

40<sup>th</sup> Jubilee Year



XI ECPD Global Youth Forum  
**YOUTH POWER FOR THE COMMON FUTURE**  
With the main topic  
**YOUTH LEADERSHIP FOR SYSTEM CHANGE  
TO SAVE THE EARTH FOR ALL**

Belgrade, 29 October 2023 – 10:00 AM  
Hotel Hilton

**CONCEPT NOTE**

**CHAIR:**

**Prof. Dr. Arthur Dahl**, President, International Environment Forum, Geneva, Switzerland

The world is struggling with war and conflict, famine, pandemic diseases, impossible debt burdens, rising prices and the other multiple ills threatening our future. It is normal for youth to search for a positive way forward. Yet 2023 offers some glimmers of hope. At the international level, following up the UN Secretary-General's *Our Common Agenda* in 2021 that looked ahead 25 years, and the Stockholm+50 International Meeting in June 2022, there will be a Summit on the Sustainable Development Goals and a preparatory meeting for the 2024 Summit on the Future in New York in September 2023, the month before the Youth Forum. There are already many efforts leading to proposals for a better world, and youth can become actors for change. While the worst may not yet be behind us, there is much that youth can do to prepare solutions for the problems we face.

In 1972, a report to the Club of Rome on *The Limits to Growth* presented computer-generated scenarios of the possible futures as the world reached planetary limits to growth. The business-as-usual scenario led to the collapse of civilization by the mid-21st century, but alternative scenarios showed that sustainability was possible if we reduced population growth, resource consumption, industrial output and pollution. While these conclusions were derided and ignored at the time, the business-as-usual scenario has proven remarkably accurate in forecasting what actually happened. Now, 50 years later, the Club of Rome has issued a new report, *Earth for All*, (<https://www.earth4all.life/>) again using computer modelling to identify what we need to do to avoid a collapse that now seems likely. The report confirms what *Our Common Agenda*, the IPCC and IPBES, and many others have been saying, that we only have about ten years to turn the corner and make a fundamental transformation of our economy and society. It also provides a useful framework for the issues to be discussed in this ECPD Youth Forum: economic transformation, social change, and planetary health.

The report calls for a rapid systems-change, including the fastest economic transformation in history. There are five critical turn-arounds: The first is to eliminate **poverty** by expanding the policy space and dealing with debt, transforming the financial architecture, transforming global trade and improving access to technology so that poorer countries can leapfrog to a better future. Second, we need to greatly reduce **inequality** with better sharing of the wealth created by our economy, such as by dividends to which everyone is entitled. We then need an empowerment turnaround by achieving **gender equity**, transforming education, ensuring financial

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independence and leadership for women, and providing for a secure pension and dignified ageing, which also will address the population problem. The fourth change is to make the **food system** healthy for people and the planet instead of consuming the Earth's biosphere, by revolutionizing the way we farm, changing our diets, and eliminating food loss and waste. Fifth is the **energy** turnaround to address the climate crisis by introducing systemic energy efficiency, electrifying almost everything, and an exponential growth in new renewables. From these we can derive three themes for the Youth Forum with specific issues you can focus on.

### ECONOMIC TRANSFORMATION

A Transformational Economics Commission of the Club of Rome with many of the leading thinkers in alternative economics has combined six economic paradigms: well-being economics, degrowth, green growth, ecological economics, donut economics, and beyond GDP, to suggest what the economic transformation might look like. From a systems perspective, we need to move to a just and sustainable circular economy where nothing is wasted. Transformation requires resources, but these are wasted today on conflict and governments are blocked. How can civil society develop approaches to peace so that resources are no longer consumed supporting destruction? The present materialistic consumer society has been highly profitable for a few, while raping the planet's resources and leaving the majority struggling to meet their basic needs. Modelling shows that the neoliberal capitalist system with no government regulation inevitably leads to wealth concentration at the top. Even the efficiency of the market fails when monopolies are created. Innovation is captured to increase profits rather than shared for the well-being of all. With so much wealth available in the world, what needs to be done to eliminate poverty, and also restrain extreme wealth? Can businesses be given a social purpose? What role should governance play in regulating the private sector, including at the global level? What might a just economic system look like?

Behind the faults in the economic system itself are the assumptions underlying it, that humans are naturally selfish and aggressive and nothing can be done to change human behaviour. The resulting values of competition, winners and losers, selfishness and success over others represent the institutionalization of greed and corruption, with the ends justifying any means in the drive for power and wealth, both corporate and individual. Yet experience in many other cultures and communities shows that this is not the case. With education to higher values, people are just as naturally cooperative and altruistic. Youth are frequently rejecting such false assumptions and seeking more ethical values. What are the values you want to live by? How can you join others to take them forward? For youth today, it is a challenge to understand how you are sold superficial pleasures, manipulated by clever marketing, and driven to addiction with tobacco, alcohol, drugs and social media for the profit of others. Can you imagine better alternatives for more sustainable living, being content with little, and showing altruism and solidarity? What kind of lifestyle do you want, individually and collectively? What would be better indicators of human and environmental well-being than the monetary values of things traded in the market?

### SOCIAL CHANGE

Since extremes of wealth and poverty drive social instability, transforming the economy is a prerequisite for social change towards a more just, equitable and inclusive society. Another key determinant is to eliminate the marginalization of half the human race, the female and other gendered half. Science shows that there is no gender difference in human capacities and potentials. There has been progress on this in some parts of the world, but resistance and even regression in other places. While governments must play an important role in legislating gender equality, there is much that youth can do to set an example and push the older generations to change as well.

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There is an increasing call, including at the United Nations where there is an Envoy on Youth, to give youth a place at the table in discussions concerning their future. *Our Common Agenda* called for a focus on the future, through a deepening of solidarity with the world's young people and future generations. It recommends meaningful, diverse and effective youth engagement both within and outside the United Nations, including through better political representation and by transforming education, skills training and lifelong learning. There is a European Youth Portal ([https://youth.europa.eu/eu-youth-dialogue\\_en](https://youth.europa.eu/eu-youth-dialogue_en)) to enable an EU Youth Dialogue. Do not think that you are without a voice or cannot make a difference. Youth can be leaders in building social cohesion, seeing the diversity of the human race as an asset and source of wealth. You connect so easily with new technologies, and can organize effectively. You can reach out to the older generations for their wisdom and experience, while responding creatively to the new integrated world that has emerged. What can you do both to prepare for this role and to make your voices heard?

One issue where youth can immediately make a difference is migration. At a time when population displacements are increasing, whether from conflict and war, poverty or climate disasters, youth can do much to create a welcoming environment, assisting new arrivals - who are often youth as well - to find a place, build new friendships, and prepare a better future. Where youth can really lead is in social change at the community level in a spirit of service to others. You can organize your own projects for social action, identifying local problems, consulting with the community on possible solutions while ensuring the participation of all, trying out some actions within the resources available, and reflecting on the results in a process of learning. Older youth can help younger youth to build their capacity for service, and even organize classes for children. Think about all the roles that youth can play in building more just communities. Are you already engaged in some way? Do you have case studies to share?

## PLANETARY HEALTH

The triple environmental crises of climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution have become existential threats to our future, as youth have been insisting forcefully and effectively, but we are still not responding in time. The 15<sup>th</sup> Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity in December 2022 agreed to set aside 30% of the land surface and oceans by 2030 to protect nature and its ecosystem services and biodiversity. However, governments are notorious for signing on to ambitious agreements and then failing to implement them. You must keep up pressure on governments to fulfil their engagements. Contact with nature is important for our physical, mental and emotional wellbeing. Do you have ways to get out into nature, and perhaps to help others to do the same? Are there things you can do to protect your local biodiversity and restore nature? Since farming, particularly industrial agriculture and meat production, has been the major force clearing forests, destroying soils, over-using water resources and polluting lakes, rivers and the sea, transforming our food system is essential if we are to halt the loss of nature and restore damaged ecosystems. While not all youth are farmers, everyone is a food consumer, and we can change our diets, learn where our food comes from and how it was produced, stop wasting food ourselves, and even grow some of our own, perhaps in community gardens with a social dimension as well. What can you do to help transform food systems?

The most urgent planetary challenge is climate change, with greenhouse gas emissions continuing to rise to dangerous levels despite governments' agreement to limit them. With decisions in the Climate Change Convention made by consensus, countries benefitting from fossil fuel extraction can block progress, and there is no international enforcement. Since our world economy and the wealth of industrial nations was built on the cheap energy from fossil fuels, the transformation required to leave all that behind is enormous. It requires abandoning much of our industrial infrastructure, transport systems, building designs, consumer energy sources, intensive agriculture and much more. Yet the cost of not acting will be even greater as climate change

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catastrophes multiply and sea levels rise. We must become much more efficient in energy use, and electrify all that can be using electricity from renewable sources, which are now generally cheaper than alternatives. While youth cannot easily transform energy utilities or industrial processes on their own, there is much that everyone can do to use energy more wisely, turning off things on standby, and heating and cooling less. Some technologies for solar energy are within the reach of individuals. Youth can easily walk more, bicycle and use public transport, or prefer electric vehicles over those requiring fossil fuels. Can you think of other dimensions of a climate-friendly lifestyle?

### YOUTH FORUM

The Youth Forum will include keynotes and presented papers on the three themes above as well as workshop discussions on each theme. This is your forum. We invite you to submit your proposals to participate actively in this forum. The focus should be on actions that youth can take to address these problems, and even suggest possible careers in contributing to solutions.

