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YABT PRESENTATION
(Maricel Lonati, Argentina)

Thank you very much. First of all, I would like to extend my greetings to the Chair and to the coordinating representatives of each country.

I would also like to thank the Forum of the Americas for providing this space for the youth agenda.

Today I have come to share some of the findings and recommendations contained in the Luminate Foundation's study on Youth and Democracy in Latin America, which was coordinated by researchers Esther Solano and Camila Rocha from the Universidad de San Pablo and offers new information about youth behavior in the Hemisphere.

Although the interviews were conducted in just four countries—Mexico, Colombia, Argentina, and Brazil—we believe they constitute a representative voice of this generation, though we also think it is highly necessary to continue supporting similar research in all of the countries.

The study's main finding is that young people in the Americas are not anti-democratic, or apathetic, or depoliticized, as quantitative studies often show.

Youth in the Americas continue to support democracy as a political system, but are showing increasing frustration with political parties, political institutions, and their leaders.

For the young people in the study, democracy is synonymous with freedom of expression, transparency, and community participation, especially online.

However, these same youth speak of a crisis of representation and are pessimistic about political outcomes. They view the leadership as corrupt, violent, inflexible, removed from the people, focused on their own interests, and not particularly open to youth participation.

For this reason, these young people largely prefer non-institutional engagement, especially cyber-activism, mobilizations, and protests.

But a single click, or one campaign are not enough for democracy to remain strong. Young people must have the opportunities, the information, and the skills to engage in electoral processes and decision-making that impact our communities.

Most of the study's interviewees are, however, afraid to participate actively and openly. There is a shared fear among young people of becoming caught up in webs of corruption, losing their personalities, or having their own lives come under attack.

For young people to become politically active again and occupy places of power, we need those of you here today to support specific actions:

Institutional outreach to youth through the promotion of specific channels, using young people's language and a greater online presence must be urgently prioritized. Young people agree that politics should be presented in a lighter, nimbler, and seductive way.

We ask you to create opportunities for engaging youth in agendas they are drawn to, for example, environmental issues, animal protection, combatting gender, race, and ethnic violence, and education, and by doing so give democracy a tangible meaning that is rooted in daily life.

We recommend investing in user-friendly, straightforward, concise, and interactive open government platforms so that people may follow parliamentary activities and participate in the development of laws and other government activities such as public procurement management and the execution of public works.

Political and legal education should also continue to be advanced in school and university curricula since a lack of understanding about the exercise of politics and how governments function is increasingly alienating young people from traditional structures of involvement.

The research bears out that young people's perception of the reality surrounding them comes via social networks. Politics reaches them not just in a news format, but primarily in the form of a comment, a meme, a reaction, or a debate. These formats reduce public discussion to a polarization or bubble dynamic. This is why we are asking you to both support programs that fuel the production of truthful information in the media and encourage the dissemination of informative education and criteria for identifying and deconstructing fake news, bearing in mind the key role played by the internet, social media, and streaming platforms.

Finally, we are calling on you to promote programs aimed at young people in political parties. The current feeling of being disconnected from the political system makes young people more susceptible to authoritarian proposals disguised as democracy. Young people want political parties to be closer to the people, to put up young candidates, and to become more transparent, innovative, and digital.

If the governments you are representing here today wish to engage with young people, they must enable safe spaces for social protest, for mobilization, and at the same time find innovative ways to establish a dialogue between citizens and institutions so that together we can devise the solutions we wish to see in society.

We need young people to regain trust in politics as a way to achieve fairer and more egalitarian societies. Otherwise, we run the risk of them abandoning the fight for democracy.