and Cultural Evolution of Adolescents and Youth

³ Youth Integration and Action

⁴ Active Youth



Background

Many people are affected by crisis and situations of vulnerability generated by armed conflicts and disasters in Latin America and the Caribbean region. Considering the significant displacement of families from Colombia to different countries of Central and South America that has occurred over many years, RET International has assumed the task of providing support to refugees in this region, emphasising work with young people through education.

The first steps were taken in 2008 and 2009, with the first actions in support for refugee families and persons in situations of vulnerability in Latin America & the Caribbean, always emphasising the protection of the youth through education. The following years were of evolution and consolidation of a vision to strengthen the participation and organisation of young people, with local capacities.

Thus, for the years 2010 to 2015, a regional vision was consolidated through the different phases of the project “Strengthening capacities to ensure humanitarian assistance, social, economic, and educational integration of refugee families in Ecuador, Costa Rica, Panama and Venezuela”. This is the foundation on which youth participation and organisation is promoted and produces the necessary conditions for the realisation of the Regional Youth Meeting, “We have Something to Say.”

A comprehensive process was therefore developed for promoting participation, learning and youth leadership which has at its core a Regional Action Plan that facilitates the articulation of all interventions. The strategies combine the following: national reunions and meetings, workshops on topics such as violence (in its multiple forms), discrimination and xenophobia; recovery of historical memory; processes for the development of teamwork capabilities, organisation and leadership; activities for the use of free time and the development of life skills through theater, music and sports; preparation for access to employment and the creation and sustainability of income-generating activities.

The Regional Youth Meetings “*We Have Something to Say*,” have allowed for sharing, reflection, and proposing actions by youth leaders. In 2013, a synthesis of the challenges faced by young people was produced. In 2014 a broad proposal for coordinated activities for the region was developed and in 2015, the impact and results of enhanced levels of organisation were achieved: specific outreach projects for their communities and the proposal to establish themselves as a network, to such extent that their groups and initiatives are sustainable.



The following Declaration addresses future challenges to consolidating local and national knowledge, to opening spaces for the exchange of lessons learned and for knowledge generation, adapting actions to the contexts of each country, without losing the regional vision.



The Declaration

We, the young refugees, migrants and nationals from Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Panama and Venezuela, within the framework of the 3rd Regional Youth Meeting “*We have Something to Say*” and as a result of the participative and organisational processes that we developed with the support of RET International, have decided to produce this Declaration.

We want the youth from this region to know about our groups and the actions that we implement, and also that the people and authorities of the countries where we live have a better understanding of the situation that we face and that they recognize our proposition.

We hope that this way we can make ourselves heard, to inform, to motivate and to commit society to accompany us with our projects. As such, we affirm our responsibility to achieve the changes that we aspire for.

What we face:

- Many of us, youth from Latin America and the Caribbean, were faced with the need to seek refuge in other territories, to migrate, because of violence and risks (of social and natural origins) in our countries of origin.
- As young people, we face the same challenges: difficulties in achieving our dreams and pursuing our goals. Some of us have faced obstacles to access education, to be respected for our differences (customs, habits, accents, physical traits etc.), to integrate in income-generating as well as cultural and sports activities.
- We worry about the attitudes and messages that try to disunite us, to separate us and to confront us, between individuals, groups, ideologies, religions and nations.
- We also worry about prejudices and the lack of empathy amongst our equals. Manifestations of discrimination from one person to another because of one's age, race, birthplace or sexual orientation, afflict us.
- Many of us have experienced the process of adapting to new customs and cultures, the fear of arriving to a new country where we do not have support networks or guidance on how to go about and who to turn to for help.

What we are doing:

- We are participating in an integration process and we want to continue strengthening our groups and networks.
 - We work for a world without violence, without discrimination or xenophobia. This is a commitment that we reiterate each day.
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- We create our life visions and plans, as individuals and as a group, and through these we are including actions to support our families and to promote wellbeing in our communities.
- We develop and implement economic activities that allow us to access new educational opportunities, to improve our integration and to support the socio-economic development of our communities.
- We promote values within the contexts where we coexist through sports and cultural activities where other young people can join us.
- We lead and implement awareness and training processes to transmit our ideas and knowledge on topics that interest us.
- We influence in a positive manner authorities and communities to recognise us as youth protagonists.

What we propose:

- To continue strengthening and expanding our groups and networks so that more youth join this movement for integration.
- To present our experiences and situations as migrants and refugees, to open a dialogue with our peers in the countries and host communities.
- To promote integration through values such as solidarity, respect, acceptance and recognition of differences.
- To recuperate and honor our historical memory and culture, as well as those of the countries where we currently live.
- To inform and sensitize the world on migration, refuge and violence. People need to know about these phenomena in our countries, that we all can face situations that force us to be displaced and in face of this, it is indispensable to have solidarity and cooperation from everyone.
- To prepare and develop resilience to cope with the social and natural risks that we face.
- To protect and defend our rights to education and to accomplish our dreams and goals.
- To strengthen our political participation, our autonomy and our coordinated work with authorities and community leaders.
- To improve opportunities for access to and permanence in higher education (vocational or university) and to be able to practice our professions in our host countries upon graduation.
- To encourage the role of young people as economic agents in the communities and to promote access to financial services and employment opportunities.



- To consolidate the regional network “*We have Something to Say*” and to promote the construction of a global youth network, to have meeting spaces where we can exchange experiences, ideas and knowledge.

We are committed to continue working towards these objectives, to develop and implement these proposals, to continue strengthening our groups and to create a network that will serve as a platform to multiply our actions and to spread our message of integration to Latin America and the Caribbean and to the world.

We hope that more young people will sign this Declaration and become emissaries of this message, who will show through their actions that we can have an influence within our contexts, that we have a right to quality education and to an effective participation in all matters that impact our lives.

Furthermore, we hope that we can contribute to the construction of a world where our actions, as young people, will lead our communities to overcome moments of crisis and to achieve a greater social cohesion, peace and prosperity.

We sign this Declaration within the framework of the Regional Youth Meeting “*We Have Something to Say*”, Panama City, Panama, August 2015.