

Dear Mr. Chair,

Minister Hasani,

Your Excellencies, colleagues, and friends,

First and above all, we would like to thank Albania for conveying this important meeting, and for the support they give to RYCO together with their friends from the other 5 governments in the region of WB6, as well as the UNSC to dedicating special attention to this geographical region and bringing forward the importance of the YPS agenda in such a prestigious setting of decision-makers. Personally, I am deeply sorry for not being able to seize this opportunity to meet you all in person due to technical visa issues.

As an inter-governmental organization, derived from the Berlin process, and established by 6 Governments of the region of WB, we pride ourselves that ... alongside the 6 government representatives, **our governance** lies also on the voice and vote of 6 youth representatives from the region. This **co-management principle** that directly enables meaningful youth participation in decision-making is guiding our overall approach to peacebuilding, reconciliation and youth empowerment, and it is something that we want to have it integrated in all levels of society.

RYCO is the leading policy organization in WB6 that is mandated to support youth in the region, aiming to also promote the spirit of reconciliation and cooperation among youth, through youth exchange programs, ... following the example of Franco-German Experience and cooperation, that in this meeting is going to be elaborated by our sister- organization and our friend Tobias Butow.

Up to now, with our program, we have been supporting over 35.000 young women and men, boys and girls, through various: **exchange programs for schools and students, voluntary programs, social entrepreneurship programs, cultural activism programs**, and many

more. We are aware that a big burden is placed on our shoulders, and much more is expected from us, and that is why we welcome all youth-related initiatives coming from our friends and partners such as UN, EU, other regional initiatives, CSO's, and political stakeholders leading this region.

In our modern world, the concept of Peace faces significant obstacles due to **complex interconnections of various crises**. However, we keep noticing that the new generation is stepping up and actively addressing these challenges on a global scale. They are resilient, they are taking decisive actions within their communities to promote peace and justice.

It is beyond doubt that youth can play a positive role in Peacebuilding, reconciliation, and countering violent extremism. Our experience in uniting young people from diverse ethnic, national, and religious backgrounds, confirms that they are eager to overcome these differences. They are collaborating, connecting, and actively contributing to improving the region. By providing concrete examples they, the youth, freed from the burden of the past, **pave the road for our politicians to free themselves from the fear of cooperating** at the regional level.

Our research shows that 2/3 of youth in the region see the **Cooperation among political leaders in the region as a factor that contributes to peace** and that over 65% of youth want to get actively engaged in society. Today in the middle of challenges that threaten peace and stability in the region our joint Peacebuilding mission becomes more important than ever.

The YPS agenda and the UNSC resolution, have highlighted the need for young people to be center staged, be the primary actors, and involve them in crosscutting issues. At a smaller scale, regional level, RYCO is shaping itself as the main regional actor for the YPS agenda. This comes also as demand from young people of the region, who paced their needs and

concerns in the Berlin Youth declaration and asked leaders of the Balkans to take actions, get involved as well as support the YPS agenda. In this direction we believe that UNPBF has a crucial role, they should be supported even more by all of you, and we in RYCO are looking forward to continuing our cooperation, by presenting a new joint project that will address all the above-mentioned issues.

Realizing that youth need to be seen as **rights-holders, full citizens, and agents of positive change** and **that up to now nothing has been done with the YPS agenda in the region**, we took responsibility to become regional leaders in pushing and promoting it in WB, by focusing on multisectoral dialogue, as the first step towards forming firm coalitions that will support peace and human security in our region. All this came as input from **our YPS program activities** across the region, supported by the German Government, and we are looking forward to joining forces with the UN Agencies. One of our main tasks would be that, besides strong advocacy and lobbying in this direction, we need to work on securing funds for the YPS agenda as noted by the **Office of the Secretary General's envoy on Youth**, and the **United Network of Young Peacebuilders**.

It is our duty to reflect upon the needs and concerns of the Youth in the region before they get manipulated for political purposes or vote with their feet. We need to address seriously their concerns related to Corruption, low-quality Education, Brain drain, unemployment, quality of health services, environment and climate justice, hate speech, etc.

RYCO stands as a testament to your unwavering commitment and vision that enables youth to be the driving force leading toward a stable and peaceful WB. Our unique and robust infrastructure stands at the disposal of the UN and its agencies, as well as other regional initiatives that are eager to foster positive change. As we are on the same mission, let us join forces to empower young minds, involve them in decision-making processes, provide regional opportunities, support their visionary projects, and boost their capabilities.

We need the youth here to help us shape a brighter future, and they need us to support them not just with strong statements but also with deeds and funds.

A better region starts with youth

Thank you,