



# Sigma Theta Tau International Honor Society of Nursing®

## UNITED NATIONS ACTIVITY REPORT

[United Nations Economic and Social Council Youth Forum](#) provided a platform for youth to engage with member states on developing priorities for youth as well as strategies to address them.

The forum was held 30-31 January, 2017, at the United Nations headquarters in New York, NY, United States.

Report submitted by Aden Hamza, STTI United Nations Youth Representative

### UN ECOSOC Youth Forum

The UN ECOSOC Youth Forum is the only dedicated platform for youth to meet with UN officials and ministers to participate in dialogue with each other around youth priorities. The 2-day conference takes place every year and is an opportunity for youth to participate and provide input to the United Nations Economic and Social Council by drafting an outcome document that summarizes the event's feedback.

#### Day 1

The first day opened with a plenary session where we were greeted with a video of the newly appointed Secretary-General António Guterres, and saw the President of the General Assembly Peter Thomson. Mr. Thomson highlighted the need to focus on increasing understanding of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the Paris Agreement to build support for the SDGs, with youth being a key partner needed to ensure success. The President of the General Assembly also announced that he has sent requests to all UN member countries to include SDGs in their curriculum to increase awareness and education for youth.

The Secretary General's Youth Envoy to the UN, Ahmad Alhendawi, also spoke on youth engagement and highlighted youth's significant role in creating the SDGs and other important UN legislation, such as the Security Council Resolution on Youth and Peace. As his tenure is ending, he identified some key lessons learned:

- Governments are better off when they listen to youth and they struggle when they fail youth.
- Institutions open to young people are most successful; those that are ageist are falling behind.
- Institutions that provide opportunities for youth are not doing youth a favor; it is in their best interest to engage and work with youth.
- Don't underestimate your power; show up!

We also had the privilege of receiving remarks from Trisha Shetty, the CEO of SheSays (<http://www.shesays.in/>), an organization that focuses on advancing women's rights in India through

youth engagement to achieve the UN SDGs. She reminded us that we need to take into account the most vulnerable and marginalized within our communities and focus on interdependency and promote global consciousness. This includes using an intergenerational approach to build resilience by increasing access, capacity-building, and investment for most vulnerable. In addition, remember the importance of evaluating—therefore, solid data need to be generated (i.e., segregated by age)—and focus on the SDGs' rights-based agenda.

This was followed by a discussion with ministers from various nations, who discussed the initiatives that are taking place in their own countries for youth engagement as well as identified strategies and challenges that arose. These included the upcoming World Youth Summit in Russia, the Sustainable Development Forum in Latin America, the mentorship program in Antigua and Barbuda, and the Youth Fund for entrepreneurship in Kenya, among many other great initiatives.

### **Breakout Session – Ensure Healthy Lives and Promote Well-Being for All at All Ages**

The breakout session on health included representatives from the World Health Organization (WHO); UN Major Group for Children and Youth (MGCY); United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA); Chronic Disease Network; and The Partnership for Maternal, Newborn & Child Health (PMNCH).

David Ross of WHO introduced and discussed the Global Strategy for Women's, Children's and Adolescent's Health, which uses a holistic definition of health (e.g., mental health, maternal health). He also stressed the importance of the Global Accelerated Action for the Health of Adolescents (AA-HA!; [http://www.who.int/maternal\\_child\\_adolescent/topics/adolescence/framework-accelerated-action/en/](http://www.who.int/maternal_child_adolescent/topics/adolescence/framework-accelerated-action/en/)) because adolescence is an age category that has historically been overlooked. This action plan was launched at the World Health Assembly and hopes to help countries address the health of adolescents via effective tools and strategies, as well as in developing national priorities and programs to monitor and evaluate progress.

Non-communicable diseases (NCDs) were also identified as a priority, particularly as its definition is expanding beyond physiological health to include mental health as well as injuries. However, this broadened definition lacks the increase in funding required to address NCDs, as NCDs continue to be disproportionately curable in high-income countries compared to low-income countries. It was stressed that public policy can only respond to these changes if there is meaningful engagement and data-specific management.

Some of the challenges in advocating for youth engagement in health were discussed, and include youth outreach and meaningful engagement, while moving away from tokenism. It was identified that there need to be strategies to make the atmosphere around policy and decision-making less intimidating for youth to ensure they are at the table. Particularly for the SDGs, it was agreed that youth are needed to ensure their success, especially around ensuring accountability. Countries were also recognized as in need of support, because there is a lack of knowledge and expertise regarding adolescent health; therefore, youth networks can assist with the dissemination and implementation of AA-HA!.

Opportunities for engagement:

- UN Population Fund (UNFPA) hosts a fellowship program that provides capacity-building for young innovators and a network of peer education for youth (<http://www.unfpa.org/type-contract/fellowship>).

- The Partnership for Maternal, Newborn & Child Health (PMNCH) has focal points in each region, and a youth network that is a space for youth to be formally involved in partnership (<http://www.who.int/pmnch/en/>).
- Young Professionals Chronic Disease Network (YP-CDN) focuses on capacity-building through training as well as advocacy at the local and global levels for issues on NCDs (<http://www.ncdaction.org>).

## **Plenary Session – Role of Technology in Implementing and Monitoring the SDGs**

“We don’t need programs for youth; we need programs created with youth.”

Technology was identified as a medium with great potential to help address the SDGs. In discussion, the barriers and opportunities of technology were identified, primarily being a great way to address challenges of inequity as well as a potential safe space for civil society to engage. However, public-private partnerships need to invest in creating digital spaces. Media partnerships were also discussed as a mechanism to promote SDGs in three different ways: a) print b) digital c) next innovation. During the discussion with participants, the importance of story-telling with media was emphasized, as well as reaching out to those with limited access to internet.

Suggested Reading Material (as suggested by ECOSOC Youth Forum):

- [World Youth Report: Youth Civic Engagement](#)
- UNICEF U-Report: [www.ureport.in/](http://www.ureport.in/)
- Multi-stakeholder forum on science, technology, and innovation for the SDGs: [summary by the co-chairs notes of the President of the Social and Economic Council](#)

## **UNECOSOC Youth Forum**

### **Day 2**

#### **Regional Breakout Sessions: Europe & North America**

Goal: Create 5 clear recommendations

The second day, representatives were divided into regional breakout sessions where we discussed recommendations for UNECOSOC to take into consideration.

In our discussion, we identified the challenge of addressing global issues such as climate change when youth are unemployed or underemployed. Unemployment and decreased social welfare were recognized as risk factors for youth radicalization, thereby making climate change a secondary issue, with one participant using Maslow’s hierarchy to explain that basic needs should be met first before one can be concerned with larger global issues. We eventually agreed that strategies to address environmental concern should simultaneously address employment as well.

The challenges and opportunities of entrepreneurship were identified, particularly its ability to eradicate poverty and promote prosperity. In discussion, entrepreneurship was recognized as one of many ways to address poverty, because it provides young people with opportunities. However, self-employment can be unstable, and also requires capital and investments; therefore, it may be challenging to eradicate poverty when such resources are required. Lastly, we discussed the varying levels of interest in the SDGs campaign among youth in North America, and how we can raise awareness and education about the campaign. We then received feedback and advice from a panel that consisted of members of the Council

of Europe, European Youth Forum, Youth from Australia, and the American Youth Observer to the UN. From this discussion we created the following recommendations:

- Youth need to be participants in decision-making processes, monitoring and reporting at the international, regional, and national level, and should be given appropriate resources (e.g., financial and educational) to ensure meaningful engagement.
- Increased support is required for youth organizations in civil society.
- Call for action to youth organizations to be a platform for youth
- Poverty eradication – redistribution of wealth and efficient social security systems can make positive contributions:
  - The transition of young people from education to employment needs to be better supported with diverse types of work, not just entrepreneurship.
  - Support and recognition of youth work should be highlighted, and therefore need tools and encouragement to reach out to youth.

### **Plenary Session: Interactive Roundtable on Means of Implementation and Financing for Youth Development**

The final session tackled the importance of financing for youth development and initiatives, and was led by Katherine Ellis, Director of Youth Affairs, Commonwealth Secretariat. The question-and-answer period allowed for increased interaction from national ministers who identified various investments made to increase youth development across the SDGs. Examples include developing national health policy for youth, creating online platforms for young people to comment/consult on policies, and initiating an inter-agency commission for government and civil society on youth issues, among just some of the excellent activities discussed.

### **Closing Session**

Closing remarks were heard from Assistant-Secretary General of UN DESA, Chair of UNDG Helen Clark, and YMCA representatives. Each of the representatives highlighted important aspects of youth engagement, including solidarity for young people, and encouraged civic engagement and political inclusion, as well as strong partnerships. Our last speaker was the Secretary-General Envoy on Youth, who encouraged us to claim this space and continue to be active agents of change.

Opportunities:

Not Too Young To Run Campaign encourages, promotes and celebrates youth to run for office — <http://www.nottooyoungtorun.org>

Secretary-General's Envoy on Youth — <http://www.un.org/youthenvoy/>

Links:

Programme and Concept Notes for all discussions at the UN ECOSOC Youth Forum — <https://www.un.org/ecosoc/en/node/902004>

Highlights from the UNECOSOC Youth Forum — <http://www.un.org/youthenvoy/2017/02/ten-things-you-need-to-know-about-the-2017-ecosoc-youth-forum/>