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## Youth Rights Academy Equips Future Leaders for Global Change

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A recent international initiative in Geneva has brought together young advocates from around the world to strengthen their knowledge and skills in human rights, civic participation, and leadership. The Youth Rights Academy, held from July 7 to 11, was designed to prepare a new generation to promote individual liberties, civic accountability, and education, especially in regions affected by conflict and instability.

The Academy is a result of a partnership between the United Nations Human Rights Office and Education Above All (EAA), a global foundation committed to supporting access to education in vulnerable communities. The program is the latest development in their joint Youth Empowerment System (YES), launched in 2023, and is guided by a Youth Advisory Board (YAB), which ensures that young voices shape the initiative's direction.

Participants included 45 young advocates such as Avril Murillo from Bolivia, Kenneth Mulinde from Uganda, Constance Luk from Malaysia, and Yara Al-Zinati from Gaza. Each offered a unique perspective rooted in their local experience. Murillo, a gender justice campaigner, emphasized the power of storytelling and personal narratives to defend rights and build awareness. Luk, an advocate for mental health, stressed the importance of youth perspectives in shaping inclusive policies that protect well-being.

Workshops covered a range of issues relevant to today's youth leaders, including international human rights law, international humanitarian law, freedom of expression, digital advocacy, and equitable access. These tools are increasingly essential in a world where civil liberties are under pressure in many parts of the globe. Al-Zinati, who grew up in a conflict zone, noted how education gave her the ability to reshape her future and advocate for others who face systemic obstacles.

Mulinde, who founded the Youth Arts Movement Uganda, underlined the importance of youth involvement in holding institutions accountable and reforming public policies through peaceful advocacy. He stated, "We are not just future leaders; we are today's architects of the change we seek."

The event reinforced a key belief that many young people share across political lines: personal responsibility and civic engagement are vital to defending rights and improving their communities. By providing practical education and global connections, the Youth Rights Academy helps ensure that emerging leaders are better prepared to stand for the values of freedom, human dignity, and fair opportunity.