To require the USAID Youth Coordinator, in their role as defined by the USAID Youth Policy, to coordinate cross-sectoral international development efforts related to youth, inclusive of youth, peace, and security, and for other purposes.

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Ms. MENG introduced the following bill; which was referred to the Committee on ____________________

A BILL

To require the USAID Youth Coordinator, in their role as defined by the USAID Youth Policy, to coordinate cross-sectoral international development efforts related to youth, inclusive of youth, peace, and security, and for other purposes.

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,

SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.

This Act may be cited as the “Youth, Peace, and Security Act of 2023”.

SEC. 2. FINDINGS.

Congress makes the following findings:

(1) As of 2023, there are an estimated 2.4 billion people in the world between the ages of 10–29 years of age, which represents the largest number of young people to have existed in human history, with 90 percent of youth (ages 15–24) in developing countries, and 1 out of every 4 young people directly affected by conflict, violence, and crisis.

(2) More than 1 billion children and youth are exposed to violence each year. Failure to properly address adversity experienced during childhood (ages 0–17) and youth (ages 10–29) can lead to lifelong deficiencies and compromises future opportunities for individual, community, and national development.

(3) The majority of the population in many conflict-affected countries is younger than 20 years of age, with some countries having more than 70 percent of the population who are younger than 30 years of age.

(4) Only 2.2 percent of parliamentarians are under 30, and less than 1 percent are young women. Youth therefore remain underrepresented around the world in peacebuilding, political decision-making processes, conflict prevention, management, and res-
olution, and post-conflict resolution relief and recovery efforts. As a consequence, youth may turn from institutional politics as they feel their governments are not addressing critical issues they care about.

(5) When we fail to effectively engage youth, it can lead to violence, instability, unrest, and irregular and forced migration. For example, Sub-Saharan Africa hosts more than 26 percent of the world’s 52 million refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs), of which approximately 50 percent are youth. In Latin America and the Caribbean there are 6.3 million migrants that are under 18 years old, and most migrants from this region come from fragile states with economic and political instability, where youth can be the deliberate targets of violence.

(6) Adverse climate impacts, increased food insecurity and malnutrition, rising debt, growing inequality, price shocks and inflation, democratic recession, and the continued impacts of COVID on service delivery contribute to the instability of communities, disproportionately impacting the economic, educational, and security prospects of youth, and their mental health and wellbeing.
(7) Digital transformation has dramatically changed industries, governments, economies, and societies. Digital ecosystems, consisting of stakeholders, systems, and enabling environments, can empower people and communities to use digital technology to access services, engage with others, and pursue economic opportunities in partner countries. Digital ecosystems also come with risks of increasing inequality, repression, and instability. Unsurprisingly, the rise of digital technology has had a profound impact on young people, raising new opportunities and challenges alike for youth, peace and security, from youth mental health and wellbeing to online recruitment and mobilization to online peacebuilding movements.

(8) Youth and youth-led groups and movements have demonstrated the capacity of young people to play critical roles in calling for reform through, for example, nonviolent action and peaceful protests to hold governments accountable and attempt to decrease or prevent authoritarianism in their countries, by serving as a bridge between traditional community values and cultural globalization, and by building diverse coalitions that advance more peaceful
and democratic outcomes for their communities and countries, including—

(A) deescalating destructive conflict and helping prevent the spread of conflict;

(B) discouraging anti-social youth mobilization among peers;

(C) preventing recurring cycles of violence;

(D) encouraging defection from armed groups and social reintegration of ex-combatants;

(E) improving the effectiveness and sustainability of peace and political processes;

(F) improving social cohesion between and among groups, peers, and associates;

(G) building resilience to violence and recruitment;

(H) helping to identify and improve livelihood options for youth and their families, and communities impacted by crisis and conflict; and

(I) contributing to improved and more inclusive democracy and governance.

(9) Youth are critical actors and partners in development at all levels of society. The meaningful inclusion of youth in the design and delivery of
projects and strategies, including those focused on youth, peace and security, can contribute to better and more sustainable outcomes.

(10) Preventive, resilience-based, and cross-cutting youth-inclusive approaches are more effective at reducing physical and psychological violence than hard security responses and at-risk and remedial approaches, which are often counterproductive.

(11) Youth who have participated in United States-supported civic engagement and development programs are less likely to participate in or support political violence.

(12) Youth participation in the design and implementation of community development strategies is critical for effectively reducing violence and extremism, and increasing young peoples’ education, economic opportunity and empowerment, civic engagement, and positive health outcomes, which can contribute to peace and stability.

(13) Young people around the world, particularly adolescent girls and members of the LGBTQI+ community, but also young men and boys, are disproportionately affected by all forms of violence. This includes, but is not limited to, risks associated with technology facilitated violence, such
as intimidation, harassment, exploitation, abuse, trafficking, misinformation, disinformation, malinformation, data tracking, and other threats, which warrant increased attention. Such risks also inhibit young peoples’ ability to participate in digital networks, democracy rights and governance and peacebuilding movements.

(14) A study by PLAN International, which surveyed girls in 22 countries, found that—

(A) 58 percent of respondents reported that they had personally experienced some form of online harassment on social media platforms;

(B) activists attracted particular vitriol and attention; and

(C) 47 percent of respondents reported that they had been attacked for their opinions.

(15) The shrinking of global civic spaces facing youth, as documented in the United Nations Office of the Secretary-General’s Envoy on Youth’s report, “If I Disappear”, shows the complexity of the grave threats, challenges, and barriers against diverse groups of youth active in the civic space, taking the forms of sociocultural, financial, political, legal, digital, and physical. Shrinking civic and political spaces challenge the ability of youth to contribute to
society effectively and meaningfully, often resulting in declining trust in government institutions among youth, leading to youth directing social, civic, and political participation to informal channels.

(16) Many national and international mechanisms for the protection of human rights defenders, peacebuilders, and humanitarians usually apply to adults (individuals over the age of 29) excluding youth (age 29 and younger) due to their age.

(17) United Nations Security Council Resolution 2250 on Youth, Peace, and Security, which was adopted on December 9, 2015, formalized an international framework to address the role of youth in building and sustaining peace and preventing conflict.

(18) United Nations Security Council Resolution 2419 on Youth, Peace, and Security, which was adopted on June 6, 2018, calls for increasing and formalizing the role of youth in negotiating and implementing peace agreements.

(19) United Nations Security Council Resolution 2535 on Youth, Peace, and Security, which was adopted on July 14, 2020, advocates for the increased protection of youth peacebuilders at risk of violence, creates a two-year reporting mechanism on
Youth, Peace, and Security, and recognizes the critical role of youth in mitigating humanitarian crises, such as COVID–19.

SEC. 3. SENSE OF CONGRESS.

It is the sense of Congress that the United States Government should, consistent with the priorities of USAID’s 2022 Youth In Development Policy—

(1) apply Do No Harm principles, while recognizing that engaging young people as partners in peacebuilding and humanitarian activities is critical in fragile environments;

(2) promote the meaningful and inclusive engagement of youth in peacebuilding and conflict prevention, management, and resolution, as well as post-conflict relief and recovery efforts and processes, reinforced through diplomatic efforts and programs;

(3) provide assistance to and build the capacity of youth-led organizations dedicated to advancing peace and review administrative and bureaucratic impediments to achieving this aim;

(4) build on new learning and existing United States Government strategies addressing youth, peace, and security, including the Women, Peace and Security Act of 2017 (Public Law 115–68) and
the Action Plan developed pursuant to section 8, to ensure that—

(A) there is meaningful, inclusive and equitable participation of diverse youth in decision making at all levels;

(B) such decision making is designed and assessed in consultation with youth representing diverse identities and situations, including youth from marginalized and underrepresented groups, including young women and girls, LGBTQI+ youth, indigenous youth, and youth with disabilities;

(C) ensure that the voices, experiences, and perspectives of local youth are heard and valued, and create accessible platforms for dialogue and participatory processes that allow them to contribute to decision-making, peace negotiations, and policy development at the local and municipal levels; and

(D) recognize that youth, including young women and girls, are not a homogenous group and have diverse experiences and perspectives, and ensure inclusivity by engaging and incorporating the perspectives of marginalized and underrepresented youth, girls, and young
women, including those from minority communities, indigenous backgrounds, and rural areas;

(5) integrate youth outreach and engagement into relevant conflict-resolution, leadership, democracy, and governance programs supported by the United States Government; and

(6) include policies that are specific to boys and girls at various ages and programming in the design, implementation, and evaluation of relevant United States foreign assistance programs.

SEC. 4. STATEMENT OF POLICY.

It shall be the policy of the United States to promote the inclusive and meaningful participation of youth in peacebuilding and conflict prevention, management, and resolution, and post-conflict relief and recovery efforts, reinforced through diplomatic efforts and assistance programs that—

(1) elevate and incorporate the perspectives and interests of affected youth into conflict-prevention, violence-reduction, and post-conflict peacebuilding activities and strategies;

(2) increase meaningful and inclusive youth engagement in program planning and policy development related to conflict prevention and violence reduction, democracy and governance, and security
sector initiatives funded by the United States Government;

(3) promote the safety, security, and dignity of youth in crisis, conflict, and other fragile environments;

(4) provide technical and financial support to diverse youth-led groups, initiatives, and innovations working on issues of peace and security;

(5) support greater access of youth-led and youth-serving organizations who are traditionally less represented in peacebuilding and conflict prevention programming to United States foreign assistance aid distribution mechanisms and services;

(6) advance civic education in formal and non-formal settings, increase youth civic and political participation and representation, and bolster collective action and leadership that improve democracy, peace, and security outcomes;

(7) encourage partner governments to adopt plans to increase meaningful and inclusive youth engagement in peace and security processes and decision-making institutions;

(8) recognize the unique context underrepresented and marginalized youth, including girls and young women, experience in conflict and violence
settings by adjusting programs and policies that pertain to the achievement of the strategy and policy goals of this Act—

(A) to protect youth population that are especially vulnerable, including girls and young women, and to ensure their online and offline safety, security, and dignity;

(B) to support their equal access to aid and development assistance;

(C) to prioritize programs to improve outcomes in inclusion, equality, and empowerment; and

(D) to recognize the critical roles and agency of young people in peacebuilding, recovery, and development and prioritize the inclusion of underrepresented and marginalized youth in these processes and efforts;

(9) recognize the unique challenges facing youth affected by conflict and violence in the areas of—

(A) trauma, psychosocial, and mental health issues;

(B) stigma and other challenges with community reintegration after conflict or gang association, such as access to education, training,
and economic opportunity, and a lack of access to related services; and
(C) a lack of access to education, training, and economic opportunity in pre-conflict, conflict and post-conflict settings; and
(10) recognize the unique challenges facing young people from a variety of different backgrounds and demographics including but not limited to, race, religion, ethnicity, linguistics, caste, and youth with disabilities.

SEC. 5. USAID YOUTH COORDINATOR.

(a) In General.—The Secretary of State, in consultation with the Administrator of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) shall require the USAID Youth Coordinator, in their role as defined by the USAID Youth Policy, to coordinate cross-sectoral international development efforts related to youth, inclusive of youth, peace, and security.

(b) Delegation.—At the discretion of the Secretary of State, the authority to require the USAID Youth Coordinator to fulfill this role may be delegated by the Secretary of State to the Administrator of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID).

(c) Duties.—The USAID Youth Coordinator shall—
(1) have the primary responsibility for the advocacy and integration of youth into USAID initiatives, oversee the youth and development policy coherence, support implementation and training; and serve as a senior representative on youth issues in the interagency and external community;

(2) lead the development and implementation of the United States Foreign Assistance Youth, Peace and Security Action Plan in accordance with section 8;

(3) lead revision, not less frequently than once every 5 years of such Plan;

(4) oversee the interagency coordination as provided for under section 6, by engaging Youth, Peace and Security policy and program experts across Federal agencies to inform the development, implementation, and revision such Plan;

(5) facilitate outreach to and exchange with multilateral agencies and other youth, peace, and security stakeholders established under section 6 to inform such Plan, by carrying out—

(A) outreach to facilitate exchange between USAID and a diverse range of youth leaders, youth-led organizations, and youth-serving organizations advancing youth, peace, and secu-
rity to inform and provide recommendations to improve the Action Plan; and

(B) engagement with multilateral agencies and international organizations to inform the development, implementation, and revision of the Action Plan; and

(6) support, consistent with USAID’s Policy for Youth in Development, the designation of a Youth Point of Contact (YPOC) in USAID Bureaus and diplomatic overseas Mission, as selected by such missions and bureaus.

(d) Restriction on Additional or Supplemental Compensation.—The USAID Youth Coordinator shall receive no additional or supplemental compensation as a result of carrying out responsibilities and duties under this section.

SEC. 6. COORDINATION.

To advance coordination for cross-sectoral international development efforts related to youth, inclusive of youth, peace and security, the USAID Youth Coordinator shall—

(1) serve as the focal point for intra agency and interagency coordination of youth, peace, and security initiatives between USAID and other United States Government peacebuilding offices, entities,
and partners including the Executive Office of the President, the National Security Council, the Department of Defense, the Department of State, the Peace Corps, and the Millennium Challenge Corporation, and the US Institute of Peace;

(2) support an interagency working group focused on the harmonization of the United States Foreign Assistance Youth, Peace, and Security Action Plan established under section 7 with approaches and key learning from existing peace and security strategies, such as the United States Strategy on Women, Peace, and Security and the Global Fragility Act, and leverage learning other relevant policies and strategies to inform the Action Plan’s approach, such as USAID’s Digital Strategy the USG Global Strategy to Empower Adolescent Girls; and

(3) engage multilateral agencies and other key youth, peace, and security stakeholders from the implementing community, youth-led organizations, and the private sector to help inform the development of the Action Plan, including by—

(A) engaging the multilateral community in a call to action to help inform and surface key evidence, data, and measurement indicators
to track youth in development and youth, peace and security programming; and

(B) engaging youth-led and youth-serving organizations and networks to inform youth engagement in the Action Plan.

SEC. 7. UNITED STATES FOREIGN ASSISTANCE YOUTH, PEACE, AND SECURITY ACTION PLAN.

(a) IN GENERAL.—Not later than one year after the date of the enactment of this Act, the SAID Youth Coordinator, in coordination with the USAID Administrator and the Secretary of State, and Secretary of Defense, shall coordinate the development and implementation of the United States Foreign Assistance Youth, Peace, and Security Action Plan to accomplish the policy objective described in section 4, which shall—

(1) consistent with the goals, priorities, and approach of the USAID Youth In Development Policy, identify barriers and opportunities to meaningfully integrate and engage diverse youth in the full program cycle of interventions that are relevant to youth, peace, and security (e.g., youth-led research, assessment, and consultation; program design and implementation; monitoring, learning, and evaluation).
(2) prioritize funding programs that build the assets, agency, and capacity of youth engaged in peacebuilding, violence prevention, mediation, negotiation, and peacekeeping, at the community level and through meaningful youth participation in decision-making and in formal spaces and institutions;

(3) ensure that capacity-building and youth engagement programs take a systems-based and inter-generational approach by engaging key institutions and stakeholders, such as peers and peer mentors, family and community members, educators, religious leaders, and policy leaders;

(4) encourage the development of youth-inclusive reconciliation, disengagement, and reintegration programs;

(5) support inclusive education with a focus on mother-language and cultural pride, and context-specific critical thinking skills, relationship-based and skill-building learning, and conflict resolution;

(6) through the USG’s geographical reach, experience working with vulnerable children and youth on the ground, existing partnerships and thematically linked programs, and USAID’s Digital Strategy as a vehicle, address diverse forms of digital
harm to children and youth, learn from these experiences and continue to strengthen interventions;

(7) utilize and promote safe and accessible digital platforms and networks to strengthen and promote youth dialogue and participation in peacebuilding efforts;

(8) specifically address the impact that the growing digital ecosystem play in—

(A) achieving or impeding the inclusive and meaningful participation of youth in peacebuilding efforts and political processes; and

(B) radicalization and recruitment;

(9) include youth in assessments of United States peace and security initiatives;

(10) encourage government partners to ensure inclusive participation of youth in formal peace and political transition processes, including in national dialogues; civic engagement and political participation; reconciliation; and other political processes related to peace and security; and

(11) assist youth to create a more secure environment in which youth actors may better carry out their work in peace and security in relation to the
Action Plan and promote the physical and psychological recovery of young survivors of armed conflict

(d) REGIONAL PLANS.—Such Plan shall include specific implementation issues and considerations to be made in consultation with each regional bureau of USAID and the Department of State as part of the ongoing planning processes within USAID, including relevant Country Development Cooperation Strategies and Joint Regional Strategies.

SEC. 8. DEVELOPMENT ASSISTANCE TO EXPAND TRAINING, TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE, AND GRANTS MANAGED AND CONTROLLED BY YOUTH LEADERS.

(a) YOUTH, PEACE, AND SECURITY FUND.—The USAID Youth Coordinator is authorized to establish a grant program through an implementation mechanism as determined by the Youth Coordinator, using amounts from the Youth, Peace, and Security fund made available pursuant to paragraph (3), may provide grants, emergency assistance, and technical assistance to eligible youth-led civil society organizations and youth peacebuilding implementers who seek to achieve—

(1) peacebuilding;

(2) improved economic security;

(3) community violence intervention;
(4) conflict and crisis management;
(5) conflict resolution and people-to-people reconciliations;
(6) post-conflict relief recovery, and rebuilding efforts;
(7) assistance for individuals facing immediate legal and safety concerns due to their participation in any activity described in paragraphs (1) through (5); and
(8) any programming based on a positive youth development approach.

(b) Authorization of Appropriations.—There are authorized to be appropriated $5,500,000 to carry out this section. Amounts appropriated pursuant to the authorization of appropriations under this subsection may be referred to as the “Youth, Peace and Security Fund”.

SEC. 9. DEFINITIONS.

In this Act:
(1) Conflict.—The term “conflict” in this Act is understood as an inevitable aspect of human interaction, and present when two or more individuals or groups pursue mutually incompatible goals. “Conflict” is a continuum. When channeled constructively into processes of resolution, conflict can
be beneficial; however, conflict can also be waged violently, as in war.

(2) CONFLICT PREVENTION.—The term “conflict prevention” is understood as deliberate efforts to disrupt likely pathways to the outbreak, escalation, or recurrence of violent conflict and promote peaceful, resilient communities.

(3) DO NO HARM.—The term “Do No Harm” refers to taking measures that ensure our efforts and interventions do not put any individual or group at increased risk of harm. As the legal, political, and social context for diverse youth is challenging in most countries where youth, peace, and security activities occur, our engagement with youth and their communities should be done thoughtfully as it can raise their visibility and potentially put them at risk.

(4) INCLUSIVE DEVELOPMENT.—The term “inclusive development” is understood to mean the concept that every person, regardless of their identity, is instrumental in transforming their societies. Development processes that are inclusive yield better outcomes for the communities that embark upon them.

(5) MEANINGFUL YOUTH ENGAGEMENT.—The term “meaningful youth engagement” is defined as
an inclusive, intentional, mutually respectful partnership between youth and adults whereby power is shared and respective contributions, including young people’s ideas, leadership, perspectives, skills, and strengths, are valued.

(6) **PEACEBUILDING.**—The term “peacebuilding” is understood as a range of efforts at the community, national, and international levels to address the immediate impacts and root causes of conflict and violence before, during, and after it occurs.

(7) **RESILIENCE.**—The term “resilience” in this Act is understood as the ability of people, households, communities, countries, and systems to mitigate, adapt to, and recover from shocks and stresses in a manner that reduces chronic vulnerability and facilitates inclusive growth. In conflict and violence prevention, resilience often refers to protective structures (personal, group, institutional) that buffer individuals from the effects of adverse experiences.

(8) **VIOLENCE.**—The term “violence” in this Act is understood as the intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against another person or against a group or community that results
in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, or psychological harm.

(9) **VULNERABLE.**—The term “vulnerable youth”, “vulnerable populations”, or other such iterations referred in this Act means a group of people are vulnerable to situations or conditions, such as those situations and conditions presented during conflicts or instability. It is not meant to define any group as having vulnerability as inherent to their identity.

(10) **ACTION PLAN.**—The term “action plan” means the United States Foreign Assistance Youth, Peace, and Security Action Plan developed pursuant to section 8.

(11) **USAID.**—The acronym “USAID” means the United States Agency for International Development.

(12) **YOUTH.**—The term “youth” means individuals who have attained 10 years of age and have not attained 30 years of age.

(13) **YOUTH COORDINATOR.**—The term “Youth Coordinator” means the individual designated by the Administrator pursuant to section 6 to coordinate all cross-sectoral international development efforts related to youth.
SEC. 10. REPORTS.

(a) INITIAL REPORT.—Not later than 1 year after the date of the submission of the United States Foreign Assistance Youth, Peace, and Security Action Plan required under section 7, the USAID Administrator shall submit to Congress a report that describes the status of the implementation of such Plan.

(b) CONTENT.—The report required under subsection (a) shall—

(1) contain a summary of such Plan as an appendix;

(2) describe the progress made in implementing such Plan;

(3) identify the indicators and measure results over time, including disaggregated data on YPS grant funds obligated to support children and youth and their meaningful engagement in United States foreign assistance programming, as well as the mechanisms for reporting such results in an open and transparent manner;

(4) contain a transparent and detailed accounting of USAID spending to implement such Plan and related activities;

(5) describe how such Plan leverages the United States peace and security programs; and
(6) assess the increased access of youth-led and youth-serving organizations to grants provided by USAID.

(c) Subsequent Reports.—For the 6-year period beginning on the date of the submission of the initial report required under subsection (a), the USAID Administrator shall submit to Congress a report on the status of the implementation of such Plan, the progress made in achieving the elements described in section 8(a), and any changes to such Plan every other year since the date of the submission of the most recent prior report.

(d) Public Availability of Information.—The information referred to in subsections (a) and (b) shall be timely made available on the public website of USAID in a consolidated, downloadable, and machine-searchable format.