

27th EDITION
ESSAOUIRA
Gnaoua
& World Music Festival
 25th TO 27th JUNE 2026

13th EDITION HUMAN RIGHTS FORUM
 JUNE 26th AND 27th, 2026



**JEUNESSES
 DU MONDE**
 Liberté · Identité · Avenir

**13th EDITION - JUNE 26-27, 2026,
 IN ESSAOUIRA UNDER THE THEME :**

« YOUTH OF THE WORLD: FREEDOM, IDENTITY, FUTURE »

Casablanca, Tuesday, June 16, 2026 - The Gnaoua and World Music Festival of Essaouira will host the 13th edition of its Human Rights Forum on June 26 and 27, 2026, under the theme «Youth of the World: Freedom, Identity, Future.» Over the course of two days, researchers, writers, artists, public officials, journalists, and civil society actors will gather in Essaouira to reflect on the challenges facing younger generations in a rapidly changing world.

Since its creation, the Forum has established itself as a unique space for debate and critical thinking, where major contemporary issues are examined through the lens of human rights, culture, and creativity. This new edition places youth at the center of its reflection - not as subjects of analysis, but as key drivers of the transformations shaping our societies.

In a context marked by geopolitical tensions, technological upheavals, climate challenges, and shifting identities, younger generations are facing unprecedented questions. *How can one build a future in a world defined by uncertainty? How can identity be affirmed without retreating into oneself? How can young people make their voices heard and take action when traditional forms of engagement appear to be losing momentum?*

Organized in partnership with the **Moroccan Community Abroad Council (CCME)**, the Forum will bring together leading intellectual, artistic, and institutional figures whose work and experience shed light on contemporary issues of freedom, identity, and civic engagement.

«This Forum embodies the very spirit of the Festival. It extends, through ideas and reflection, what music expresses so powerfully: dialogue, diversity, and the ability of cultures to create common ground. Today's youth are at the heart of these transformative dynamics, and it is essential to provide them with a space for expression, reflection, and encounter,» explains Neila Tazi, Producer of the Gnaoua and World Music Festival.

«Young people around the world face considerable challenges, but they also carry aspirations, imaginations, and capacities for innovation that represent one of the greatest resources of our societies. The Forum gives them the place they deserve within our collective reflection,» adds Driss El Yazami, President of the CCME.



The opening keynote address will be delivered by **Souleymane Bachir Diagne**, the internationally renowned Senegalese philosopher and professor at Columbia University in New York. A leading voice in contemporary thought, he will open the Forum with a reflection on the major issues shaping the lives of young people across the world today.

Following this keynote, the Forum's first highlight will take the form of a cross-conversation entitled «**Freedom in Question: Being Young in a World Under Pressure**,» bringing together **Mohamed Mehdi Bensaid**, Morocco's Minister of Youth, Culture and Communication, and **Najat Vallaud-Belkacem**, former French Minister of National Education and President of France Terre d'Asile.

Having both assumed ministerial responsibilities at a young age, they will share their experiences and perspectives on public policies designed to support the aspirations of younger generations. Their dialogue will explore how institutions respond to young people's expectations regarding freedom, education, culture, and civic participation on both sides of the Mediterranean.

The discussions will then continue through three major roundtables dedicated to the relationships between youth, creativity, identity, and engagement.

The roundtable «**Arts & Cultures: Creating to Exist**» will bring together artist **Fatima Ezzahra Ait Zaouit**, co-founder in Essaouira of the artistic duo TABRAT, writer **Samira El Ayachi**, filmmaker **Asmae El Moudir**, visual artist **Aliou Diack**, actress and director **Fatym Layachi**, and sociologist **Marwan Mohammed**. Together, they will explore artistic creation as a space for expression, emancipation, and resistance.

The discussion will continue with «**Identities in Motion: Growing Up Between Worlds**,» featuring political scientist, novelist, and playwright **Rachid Benzine**, sociologist and philosopher **Raphaël Liogier**, sociologist **Cléo Marmié**, musician **Sara Moullablad**, and novelist and Prix Goncourt winner **Leïla Slimani**. Through their diverse perspectives, they will examine questions of belonging, transmission, and identity construction in a world shaped by mobility, cultural mixing, and multiple influences.

Finally, the roundtable «**New Forms of Engagement: When Youth Reinvents Action**» will give the floor to **Youssef Askour**, a community leader from Essaouira actively involved in local civic initiatives, **Fadwa El Menzhi**, founder of a cooperative committed to the social and solidarity economy, journalist and digital rights advocate **Malek Khadhraoui**, **Badra Oudghiri Idrissi**, Director of Studies, Communication and Development at Morocco's National Social Security Fund (CNSS), and **Adebola Williams**, a communications specialist and Nigerian social entrepreneur widely recognized for his work with African youth.

Through these discussions, the Forum will bring together voices from academia, the arts, the media, civil society, and public institutions, with the constant ambition of breaking down barriers between fields of knowledge and fostering meaningful exchanges of experience.

More than a parallel event, the **Human Rights Forum is one of the pillars of the Gnaoua Festival**. In a world marked by tensions and uncertainties, it offers a rare space where thought, dialogue, and creativity help us better understand ongoing transformations and imagine possible futures.

For two days, Essaouira will become an open agora connected to the world. A place where questions of freedom, identity, and the future will be openly debated, driven by the conviction that youth is not merely the future of the world, it is already one of its driving forces.

