



UN and Partners Launch Global Campaign Promoting the Rights of Young People To Run for Public Office

Geneva, 22 November 2016 - Today the global campaign *Not Too Young To Run* was launched at the first United Nations Forum on Human Rights, Democracy and the Rule of Law.

The campaign, which is launched by a partnership consisting of the Office of the UN Secretary-General's Envoy on Youth, the UN Development Programme (UNDP), the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), the European Youth Forum (EYF) and the Youth Initiative for Advocacy Growth & Advancement (YIAGA), aims to elevate the promotion of young people's right to run for public office and address the widespread issue of age discrimination.

"Young people have every right to be active participants in civic and public life and it is time to ensure they no longer face arbitrary barriers to run for public office – whether at the local, regional or national level," said the UN Secretary-General's Envoy on Youth, Ahmad Alhendawi. *"Through the Not Too Young To Run campaign, my office will work with partners around the world to raise awareness about the issue of age discrimination and promote and expand the rights of young people to run for public office."*

In a rapidly changing world where more than 50 percent of the population is under 30, but less than 2 percent of elected legislators are, the campaign highlights that the active participation of young people in electoral politics is essential to thriving and representative democracies worldwide. The campaign emphasizes young people's rights to engage fully in the democratic process, including the right of young people to run for office themselves.

The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein, said: *"Younger generations are not adequately represented in formal political institutions such as Parliaments, political parties and public administrations. This leads many to feel leadership and policymaking are reserved for an élite. A society that does not fully respect everyone's equal right to participate is fundamentally unsound. The right to express opinions – including criticism – and to participate in public affairs are essential to ensuring state institutions are accountable, grounded in service to the people."*

The UNDP Administrator, Helen Clark, said: *"Political participation is not just about the right to vote. It's also about the right to be elected. The right of young people to participate in the political arena in positions of leadership is at the core of UNDP's work to support inclusive political processes. The exclusion of young women and young men leads to their disenfranchisement, challenges the representativeness of institutions and affects young people's perception of political institutions and processes. This has a fundamental impact on the very quality of democratic governance. This campaign will address institutional barriers and aims to overcome the disenchantment that dissuades some young people from running for office."*



“If young people are not too young to get married, to serve in the military or to choose the parliamentarians who will represent them, they are Not Too Young To Run,” said IPU Secretary General Martin Chungong. *“IPU calls for the age at which people may run for political office to be aligned with the legally permitted voting age. IPU Member Parliaments agreed to this in 2010 when they adopted a resolution on youth participation in the democratic process. If more young MPs were elected, there would be more role models from whom young people could take their lead and engage in politics. The time has come to increase youth representation in politics and we are happy to join forces with the United Nations Envoy on Youth in this endeavor,”* he added.

The campaign brings to scale the movement of the same name that was started by YIAGA in Nigeria. The campaign will showcase young leaders in elected positions and inspire young people to run for office themselves.

Over its course, the campaign will gather inputs and ideas from young people around the world through a series of online activities and engagements, while providing a platform and resources for national campaigns to flourish.

Johanna Nyman, President of the European Youth Forum, said: *“We’re delighted to support the Office of the Secretary-General’s Envoy on Youth’s in the Not Too Young To Run campaign. Young people bring the fresh ideas and innovation to politics that are sorely needed! In an era when young people are turning away from traditional politics, we must all work together to increase youth participation in politics and to encourage political parties to welcome younger candidates and young people to run for political office. If the last few months of global political upheaval have taught us anything, it should be that politics needs young people more than ever and that young people do care passionately about the decisions made about their future.”*

Samson Itodo, the Executive Director of YIAGA, said: *“Any country guided by the principles of inclusion, freedom, equality and justice must ensure the full participation of young people in the electoral process. The passage of the #NotTooYoungToRun bill in Nigeria is the first step towards ensuring democratic consolidation and sustainable development.”*

The campaign kicked off at a side event at United Nations Geneva during the first Forum on Human Rights, Democracy and the Rule of Law, which this year focuses on the theme of “Widening the Democratic Space: The Role of Youth in Public Decision-making.”

About the campaign: Today’s generation of young people is the largest the world has ever known. Half of the global population is under the age of 30 and yet, young people are starkly underrepresented in government and politics at virtually every level. Efforts have been made around the world to promote the rights of young people running for public office by seeking to lower the legal age of candidacy. In 2007, a campaign entitled “How Old is Old Enough” lowered the age of candidacy requirement in England, Wales, and Scotland from 21 to 18, in line with the voting age. In Turkey, young people lobbied the government to reduce the age of candidacy for Parliament from 30 to 25 years in 2006. In Nigeria, the #NotTooYoungtoRun campaign has embarked on a mission to address age discrimination in candidacy for the legislative and executive branches, and serves as inspiration for the global campaign. Building on the



#NotTooYoungtoRun campaign in Nigeria, the global campaign Not Too Young To Run will be focused on promoting the rights of young people running for public office.

About the Office of the Secretary-General's Envoy on Youth: In 2013, the UN Secretary General's appointed Mr. Ahmad Alhendawi of Jordan as his first-ever Envoy on Youth and as the youngest senior official in the history of the organization. Mr. Alhendawi and his Office's mandate is to play a lead role in the harmonization of the UN system's efforts on youth development, to enhance the UN response to youth needs, to advocate for the development needs and rights of young people, as well as to bring the work of the United Nations on youth closer to them. The Envoy on Youth also acts as the advisor to and the representative of the Secretary-General on youth related matters.

About the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP): UNDP works in nearly 170 countries and territories, helping to achieve the eradication of poverty, and the reduction of inequalities and exclusion. We help countries to develop policies, leadership skills, partnering abilities, institutional capabilities and build resilience in order to sustain development results. UNDP supports countries' efforts to achieve the new Sustainable Development Goals by helping them build and share solutions in three main areas: (i) Sustainable Development; (ii) Democratic Governance and Peacebuilding; and (iii) Climate and Disaster Resilience. In all our activities, we encourage the protection of human rights and the empowerment of women, youth, minorities and the poorest and most vulnerable. With its first 5-year global programmatic offer on youth empowerment, the *Youth Global Programme for Sustainable Development and Peace* (Youth-GPS, 2016-2020), UNDP is set to leverage all of its strengths to respond to youth development challenges on the ground, addressing their complex and multi-dimensional nature while remaining sensitive to national and regional priorities to help achieve sustainable development and peace.

About the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR): The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) represents the world's commitment to universal ideals of human dignity. It has a unique mandate from the international community to promote and protect all human rights. OHCHR's thematic priorities are strengthening international human rights mechanisms; enhancing equality and countering discrimination; combating impunity and strengthening accountability and the rule of law; integrating human rights in development and in the economic sphere; widening the democratic space; and early warning and protection of human rights in situations of conflict, violence and insecurity.

About the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU): The Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) is the world organization of parliaments; it has a membership of more than 170 Member Parliaments. The IPU promotes democratic governance, institutions and values and works with parliaments and parliamentarians to articulate and respond to the needs and aspirations of the people. The IPU promotes youth participation as a key element of democracy and inclusive and efficient political processes. It monitors youth representation in parliament and provides guidance on means to enhance it. It has established within its own structures a youth-led Forum of Young



Parliamentarians that brings together young MPs from all around the world to work together for the involvement of young parliamentarians and youth in general in decision-making. The IPU also supports parliaments in better responding to the needs of youth and integrating their perspectives into parliamentary work.

About the European Youth Forum (EYF): The European Youth Forum is the platform of youth organisations in Europe. Independent, democratic, youth-led, it represents over 100 National Youth Councils and international youth organisations from across the continent. The Forum works to empower young people to participate actively in society to improve their own lives, by representing and advocating their needs and interests and those of their organisations towards the European Union, the Council of Europe and the United Nations. For more information, visit www.youthforum.org.

About the Youth Initiative for Advocacy Growth & Advancement (YIAGA): YIAGA is a civic hub promoting democratic governance, human rights and youth political participation. Established in 2006, YIAGA is one of the main organizations promoting democracy, elections and youth participation in Africa. YIAGA envisions an African continent where democratic rights and youth participation are guaranteed. YIAGA's mission is to be a frontline youth 'think' and 'do' tank promoting democratic governance through research, policy advocacy and capacity development. YIAGA is a founding member of the Africa Movement for Democracy and has facilitated the creation of several youth networks in Africa. YIAGA facilitated the creation of the first Youth coalition on constitution and electoral reform in Nigeria. YIAGA is currently leading the #NotTooYoungToRun campaign in Nigeria.

To learn more about the campaign, visit: www.nottooyoungtorun.org

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