The Young UN

The Young UN is an internal network of more than 1500 young professionals across various UN entities (80+), that is advocating for the change and improvement of the UN. The network is decentralized in order to fairly reflect on the several processes that drive the organization away from its primary mission, and on other inefficiencies and misconceptions. There are 11 hubs of Young UN around the world, in Geneva, Paris, Bonn, Rome, Vienna, Addis Ababa, Nairobi, Mexico, New York and Bangkok. The coordination of the network is quite open and its members draw inspiration form inside and outside the UN. The work of the YUN is oriented around three criteria: a. it has to be in line with the UN principles, b. it has to be solution-driven, and c. it has to be cross-UN, in the sense that it concerns the entire UN Cluster.

There are 5 centers of work, namely the Policy Lab, a team focused on the SDGs and Climate Action, a team working on a UN Global Survey on ideas and feedback, another on Diplomacy and another one on the UN Identity. Their suggestions extend to a broad scope of topics, including the internal working dynamics, structures and policies, transparency, data ownership, frontier technologies and ethical questions related to "frontier issues", international agreements and treaty frameworks, income models, the relevance of the UN as the most representative body and many more issues of practical and ethical value.

The internal UN working systems are thoroughly evaluated by the YUN. Bureaucracy is identified as the biggest obstacle against efficiency throughout the entire UN System. Interconnectedness between entities, on the other hand is identifies as the most important solution. Concerning the working environment and relevant dynamics, the significance of mentorship programmes is highlighted, as well as ideas coming from a more innovative space, e.g. gamification.

On the direction of more classic diplomacy debates on world peace and democracy, the YUN recognizes that the relevance of the UN as the most representative body is an overstatement. As challenges become more and more global, multilateralism delivered by the UN comes at stake. Inclusiveness and a more diverse security council is suggested as the No.1 solution for the growing problem related to the UN's relevance and representation. At the same time, the abolishment of Veto comes second in the ranking among the suggested solutions. An alternative suggested within YUN's prepositions is the urge for the frequent use of "united for peace" resolution of the UN Charter, where the Security Council can be blocked.

Diverging from the traditional diplomacy issues the YUN pursues making UN more SDG conscious and efficient. In an extended survey, thousands of employees reflected on unsustainable behaviors across numerous UN entities. Upon the results of "My SDG confessions", as the survey was called, "flying too much" was reported to be by far the most unsustainable practice among UN employees. In September 2019, prior to the UN Climate Action Summit in New York, the YUN initiated an open conversation with UN Secretary General, Antonio Guterres, on the development of a bold UN System-wide climate action plan.

The network has outsourced their recommendations to the highest level coordination fora of the UN, the High Level Committee for Management and the High Level Committee for Programmes. The YUN have published an extended survey reflecting on the experiences of employees within the UN Cluster and additionally has released a paper called, "Navigating to the Next UN".

It seems as there is extended ground of common ideas and inspiration between the YUN and CUNCR. In some cases, there are hints that the YUN was actually inspired by the ideas of our organization. At the same time, their willingness to work with inspiring external players coming from the civil society could potentially serve as the mean that could push for changes and improvements suggested by CUNCR across the entire UN System.

By Fani Tsaroucha