

PRESS RELEASE

PARTICIPATING IN PUBLIC HEARINGS

Young people make their voice heard in Congress, in defence of their proposals for modifying the National Development Strategy

Santo Domingo.- 1 September 2011.- Young people representing thirty national youth organisations and institutions in the Dominican Republic made their voices heard in the National Congress in defence of their proposals for modifying the bill for the National Development Strategy Law, during the public hearings held at the National Assembly today.

Among their proposals, the group of young people stressed the need for a pact for quality education in the country and that once the law is promulgated, a timeframe of one year should be set, so that all the political, social and economic forces may push through the reforms needed in that sector.

Martha Contreras, a representative of the team Following-Up the Consultation of Adolescents and Young People on the National Development Strategy, requested the inclusion of young people in the design and execution of social as well as economic State policies, as well as in the implementation and follow-up of the Law.

“Young men and women make up almost 50% of the total national population, a sufficient number for having a voice and being heard when issues concerning the country’s development are tackled. From here to 2003, we young people will be the ones who occupy decision-making spaces, and who will be responsible for these roles that you and other officials currently carry out”, she declared to the Bi-cameral Commission.

Luis Pelletier from the Azua Youth and Children’s Municipality requested that for the implementation of the National Development Strategy, the immediate revision and updating mandate of the Law’s Pluri-annual plan should be specified, once the Law is approved. “Because not updating it would be in violation of articles 48 and 50 of the Strategy, contradicting Art. 241 of the Dominican Constitution,” he stated.

Beykel Custodio of the Youth Municipalities Advisory Network proposed that instead of the term “decent employment” it should say “dignified employment”, in the dissenting point 24 identified by the Economic and Social Council, upon explaining that the third strategic axis of the National Development Strategy advocates for dignified employment in article 9 and its general objective 3.4, and the Constitution of the Republic in article 62 that also says “It is an essential purpose of the State to promote dignified and remunerated employment”.

Reyna Guerrero of the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) Consultative Youth Panel proposed that the topic of sexual and reproductive health should be included in the educational curriculum.

“If we’re talking about a quality education in the Strategy, it should also be guaranteed that schools do not exclude adolescents for being pregnant”, she stated.

The young people arrived three hours before the start of the public hearings, to register their 12 interventions, as representative members of the following institutions: Youth and Children's Municipalities, World Vision, A Roof for my Country, Tu-Mujer, Red Cross, National Youth Network, Sirve Quisqueya, Pastoral Youth Service, and others.

United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) representative in the Dominican Republic María Jesús Conde Zabala, who also spoke at the public hearings, praised the work of the legislators during the consultation process at national level, and acknowledged the importance of the Bill in the country's institutional progress, "to boost a strategic framework of public policies in the medium and long term".

"It is of great relevance in order to progress in the fight against poverty, that the undocumented population should be explicitly included in objective 2.1.2 (of the strategy) that refers to making education universal from pre-school to middle school. Children and adolescents must not be penalized with the denial of the human right to education, due to their legal status. It is also a violation of other rights, like the right to a name and a nationality", declared Conde Zabala during her speech.

After a year of consultations in all the country's regions, the young people achieved the inclusion of three of their six suggestions for modifying the Bill, which they defended before the members of the Bi-cameral commission in charge of the process.

Following on from these public hearings, in which 50 representatives of the country's social, political and economic organisations and institutions took part, a one-day seminar will be held for the legislators to analyze the Bill, and the Bi-Cameral Commission will then proceed to its final revision.

Consultation process

For more than a year, and with the support of UNICEF and UNFPA, five regional consultations were held, attended by some 600 young people and adolescents, in a process that they led and facilitated themselves.

The proposals suggested by the young people that were accepted include the establishment of a one-year timeframe for a pact for educational quality, and that the NDS monitoring and evaluations mechanisms should include the National Youth Council (articles 22 and 39 of the preliminary proposal).

For more information, please contact:

Patricia García, UNICEF, Communications Officer, Tel. 809-841-0741, pgarcia@unicef.org
María Eugenia del Pozo, Communications Consultant, Tel. 809-473-7373 ext. 392

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