

# Statement: Young Gifted Black

represented by Akeyo Elsa Williams

## Introduction

Hello, my name is Akeyo Elsa Williams. I am from Germany and currently living and working in France. I am representing at today's panel on "We are the change we seek!" Child/Youth of African Descent Agency and Activism" the initiative Young Gifted Black. "Young Gifted Black" (YGB) is an initiative and team of young Black, African, Afro-diasporic people who have been organizing regular youth gatherings in Germany since 2017. We are currently planning our next meeting after two years of a pandemic, which will take place on a weekend in spring of 2023 and which will be the first gathering organized on a European level.

The aim of the Spring 2023 meeting is to exchange, network and spend time together as Black, African and Afro-diasporic people from different European countries. We want to create a common empowerment space and strengthen the sense of unity. We want to create and offer different workshops, activities and space for exchange and conversations.

## History

Young Gifted Black was born at the nation wide annual meeting – the so called Bundestreffen – of the **Initiative Schwarze Menschen in Deutschland (ISD) – Initiative of Black People in Germany**. The Bundestreffen has been held once a year for almost 40 years and is the largest event of the Black community in Germany. Starting in 2016, the voices of Black youth and young people became louder and louder to have an independent meeting with spaces exclusively for young Black, African and Afro-Diasporic people.

The ISD represents the interests of Black people in society and politics and wants to influence legislation. The topics of everyday racism, racist violence and police violence are central priorities of the work.

The ISD does not see itself as the sole representative of Black people in Germany, but rather as part of the Black community with all its NGOs, initiatives, associations and projects.

The goal is to promote the political participation of Black people and to improve their living situation in Germany. The ISD demands an anti-racist approach in all areas of politics (education, residence, citizenship, asylum legislation) and that the reality of different and overlapping forms of discrimination be recognized. Aware that collective, political work is essential, the ISD organizes networking among Black and immigrant communities.

The first local groups of the Initiative Black People in Germany (ISD) were founded after a first nationwide meeting in 1985. Since these beginnings, it has seen itself as a self-organization of Black people, for them and with them. Nationwide, the work of the association always started from regionally and locally organized groups. To this day, these groups work on a grassroots democratic basis and are attached to the umbrella organization ISD Bund e.V., which was founded in 2001.

Since its existence, the initiative has been strengthening the opinion-forming among Black people in Germany and has repeatedly gone public with campaigns, actions and press releases in order to articulate substantive criticism of social injustices and (anti-Black) racism.

In 2011, the ISD initiated the ongoing campaign "Stop Racial Profiling", which aims to educate about discriminatory and racist police practices and to claim equality from the constitution.

The ISD is anchored in the struggle against (post)colonial continuities and supports the UN Decade for People of African Descent (2015-2024). It has been involved in and/or initiated local and regional Townhall Meetings and self-organized conferences in Berlin, Frankfurt and Cologne. Currently, it wishes for more commitment from the German government, which has helped to initiate this Decade at the UN level, but has so far remained conspicuously reticent in its national implementation.

The various local groups and the ISD Bund organize a wide variety of projects. These include cooperation events with other local initiatives and associations, work in youth groups, political education work, empowerment trainings and networking meetings for Black people within the association. Every year, many events come together in February on the occasion of Black History Month (BHM). At the national level, ISD-Bund coordinates supra-regional events, campaigns and does public relations work. In addition, with the emergence of the ISD more than 35 years ago, another highlight of the year has been established: the traditional national meeting, where many hundreds of Black people of all generations come together, discuss, spend free time, make plans and - celebrate each other.

And it was at a so-called Bundestreffen that Young Gifted Black also found its beginning in 2015 and 2016. I personally grew up with the Bundestreffen as a child of my Black German mother, who herself has been part of the Black German movement since her youth. I was almost 14 years old at the 2015 Bundestreffen. At that time, as part of a workshop for young people, we young people had the opportunity to exchange freely about our experiences and our needs. It quickly became clear that for many of us, the Bundestreffen was the only opportunity we had during the year to exchange with other Black young people and that we needed more than that. Therefore, we decided that we wanted to organize our own youth meeting where we - the young Black community would be the focus.

Between 2017 and 2019, these spaces of exchange, networking and empowerment were created in different locations in Germany, for four days each. The Orga Team was largely composed of Black, African and Afro-diasporic youth and young people. The meetings were organized in cooperation with the ISD and Each One Teach One (E.O.T.O.). E.O.T.O is a community-based education and empowerment project in Berlin. Founded in 2012, the association opened its doors in March 2014 as a neighborhood library and has since been a place of learning and encounter. Together with other organizations, EOTO e.V. fights for the interests of Black, African and Afrodiasporic people in Germany and Europe.

During the meetings there was a common plenum every morning, where we discussed substantive topics and came to agreements with each other, how we wanted the space / the spirit of the YGB Meeting to be. . In the course of the days there were then morning & Afternoon workshop offerings such as: Rap, Poetry, Stencil & Anti-Racism, Black History, Mentoring offerings, a Racial Profiling workshop, a Hair workshop, Black Sexuality workshop, Dance workshops, and many more offerings and spaces, some of which came out of initiatives at the meetings. Such as safer spaces for queer people and spaces for dark skinned people that emerged at the last meeting in 2019.

In addition, the framework was generally structured in such a way that leisure activities were also offered throughout the day and we were able to get to know each other informally.

Due to the pandemic, the YGB meetings have not taken place after since 2020.

The YGB is the first meeting of this kind in German history known to us - self-organized & for Black, African and Afro-diasporic youth. This is already a success and groundbreaking for the next steps.

I personally moved to France, Marseille, from Germany in 2020. For months I searched for a young Black community, which I did not find. Marseille is the second largest city in France, where for a European city relatively many Black people live, but nevertheless political Black structures are not present, which is also due to the fact that in the French law meetings that are officially reserved for certain communities based on race such as the Black community are forbidden.

After I arrived in France in 2020, I had many discussions with young Black people from France and spent a lot of time looking for Black groups and organizations. Through social media and exchanges among friends and other contacts, I kept noticing that other young Black people were also looking for a community. I realized that there was a lack of offers and political spaces explicitly for Black people. With the need to establish a community in France and the desire to build structures beyond German borders, my vision of a Young Gifted Black Europe Community was born.

In October 2021 I started to contact former members of the former Organizing Team and possible interested people and presented them my idea of a YGB Europe meeting.

The wish to network with Black people from other European countries quickly resonated within the community. Because we as a Black, African, Afro-diasporic young community are so often affected by the same issues related to racism that roots in the same colonial racist ideas and structures with effects up until today, we want to come together and address these collective experiences together to create spaces of empowerment and unite young Black voices in Europe.

We are now a team of about 10 people with different back grounds that meets regularly to discuss. We take decisions together. We have working groups. This summer we will do trips to get in personal contact with other groups.

For now we are mainly based in Germany. In autumn we organize a network meeting .

## Goal

The first concrete goal of Young Gifted Black Europe is for us to come together for four days in a youth hostel in the spring of 2023. Us, that is young people between the ages of 15 and 27 who identify as Black, African or Afro-diasporic in Europe.

As an important part of Young Gifted Black Europe we also understand the preparation process of the meeting. This already offers the opportunity to be present and participate in the conception of workshops and projects, in networking and applying for funds and many other tasks within the organization of such a meeting. Above all, it is an opportunity to get involved in a young Black, African and Afro-Diasporic team.

Another Goal for us is, as YGB, to learn together and to share knowledge and experiences with each other.

We want to come together on a long weekend with Black, African and Afro-diasporic young people from different European countries and cities in a central and easily accessible location, to exchange, to network & spend time together. We come together as a Black, African and Afro-diasporic youth group that has an interest in an exchange on the topic of the realities of living as a Black, African, Afro-diasporic youth in Europe, facing racism on a daily basis. , finding strategies for dealing with it. We want to use the weekend for networking, to reflect on how we can better organize ourselves politically, as well as for inputs, creative offers & also informal time.

The ostensible goal of this project is for us - Black youth to come together, network and meet within the context of a community. We want to come into exchange about what occupies us in life, what we wish for and also what inspires us. We want to organize on a political level.

Recognizing that racist discrimination based on various ascribed characteristics such as racialization, gender, sexual orientation, disability, nationality, residency status, and age intertwine in complex ways, we strive to create a community of Black youth and to create spaces of protection and reflection.

Another goal is to reflect on the ways in which it would be beneficial and appropriate for Black youth groups across Europe to organize and establish themselves more politically in order to be heard and visible as a part of society.

Possible program points in the form of workshops could be:

Rap, Poetry, Dance, Black History, Racial Profiling, Mentoring opportunities, Hair workshop or Mental health

## Vision

We want to unite and confront our collective experiences together to co-create spaces of empowerment and unite young, Black, African, and Afro-diasporic voices in Europe.

We are sure that change is only possible if affected people are involved in the process of change. In order to work collectively politically, you first need an understanding of the realities of life in order to make political demands together and thus set society in motion.

We see YGB Europe as a possible platform to enable the negotiation process in the community and are looking forward to our next meeting in spring 2023.