

18 September 2023

To the informal ministerial meeting on education and youth,

The Baha'i International Community would like to express its appreciation for the agenda of the informal ministerial meeting on education and youth, taking place on 18 and 19 September. The three topics that were chosen demonstrate the commitment of the European Union to ensure that youth are central to devising solutions to contemporary challenges.

We therefore would like to offer considerations for working sessions 1 and 3, which we believe are necessary for every young member of society, no matter their background or circumstance, to meaningfully contribute to shaping Europe's future.

**Working session 1: “A European policy that puts youth at the center of political commitment, through an inclusive and participatory approach that guarantees the rights and well-being of young people in the EU.”**

*Youth as drivers of social progress*

Motivated by convictions in social justice, and a vision of a world without divisions, young people bring creative energy, courage, and a sense of hope to attempts to address the many pressing challenges humanity faces. In order to release their latent capacity, youth must be viewed as protagonists and drivers of social change, not simply as one more stakeholder to be occasionally consulted.

*Consequential involvement in shaping social systems and structures*

To treat youth as meaningful protagonists requires their participation in spaces where consequential decisions are made. Isolated events and spaces risk relegating the efforts of youth to the margins of policymaking processes. Fostering a culture in which youth feel that their voices are heard and their opinions valued will require not only formal mechanisms which allow for youth participation, but a posture of openness to the creative and sometimes challenging

insights that young people will bring to policy discussions. The challenge is to allow youth to not just contribute to policy processes, but to encourage them to rethink and help reshape existing social structures. Young people should not be seen as passive inheritors of existing social systems.

### **Working session 3: “How can education promote common values and democratic citizenship in the EU?”**

#### *Common values are nurtured by common identity*

Any attempt to promote common values must be rooted in the promotion of a common human identity. This recognition of common identity makes it possible to commit to shared values and norms, even in complex and pluralistic societies. Educational systems, then, from early childhood to adult education, must nurture a broader sense of “us” as a means to counter the proliferating categories of “us and them”.

#### *Diversity as strength not weakness*

It is important to note, in this connection, that common values and a common identity are not inconsistent with respect for diversity. To the contrary, secure recognition of common human identity provides the stability to value diverse ways of life and a basis for an ongoing learning process about how shared values are best understood and applied. In addition to promoting common values, educational systems must thus promote dialogue among young people about these values, recognising that a diversity of perspectives is essential to the process of refining shared norms and principles.

#### *Committing to the well-being of society as a whole*

Education consists of more than equipping young people with the technical knowledge and skills to participate in the labor market. Promoting democratic citizenship will only be possible through an educational system which nurtures commitment to promoting the welfare of others. After all, the willingness to uphold shared values and democratic norms derives from a commitment to the well-being of society as a whole.

Tackling climate change, eradicating racism, and resolving food insecurity, to give only a few examples, will require the active participation of youth. Without their contribution, humanity

simply will not be able to overcome the most pressing challenges it faces. Educational and policymaking processes must both draw on, and actively promote, the reservoir of potential for social transformation that exists within the young people of the world.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a stylized 'R' followed by a long horizontal line that tapers to the right.

Rachel Bayani, Representative  
Brussels Office