



Statement from the European Youth Forum :

Unpaid internships: institutions must break this shameful “tradition”!

The comments of the European External Action Service (EEAS) spokesperson following the recommendation of EU Ombudsman that EEAS should pay its interns, trigger outrage of intern and youth organisations across the world.

The EU Ombudsman in their ruling on 15 February 2017 found that the practice of the EEAS of not paying its interns in foreign Delegations infringes the EU's fundamental value of equality. In a Press Briefing reacting to this recommendation, EEAS Spokesperson Maya Kocijančič, commented that *“unpaid internships were not invented by us. It is a tradition for several international organisations like the United Nations.”*

The undersigned organisations, all working to defend youth and interns' rights find Ms Kocijančič's justification shocking and deplorable.

No “tradition”, no matter how widespread, is ever justified when it negatively affects the equality of opportunities of thousands of people and reinforces a system of privilege. Attempting to defend a bad practice through the existence of similar bad practices only reinforces the vicious circle of discrimination that unpaid internships create.

The EU prides itself on being a champion of human rights. By attempting to justify unpaid internships in such a way, the EEAS disgracefully contradicts the very values that it promotes across the world. Workers rights are human rights no matter what “tradition” is endorsed. Unpaid internships, as argued by the Ombudsman, widen social and economic inequalities, as they discriminate against young people with insufficient income to cover their living costs.

On Monday, 20 February, thousands of interns and young professionals demonstrated for the first Global Intern Strike, an international day of action against unpaid internships. It is now high time for institutions that are defending human rights and promoting equality to practice what they preach. The undersigned organisations call on the EEAS to lead by example, and to take the necessary steps to comply with the Ombudsman's recommendation, without delay, to stop this discriminatory practice and break the “tradition” once and for all.

Luis Alvarado, President of the European Youth Forum, Luis Alvarado, comments:

“Human rights have never advanced by deferral to tradition. Institutions like the European External Action Service portraying themselves as global leaders must get their act together. This answer is outrageous. You can't promote human rights around the world and not respect your own worker's rights, by calling violations a “tradition.”

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Statement endorsed by:

