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DECLARATION OF PRINCIPLES

International Young Christian Workers
Av. Georges Rodenbach 4 – 0032/2/2421811 – 1030 Brussels

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1. PREAMBLE

Why this Declaration of Principles?

The IX. International Council of the IYCW held in Johannesburg in 1995 adopted a new Declaration of Principles.

In doing so, the IYCW restated what the YCW is, what it stands for and what it wants to achieve as a young workers' movement.

The process of revision of the Declaration of Principles adopted at the V. International Council of 1975 was launched at the VII. International Council in 1987 and was definitively confirmed at the VIII. International Council in 1991.

This revised Declaration of Principles went through various steps. National movements made their contribution, either by sending in their reflections to the international and continental/regional secretariats of the IYCW or in various meetings held at a continental/regional level.

In revising the text of this Declaration, we wanted to update it, starting from the analysis, action and reflections of the young workers organized in the YCW. We took into account the evolution of society, the present situation of the young workers and the history of our movement.

What is the Declaration of Principles (DoP)?

The DOP is a document explaining the essential points of the movement's identity. It states the points of reference necessary to maintain the unity and coherence of the movement.

The DOP is addressed primarily to the militants, the leaders and to young workers in initiation who should refer to it, taking into account their own particular reality.

The different chapters that make up the DOP are part of a whole and should be read as such.

The DOP should be read together with the booklets: Task of Education and Review of Life and Worker Action. These three documents complete one another.

History of the YCW

The movement was born at the beginning of the twentieth century from the initiative of a Belgian priest, Cardijn, and some young workers who were concerned about the pitiful conditions that their fellow workers in Belgium were facing in factories, mills and mines, and in their families and neighbourhoods.

They had to work long hours, in harsh conditions and for low wages, having hardly any free time.

Cardijn wanted to give working-class youth the possibility of organising themselves in order to be trained to stand up for their rights because he believed in their capacity to organise and free themselves from their situation of oppression and exploitation.

His conviction was that young workers are worth more than all the gold in the world. He thus founded - within the Church - a movement of young workers run by the young workers themselves.

He was inspired by a Christian tradition firmly rooted in reality, and in turn he himself has marked this tradition. Faith was developed starting from real life situations of the young workers and using the SEE, JUDGE, ACT method.

Carried by the young men and women workers who shared his ideal, the movement spread throughout Europe and later to all continents. It came into contact with young people of different cultures, beliefs, and traditions, welcoming all young workers without distinction, and actually became an international movement.

In 1975 the movement gave itself a DOP that took into account the evolution in society, and the history and experience of the movement. It is in the same spirit that we have revised the DOP.

In doing so the IYCW wants to give continuity to the experiences lived since 1975, taking into account the commitment of those militants who were inspired by the whole process. Through their action with and among the young workers committed to the struggle of the working class, the oppressed and exploited, they contributed to the building of the movement.

The world today

Today, as at the time when the movement was born, young workers are faced with the contradictions of capitalism.

These contradictions are more acute than ever. The collapse of communism has put an end to the cold war thereby making the defenders of capitalism present it as the only viable economic system for humanity today. Hence the society in which we live is a society where capitalism is dominant and operates on an international scale.

Capitalism has led to the growth of the gap between rich countries and poor countries, and indeed between the rich and poor within the countries. Technology and information are controlled by the dominant class. A small minority of rich people dominate, exploit and make decisions on behalf of a majority of people who live in poverty and in a situation of constant exclusion.

While wealth continues to increase, it only benefits a minority. Unemployment is growing around the world, more and more people have unstable and precarious jobs or work in the informal sector, while other workers are forced to migrate in order to earn a living. Women are exploited and dominated more than men. Indigenous people are forced off their ancestral land, their language and culture threatened and often destroyed.

Natural resources are destroyed without due respect for the environment. In many countries, racism, certain forms of nationalism and religious fanaticism that leads to exclusion, are on the rise.

Consumerism is pushed to extremes. The prevailing materialism, competitiveness and individualism drive an increasing number of people to despair, to a loss of the meaning of life, and to a lack of future prospects.

The rights that workers conquered in some countries are being gradually eroded. While the impact and strength of the working class and their organisations have diminished considerably, leaving them in a defensive position, the need for creating alternatives to the present society has not.

New forms of organisations, covering different aspects of life and facing new challenges, are appearing alongside the historical forms of worker organizations. All these associations and movements bring hope that society can still change.

The YCW in brief

The YCW is part of those movements which continue to aspire to, and build a new society. As a movement of young workers in action, the YCW wants the young workers to fulfil their deepest aspirations, live in dignity and build a new society.

It is a movement of, among, by and for young workers; a democratic organisation run and directed by the young people themselves.

It is a movement of education through action. It takes action right where the young workers are, and considers its task of education a priority.

It is a movement that creates communities where young workers can share all aspects of their lives; plan and review the action to change their situations. Through its action and reflections the YCW is present and active in the church.

It uses the review of life and worker action as its primary tool. In the YCW, the young workers make their own history, using experiences of the past as a basis. It is constantly evolving and deals with new needs of the young workers in particular, the working class, the oppressed and the excluded. It makes an analysis, which is reviewed periodically.

It contributes to the search for and deepening of the meaning of life, which is a crucial dimension of human life.

2. STARTING POINT OF THE YCW

The YCW starts out from the personal and collective situations that young workers live in everyday life and from the contradictions that exist in society. It takes account of their situation, whether they are working, unemployed, in the informal sector, in the neighbourhoods, or studying.

It covers all aspects of their lives: their working and living conditions, free time, family situation, relationships, beliefs, faith, as well as their dreams, values and aspirations. The YCW uses these situations and the actions that young workers are involved in as its starting point.

In today's society, these young people belong to the working class and share the same situation of exploitation, oppression and exclusion. They are living in a society divided into opposing classes, which leads to a struggle. On the one hand there is a dominant class, a minority, whose primary concern is the search for profit and on the other hand the large majority of people who are exploited, oppressed and excluded by this minority.

Human values are manipulated to serve the interests of those who control production and consumption. Most of the people are denied a say in matters that affect their lives. They are forced to conform to the values of the dominant class and are prevented from developing their personalities freely and from living in dignity in this type of society.

These situations of exploitation, oppression, and exclusion are part of the intimate experience of every individual. They are expressed by the frustration generated by the desire to be happy, to be someone, to be oneself, without the possibility of achieving it. This permanent contradiction between what people want to be and what they are forced to be is maintained by the society and by most of the young workers themselves.

These situations, both personal and collective, are experienced, shared and analysed by the YCW. The young people take action to change them.

Therefore, the YCW is born from:

- ⇒ the discovery of the reality to which young workers are subjected;
- ⇒ the aspirations and profound values that they find in daily life;
- ⇒ their attempts to live and develop these values and aspirations;
- ⇒ the refusal to accept this situation and the deep conviction that they can change it.
- ⇒ the cry of despair of millions of young workers who suffer and fight for change.

The YCW starts out from these situations and contradictions to determine its objectives, task of education, characteristics and means.

3. FUNDAMENTAL OBJECTIVE OF THE YCW

The fundamental objective of the YCW is that all young workers should:

- ↪ discover the deepest meaning of their lives;
- ↪ live in accordance with their personal and collective dignity;
- ↪ assume the responsibility for finding solutions to their situations at the local, national and international levels.

The YCW strives towards this objective,

- by calling on each and every young worker to have personal convictions, to disseminate a message of liberation, love, hope, justice, peace, and solidarity in action and daily life;
- by struggling for the liberation of young workers in particular, and of the working class, the oppressed and the excluded, in all spheres of life; and this by living out new values which lead to a deep change in the mentalities of the persons and the structures of society;
- by striving for a change leading to a new society, a classless and just society; where exploitation, poverty, starvation, discrimination will be no more; where production and consumption of goods will be directed towards the service of humanity and provide for the needs of all; where each person, nation, culture will have their place; a society of solidarity where the dream of the New Earth promised in ages past to the oppressed will, at long last, be fulfilled.

The YCW believes in the capacity of each young worker to discover their own importance and dignity reflect on all matters which affect them, and decide their own areas of commitment. The young workers' participation is essential.

Because the YCW believes in all the above, it offers all young workers the challenge and joy of living and struggling. This is how a new person and a new society can emerge

4. THE BASE OF THE YCW

The base of the movement is made up of the militants and the young workers who participate in the actions, activities and building of the movement.

The YCW as a whole offers all young workers the possibility of developing their personality, and of taking an active part in the building of the movement, taking into account their level of awareness, the action they are involved in, and their readiness to take on responsibilities.

The organisation and structures of the movement are determined by these concerns. The base group is the most important structure of the YCW and it is essential for the life of the movement. The whole movement is built up starting from the base groups.

The base groups

They are groups of young workers, boys and girls, militants or young people in initiation, who take action in daily life. They meet at regular intervals to review their lives and worker action. These meetings are essential to the life of the movement.

This is how communities are formed; in which young workers share their lives, hopes, aspirations, faith and beliefs. In these communities, they support each other, listen to each other, share their friendship, possibilities and capacities, and commit themselves to taking actions in order to change the situation. Through the way they live, they are a sign that a change is possible. In this manner, the YCW is a school of life.

The young workers in initiation¹

They participate in actions and activities of the base group and gradually they identify with the movement and its objectives; they participate in the group in which they assume responsibilities that correspond to their level; they are invited to share about their situations and lives; they discover those of their fellow young workers and are challenged to take action with them.

As soon as young workers start to discover the reality and to share this discovery with other young people, we can say that militancy is born. In this personal progression through action, young people will discover the need to be organized in a movement. From the moment that they accept and act in accordance with the orientations of the movement, they become militants.

The militants

They take actions together as a team with their fellow young workers, wherever there is a situation that impedes them from fulfilling themselves; they make a regular review of life and worker action.

Militants help other young workers to become militants too, while respecting their level of awareness.

They share and assume responsibilities and tasks in the movement; they plan, decide, and co-ordinate the education and action; they evaluate the movement on a regular basis. By doing so, they ensure the development of the YCW in all its aspects. They make a financial contribution to the movement and ensure the development of the financial autonomy of the movement. They decide and assume the orientation of the movement.

This is why the YCW depends on its militants. They are the pillars of the movement.

¹ National movements may replace the terms used in this chapter with terms appropriate to their reality and context

5. THE WORKER CHARACTERISTIC

The YCW is made up of young workers; young people belonging to the working class, the oppressed and the excluded.

We mean all those in the countryside, in the cities, on the seafront, natives and migrants, who are directly or indirectly linked to the system of production and consumption. We include all those who are exploited in places of production and services, in the neighbourhoods, at school or during their free time.

They are those who have stable or unstable jobs, those who are unemployed, those who turn to the informal sector to make a living, and those who are studying in order to get a job in the future. They are exploited by the dominant class and therefore they are in a situation of economic, cultural, social, professional, and political inferiority.

This system of exploitation has robbed young workers of pride and humanity by denying them the dignity of meaningful work and a decent quality of life. There are indeed many young workers today who are totally excluded from any real participation in the work force and in society.

There can be no justice in a society that suppresses rights that are so essential for human fulfilment. In the spirit and traditions of the working class a change should be brought about in people and in the structures of society.

The YCW believes that young workers are a force for change and are bearers of new values. They have the capacity to grasp the interdependency of their situation and the responsibility to change the situations they face through action. This enables them to develop unity and solidarity among themselves to bring about change.

The YCW is part of, shares and is a bearer of the history, the struggle, the dreams and aspirations of the working class, the oppressed and the excluded. Its task of education among young workers is its specific contribution to the building of a new society.

The YCW believes that a new society can only be brought about with the co-operation of all those organisations and movements which are committed to the interests of the working class, the oppressed and the excluded. This is why the YCW advocates unity in action.

In view of all the above, the worker characteristic is a priority and is decisive in the task of the YCW.

6. THE YOUTH CHARACTERISTIC

The YCW directs itself at each and every young worker, without any discrimination.

The YCW is especially directed towards youth between the age of 15 and 30, as this period in life is the ideal period for education. Youth are enthusiastic, dynamic, generous, creative and willing to take on challenges which life offers them.

It is a period of life with specific characteristics. The type of lifestyle that youth adopt can determine their capacities and the development of their personality.

The YCW draws its energy, learns and becomes stronger through its contact with the mass of young workers and their reality. At the same time it responds to their dynamism and aspirations while respecting their level of awareness.

It is convinced that those who best know the young workers' needs and aspirations are the young workers themselves. This is why they must be responsible for their future and contribute to their own liberation and that of all their fellow young workers.

It challenges young workers to commit themselves to looking for solutions to their day-to-day life situations through action.

The action of the movement is carried out, with, for and among young workers and is part of the struggle of liberation of the working class, oppressed and exploited.

Taking into account the reality, action and capacities of the young workers, the YCW allows them to commit themselves in a permanent way and to assume responsibilities in life.

7. THE CHRISTIAN CHARACTERISTIC

The YCW believes in the inviolable dignity of each person, and particularly of each young worker, and in their capacity to change their situation through action.

It is through action that the YCW calls upon the young workers of all countries, all cultures and all beliefs to discover the meaning of their lives and to live out the values of justice, freedom, solidarity, liberation, generosity, and sincerity. It gives all young workers, whatever their belief or religion, the possibility of sharing, discovering, and deepening their faith and convictions.

The YCW is an open community, welcoming all young workers who care passionately about their future and who are committed to shaping it in union with all the young workers of the world. It gives shape, strength and echoes their dreams and plans. It is a bearer of their history and their hopes. It is Good News today for the working class, the oppressed and the excluded.

The YCW believes in human love which motivates the worker struggle and acquires a new dimension when it meets the love of Christ who gave his life so that people might be free. It invites young workers to discover the love of those persons who have given their lives and made sacrifices so that people can be free.

In the name of this love, the young workers combat the causes that prevent them from loving one another and living in justice. This love can even extend to the giving of one's life. It requires a continual re-assessment of one's attitude towards others and in society. Through the review of life and worker action, they commit themselves to living out this love.

The struggle and sacrifice of Jesus Christ give hope and meaning to the struggle of the young workers, and are a sign of God's love for humanity. The YCW reads

Jesus Christ's testimony and liberating message starting out from young workers' experiences. It offers young workers the opportunity to deepen the Christian faith and to discover it as a meaningful proposition.

The YCW is continually searching for dialogue among the Christian denominations, with other religions and with other forms of expression of the meaning of life. Through its action, reflection and celebrations, it puts the liberating practices of Jesus Christ into concrete form. In this way, it strives for a society of justice and for a Church in which priority is given to the working class, the oppressed, and the excluded.

8. THE MASS CHARACTERISTIC

The YCW is a movement of, and for, all young workers. It wants to reach all young workers wherever they are because it believes that all are capable of living in accordance with their dignity and of committing themselves to the building of a new society.

It believes that with the conscious, progressive and creative participation of all the people, and of the young workers in particular, it will be possible to make those far-reaching changes which meet the universal aspirations of the working class, the oppressed and the excluded.

Militant action by young workers is necessary and irreplaceable if there is to be lasting and ever-growing awareness and sense of responsibility among the people.

Education and organisation, together with the spreading of the movement, are brought about by the involvement of militants in real life situations, acting in union with their fellow young workers.

The YCW also reaches the people through means which facilitate and supplement the efforts of militant action; for example enquiries, rallies, congresses, meetings, newsletters, activities, special campaigns, action committees, and services.

Through these means, it wants the situation to be known and changed, and it wants to convey its message of love, hope and solidarity.

The YCW invites the young workers to join the movement consciously and actively. The extension of the YCW is dependent on the awareness and sense of responsibility of the militants and young workers in initiation.

9. THE INTERNATIONAL CHARACTERISTIC

The situation of young workers has an international dimension. Their problems and aspirations are similar and interdependent.

Therefore, there is a need for a young workers' movement organized on an international level.

The International YCW is born from this need. Through its action that has an international dimension; it facilitates the unity of young workers around the world.

To do so, it develops joint action with common objectives and means.

The International YCW enables exchanges between young workers on their reality, their aspirations, their spiritual and cultural riches, leading to mutual support, solidarity and understanding among them all over the world.

The YCW promotes solidarity and co-operation between young workers and people as a daily practice.

The International YCW, through its coordination at national, continental/regional, and international levels, enables young workers to share about their day-to-day efforts with other young workers around the world.

This coordination allows young workers to draw strength from each other's experiences and action. In that sense the International YCW multiplies and strengthens the actions of young workers and becomes a force for them.

The International YCW is representative of the young workers. It wants to be their voice. On behalf of those it represents, it addresses its message to the other young people, to the society as a whole, and to all sorts of institutions.

10. THE AUTONOMOUS CHARACTERISTIC

As an international movement of young workers, the YCW is an autonomous movement.

Financial autonomy

The YCW must have the resources and material possibilities necessary to achieve its objectives. The means used must be simple so as to be really representative of the young workers.

The basic expenses of the movement are met by the personal support and fundraising activities of young workers so that the orientation and direction of the movement remain permanently in their hands. The YCW counts on external financial aid but this should not deprive it of its freedom to act.

Political autonomy

As already mentioned, the starting point of the YCW is the life and action of young workers and militants; they arrive at their own conclusions and choose their own areas of commitment.

The YCW movement does not adhere to the line of any political group, trade union or other group because it takes the various conclusions of the grassroots militants as its starting point to adopt positions and elaborate its programmes.

The positions adopted never depend on, and should not be confused with the positions or programmes of other organisations, although they may at times coincide.

Autonomy as an Organisation

The YCW develops its own structures at local, national, continental/regional, and international levels. These structures are at the service of young workers and the action they develop.

It provides for a democratic participation of young people. Its leaders are chosen by the young workers themselves at all levels.

It counts on adult collaborators who strengthen the movement and respect its autonomy.

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