



Dear OCT and EU representatives,

We, as the 25 members of the 13 EU Overseas Countries and Territories Youth Network, have been given the exciting opportunity to embark on a journey to discover the EU-OCT partnership, to learn about the functioning of the European institutions and to connect with each other. We are hereby issuing this declaration to the political leaders and representatives involved in the EU-OCT partnership; to highlight, from our OCT Youth perspective, the main challenges and opportunities related to the specificities of our islands and to encourage further policy actions.

We are European citizens, however for most of our peers, the relationship with Europe remains distant, rather intangible and often unclear. The OCT Youth Network gives us a chance to learn about EU programmes offered to us, a platform for high-level dialogue and opportunities that are so rarely found on our islands. We are finding value in the network by learning from one another. We are being recognized, heard and given a voice, and we have so much to say.

A solid network is being built, an OCT Youth Family, recognizing that although we are oceans apart, we have a lot in common. We are pursuing knowledge, helping one another, raising awareness, and we feel empowered to actively contribute to real change.

The existence and continuation of the OCT Youth Network is of utmost importance. It would continue to be an important asset to foster meaningful youth engagement and empowerment as part of the Youth Action Plan adopted recently by the Commission and the High Representative. This network is a building block for a future where the EU and OCTs are more associated, and a stepping stone to interconnect and exchange on joint priorities for the OCT Youth.

Therefore, we call upon you, OCT and EU leaders and representatives to recognize and tackle challenges that explicitly affect OCT Youth:

- Empower us, grant us opportunities, give us a voice and engage us in decision-making processes that define our future.
- Education is a concern for all: take decisive action to ensure no children are left behind, create well-balanced schooling systems and provide more assistance and support to those embracing opportunities abroad.
- Provide us with more equitable labour opportunities so we, as young adults, are not discriminated against in the labour market.
- Tackle the youth mental health crisis by promoting discussion and de-stigmatization of mental health issues and increasing access to psychological support for all.
- Last but not least, efforts towards tackling climate change and sustainable development must continue to be prioritized. Now more than ever, our islands and their inhabitants are affected by the consequences of climate change: natural disasters, sea level rise and global warming. These challenges are serious and an immediate threat that affects us all.

These islands are our home and we are calling upon you to take more decisive action, to come forward and address these challenges in concrete terms.

We, as ambassadors of our islands' younger and future generations, are thankful for the opportunity given by the OCT Youth Network to be heard at the EU-OCT Forum via this declaration. We truly encourage giving OCT Youth opportunities and voices to further engage. We hope this network can inspire youth as a foundation in the future governance of our OCTs. We, from the OCTs, need more initiatives like the OCT Youth Network and the Youth Action Plan as youth are not only the future but also the present.

Yours Sincerely,

The OCT Youth Network, 22 November 2022

Signatures:

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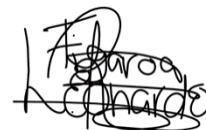
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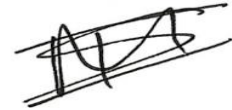
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
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