



## Building bridges between youth and climate advocates in the MENA region and Europe

Sharing experiences and best practices ahead of COP27

### Executive Summary

On 26 October 2022, the Swedish Dialogue Institute for the Middle East and North Africa hosted an interactive round table discussion online on the theme of *“Building bridges between youth and climate advocates in the MENA Region and Europe – sharing experiences and best practices ahead of COP27”*.

The discussion brought together around 40 people from across the MENA region and Europe. It aimed at strengthening connectivity and exchanges between youth and climate experts from the MENA region and Europe, many of whom will attend COP27.

The meeting also aimed at contributing to a sharing of best practices and advice on how to prepare for and what to expect from the COP gathering. In addition, the meeting provided an opportunity for youth to share their messages and contribute to policy messages and recommendations ahead of COP27.

The panellists shared experiences and best practices with first time participants of COP. These included:

- enjoy the learning and capacity-building experience
- prepare logistical arrangements ahead of time
- prepare well for the sessions and negotiations ahead of COP
- cooperate with others in identifying common demands and on policy recommendations
- build partnerships and alliances with others to advocate for the identified demands
- strengthen your networks with key actors regionally and globally; and have realistic expectations on the meeting.

The discussion also included some recommendations on how to move forward for more effective and inclusive COP processes in the future. These recommendations included:

- reconsidering procedures concerning the issuance of badges for the COP;
- ensuring youth inclusion and representation of marginalized groups, as well as small scale initiative and CSOs not participating in COP;
- conducting needs assessment with local communities with a view to better have their voices represented;
- raising awareness among broader spectra of society and push governments to do more for climate action;
- providing protection for activists, especially those involved in human rights, including climate justice; as well as
- ensuring a more fair and inclusive representation of participating countries.

## Detailed report

On 26 October 2022, the [Swedish Dialogue Institute for the Middle East and North Africa](#) hosted an interactive round table discussion online on the theme of *“Building bridges between youth and climate advocates in the MENA Region and Europe –sharing experiences and best practices ahead of COP27”*.

The discussion brought together around 40 people from across the MENA region and Europe, representing youth activists, civil society organizations, academia, experts, human rights advocates, and international organizations. While some participants had extensive past experiences in COP, others would participate for the first time. Other participants had wished to take part in COP, but were not able for one reason or the other.

The online session aimed at strengthening connectivity and exchanges between youth and climate experts from the MENA region and Europe, attending COP27, and contributing to a sharing of best practices and advice in how to prepare for and what to expect from the COP gathering. In addition, the session aimed at promoting intergenerational and intra-regional dialogue on climate change and inclusive participation in the MENA region and between the region and Europe. Furthermore, the purpose of the session was to provide an opportunity for youth to share their messages and contribute to policy messages and recommendations ahead of COP27.

The meeting was facilitated by Mr. Johan Berggren, Deputy Director of the Dialogue Institute. Ambassador Mattias Frumerie, Sweden’s Head of Delegation to UNFCCC, was invited to set the context for the discussion by giving an update of the COP process. A following panel discussion featured Mr. Axel Eriksson, Swedish UN Youth Delegates in the UNFCCC; Dr. Nadim Farajalla, Director, Climate Change and Environment Program, Issam Fares Institute for Public Policy and International Affairs; Ms. Olfa Jelassi, Gender & Climate Expert/Advocate and Ms. Jennifer Unelius, Climate negotiator & Gender focal point, Swedish Environmental Protection Agency and member of Swedish COP Delegation.

Ambassador **Charlotta Sparre, Director of the Dialogue Institute** opened the meeting and provided a brief overview on the Institute’s recent work on climate change and stressed that this is one of the most crucial issues for the MENA region and globally. She highlighted that the Institute plans to continue to work on inclusivity in climate action, not least in promoting meaningful inclusion of young voices.

**Ambassador Mattias Frumerie, Sweden's Head of Delegation to UNFCCC**, thanked the Dialogue Institute for arranging the meeting in preparation for COP27 and welcomed the chance for intra-regional dialogues. He highlighted three main areas that are expected to be covered in the upcoming COP taking place in Sharm Al Sheikh: emission gap, climate adoption, loss, and damage. He explained that mitigation work mainly focuses on bringing countries together to share best practices and encourage each other to take further steps to accelerate climate action nationally. Based on the climate policy framework, the goal is to be climate neutral by 2045, and there are targets to be implemented ahead of time, such as engagement in dialogue with other countries and providing support to the countries to become more ambitious. The second element is the finance needed for implementation of policies and the ongoing support to developing countries to secure efficient climate action and the need for all countries to be designing suitable investment frameworks. The third element is innovative technology, which includes available and future solutions to accelerate and implement the policies.

Ambassador Frumerie stressed that three elements are interrelated, and he highlighted that, accomplishments of one country on a national level can affect and reflect at a global level. With regards to climate adoption, the Ambassador stated that while emission mitigation can be easily measured, it is harder to measure climate adoption. The third area expected to be covered in the upcoming COP27, is the so-called loss and damage, referred also to as reconstruction development. The ambassador emphasized the importance of countries supporting and learning from each other. For instance, the “green revolution<sup>1</sup>” in Sweden might encourage work in other countries. In addition, he stressed the need to find spaces for diverse voices to be heard and called for more inclusivity in climate action, especially amongst youth and by civil society actors at large.

A panel discussion followed, which featured speakers from Sweden and the MENA region, speakers with a rich experience in COP. The panel focused on sharing experiences, lessons learned and advice for first time COP participants as well as tips on how to prepare and be acquainted with the structure of COP. **Mr. Axel Eriksson, Swedish UN Youth Delegates in the UNFCCC** emphasized the importance of preparing well in advance, incl. on logistical matters (transportation, food, and accommodation). He mentioned that COP provides youth with a great opportunity to meet relevant stakeholders on climate action from all over the world. He advised first time participants to have realistic expectations; to have clearly defined demands; and to prepare well before going to COP. He also pointed to the responsibility for youth participants from the global North to collaborate with and support colleagues from the global South and actively contribute to giving space for other youth to speak and participate.

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<sup>1</sup> See: [Sweden's green revolution in response to climate change - Washington Post](#)

**Dr. Nadim Farajalla, Director, Climate Change and Environment Program, Issam Fares Institute for Public Policy and International Affairs** stated that youth involvement in COP meetings has evolved over the years, adding that comparatively youth today have more room to speak and participate. However, the different Zones (blue, green etc) still limit youth from being fully involved in the negotiations and side meetings. Dr. Farajalla said that one of the best practices when forming the delegations is to include youth as full members of the delegations - not only as observers - as this would ensure their “real” participation. Furthermore, Dr. Farajalla pointed out that the main work is done during preparatory discussions and negotiations ahead of the COP meetings and stressed that youth inclusion is essential also in that phase. He finally noted that participation in a COP meeting is a good learning experience that participants should “attend, explore and enjoy”.

**Ms. Olfa Jelassi, Gender and Climate Expert and Advocate** pointed out that support from fellow advocates was helpful, especially coordination meetings that were conducted in order divide tasks and attending sessions/discussions based on everyone’s interests. Ms. Jelassi stressed the importance of connecting and networking with civil society organizations to know more about their work as well as work by other relevant stakeholder prior to, and during the meeting. Ms. Jelassi advised first time participants to learn more about COP by attending online trainings, connecting with others, attending constituency meetings, to better understand the items on the agenda. She added that COP is a learning and capacity-building process, especially when moving from the national to global level. Therefore, according to her, participants must specify their demands and develop precise and concise messages and policy recommendations to present at the meeting.

**Ms. Jennifer Unelius, Climate negotiator & Gender focal point at the Swedish Environmental Protection Agency and Member of Swedish COP Delegation** explained what it meant to be involved in the actual negotiations. At the same time, she pointed to time constraints limiting her ability to interact other actors, at side events and networking activities. Mrs. Unelius emphasised the need for more dialogue between civil society and official delegations. She advised civil society to coordinate their efforts with the delegations and be specific on their requests on what topics to highlight and advocate for during COP.

The panel discussion was followed by a Q&A session. Some of the questions that were raised concerned security measures around the COP meeting, the issuance of participants badges according to zones and the risks that climate and human rights advocates risk facing. The discussions also touched on arranging actions not only at the COP meeting but also elsewhere, and the importance of coordinating actions with different constituencies to make sure that diverse voices are being heard – not least young voices.

Participants then discussed hopes, aspirations, goals, and concrete priorities for COP27; how to achieve them; and how to follow up, in smaller breakout groups, putting forward recommendations for attending COP gatherings, **these recommendations and take away included:**

- Enjoy the learning and capacity building experience.
- Prepare well ahead of the meeting, incl. logistical arrangements (accommodation, food, and transportation).
- Cooperate with other organizations in your country and region to identify common demands.
- Familiarize yourself with the topics to be discussed in COP and explore whether the themes are interesting for your participation.
- Divide tasks among country delegation to maximize attendance and for follow-up on the discussions/ negotiations.
- Build partnerships and alliances with others to advocate for demands and ensure that the voices of youth are being heard and that they are given a chance to participate.
- Be well-acquainted and well prepared for the sessions/negotiations ahead of COP by reading the agenda with all of its components, attending capacity-building trainings and possibly attend online COP, bearing in mind that task division and time management are key to having the opportunity to attend the discussions/sessions and communicating with key actors.
- Use the COP as an opportunity to enhance your networking with key actors in the region and globally concerning climate action.
- Have realistic expectations for the discussions and outcomes of COP and know that COP is an ongoing learning experience/ journey.
- Address key demands, provide policy recommendations, and push concise and precise messages instead of only explaining challenges and obstacles that are well known.
- In the preparatory work, make sure to include all affected people of climate change (for example farmers and broad parts of the population, incl. marginalized groups) who are not able to participate in global events such as COP27.

## For Effective COP Processes/ Moving Forward

- Reconsider the procedures concerning the issuance of the badges for COP. Several participants called for more transparency and for identifying clearer criteria.
- Ensure youth inclusion, as well as representation of marginalized groups especially those most effected by climate change. In addition, find mechanisms to include small scale initiatives and CSOs, not participating in COP, and push towards having “the hidden voices” heard in COP meetings and in pre-COP preparations.
- Conduct needs assessment with communities with solid and concrete mechanisms to represent their voices.
- Raise awareness among people and push governments to do more for climate change.
- Ensure protection for activists, especially those involved in human rights.
- Include youth through education/schools, by establishing a base for youth leaders on the topic of climate change who can later represent their communities.
- Invest in research and make data easily available and accessible.
- Ensure fair representation of participating countries. Some countries have delegations with large numbers of members, while others participate in small groups due to financial constrictions, which limits their participation in the events during COP.
- Ensure capacity building of participants so they become familiar with the dynamic of COP, and not only carrying out encouragement of participation.
- Inclusion of everyone is important, as global environmental justice is for generations to come.

Thanking participants for their rich and constructive contributions and recommendations Charlotta Sparre said the report from this meeting would be shared with relevant stakeholders and that follow-up events were to be expected after COP27 and in the preparations for the COP28.

To sum-up the meeting Sparre gave the floor to Dr. Nadim Farajalla – a veteran in attending COP meetings - who wrapped up the session by underlining that throughout his extensive experience over the years, he had noticed that young people bring in enthusiasm and new energy to the gatherings they attend, while they by attending developed their skills to better articulate their positions and lobby for their demands. He emphasized that youth creativity should not be held back by the older generation, but rather that the older generation should look at ways of supporting the next generation. His message to youth engaged in climate action was: ***“Keep doing what you are doing, make your voice heard, while doing so responsibly”.***