

Thematic Discussion: Culture & Recognition

Thank you, honorable chairperson, permanent forum, member states, civil society, and youth for this opportunity to give my thoughts and suggestions today. I am Cameron Clarke, a first-year master's student at Florida International University's Latin America and Caribbean Studies Program. I am also a member of the ICSWG Youth Sub-Committee, working as the University Engagement Chair and a part of the Black Diplomat's Academy 2024 cohort.

When thinking of the subject of recognition, one of the main areas I think of as a young person is the recognition of youth in different spaces. The questions I wonder: Are the ideas of youth of African descent being uplifted? Are the youth of African descent being properly heard? Are youth of African descent in the room when policy is being made? Are their thoughts and ideas being implemented by their hands whilst at the table of change? Often, the answers to these questions are no, somewhat, maybe, or a combination of all three. I am grateful for the work that has been done on all levels in supporting and uplifting youth in different spaces, however, more needs to be done. Whilst youth are spoken to, being told that we are the future, the thought of youth leading these discussions and change often fall to the wayside. Why are we not allotted more opportunities for training and pipelines to build the future?

My suggestions echo the sentiments provided by my colleagues within this space who have spoken before me; we must invest further in youth and amplify **what the youth want, not what we are told we want**. Youth must steer spaces centered on youth where we have historically been underrepresented.

If youth are to lead these monumental and necessary changes suggested at the forum and in our respective communities, having youth present is the first step, but it is incomplete until we are the ones directing policy.

I recommend the creation of a working group involving policymakers, youth-based civil society organizations, member states, and youth of African descent, especially, to find avenues for increasing accessibility and efficacy of youth involvement within our respective communities. There is a difference between youth led versus youth serving, just as there is a difference between youth created and just listening to youth. Currently in many areas, it is the latter of both, not out of animosity I believe but due to not knowing methods for the proper participation of the youth voice. These different methods within our respective groups need to be shared and collaborated on for the full usage of the youth perspective.

Putting youth in the seat and having us lead this journey for the people of African descent is a must. Also, to echo the eloquence of my colleague Miles, we recommend that the youth should have 2 permanent chairs on the forum. Thank you.