



# Sigma Theta Tau International Honor Society of Nursing®

## UNITED NATIONS ACTIVITY REPORT

The United Nations [Youth Assembly](#) (YA) is a unique platform for fostering dialogue and generating partnerships between exceptional youth, civil society, the private sector, and the United Nations.

Attendees are selected from nominations from their affiliated [non-governmental organization](#).

The assembly was held 1-2 February 2017, at the United Nations headquarters in New York, NY, United States.

Report submitted by Aden Hamza, STTI United Nations Youth Representative

### **Day 1**

#### **Opening Remarks**

**“Peace is not an opportunity, but an obligation.” – Secretary-General of the United Nations**

#### **Deena Marlen – [Friendship Network](#) Board Member**

Since 2004, the Friendship Network has been participating at UN. Our challenges and solutions are interconnected, especially what we are going to do when we leave here. Youth in action is our best hope.

#### **Youth Chair of Winter Youth Assembly – Jolly Amatya**

To accomplish the SDGs, we need passion. This is where passion collides with purpose. She reminded us of the privilege we have to participate in this experience and to ensure we use this to increase the opportunities for all youth. Encouraging words from the youth chair:

“What will be your legacy in leaving a sustainable and prosperous world behind?”

#### **[Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Australia to the United Nations – Gillian Bird](#)**

Ambassador Bird spoke highly of the need for youth delegates to attend the General Assembly Mission to the UN, but also highlighted the importance of practical grassroots engagement to realize the 2030

goals. One of the challenges is increasing and maintaining the SDG visibility, and the need to change our attitudes about gender, equality, and many of the other SDGs listed. Finally, she encouraged bilateral agreements and relationships to help achieve the SDGs.

### **President of United Nations [General Assembly](#) – Peter Thomson**

The President of the General Assembly identified his priorities as

- a) Saving the Oceans – a man-made problem that can be solved with man-made solutions
- b) Implementing the SDGs – supporting education to include SDGs in school so that youth understand the logic of SDGs and learn about them as rights

Since spearheading the SDG agenda, the President has observed that SDG1 is the greatest global challenge. Although the number of people in poverty has decreased, he stressed that 156 million youth still remain in extreme poverty. Some of the factors that contribute to this include lack of education, rural living, and conflict-areas. SDG4 (Education) has made progress; the number of young people in school is increasing and the number of young people out of school is decreasing. SDG4 drives economic growth and can help remove barriers to education such as gender bias and poverty. Finally, sustainable production and consumption were identified as key, and the President called on us to be agents for change and to drive innovative solutions.

### **[Permanent Mission of Denmark to United Nations](#) – Ib Petersen**

Mr. Petersen encouraged us to participate and to hold government accountable to the SDGs. In Denmark, they are conducting a Review of Youth Engagement in Country Programs and have hired Youth Advisors to government to help create an environment that enables youth to be agents of change.

## **Discussion**

### **[Global Education Monitoring \(GEM\) Report](#) – Aaron Benarot**

Mr. Benarot presented the GEM Report, which is an independent, evidence-based annual report by UNESCO. Founded in 2002, it monitors the progress on six EFA Goals, and has now focused on the SDGs. The focus of the report is SDG 4 (Education) and the 10 targets within it, particularly inclusive, equitable, quality, and lifelong learning opportunities for all.

What should education teach? – What is inclusive/equitable/quality?

Mr. Benarot stressed that it needs to go beyond the essential reading, writing, and arithmetic because education has the ability to influence our values and behavior; as target 4.7 points out, we need to educate on global citizenship and sustainability. We also need to ensure that educational resources (e.g., textbooks) are not perpetuating stereotypes. He expanded education beyond the classroom to

community centers and informal areas for learning, particularly as it relates to remote areas and refugee camps.

There are still 61 million out of school, most of whom are in the secondary age group.

It is easier to identify how many children are in school; it is harder to measure how much children are learning, the quality of education they are receiving. Also, there needs to be a shift in understanding what a quality education is. Education should not simply be transferred from the Global North, and a holistic perspective is needed to create policies across siloes such as health and education.

### [International Labor Organization](#) – Vinicius Pinheiro

Our current state:

1. First time incomes are falling
2. Poverty is killing ambitious dreams
3. Job doesn't ensure access out of poverty

The key is not to simply create jobs, but to ensure decent jobs. Unfortunately, the prolonged job search is making people accept precarious or mismatched work, or people drop out of the labor force. For SDG #8: Decent Work, it is critical that youth employment and gender gaps in the labor market are addressed, especially education and training to ensure smoother transitions into the workforce. To combat poverty, Mr. Pinheiro stated that social protection and getting people into the labor market (though education and job creation) were key elements.

### Deputy Director for [United Nations Environment Program](#) – Jamil Ahmad

On SDG12 (sustainable consumption and production), the focus is promoting energy efficiency, sustainable infrastructure and development, green jobs, and making industries such as construction and tourism sustainable, as Mr. Ahmad stressed. Therefore the focus is promoting a sustainable lifestyle.

### **Breakout Session #1 - Reaching Higher Heights: The SDGs and Higher Education**

Led by Sustainable Development Solutions Network, this session focused on educating people about the SDGs and encouraging higher education. The successes of increasing education were highlighted:

- Total enrollment for developing countries is 91%
- Number of people leaving school has cut in half
- Literacy rate for youth has increased
- Increased number of girls in school

But there is still room to improve. The importance of increasing access to tertiary education, including vocational, technical and higher education is critical, and one way in which to accomplish this is online education. Although research is still being conducted to measure how much is learned from massive open online courses—and it often requires internet, which is inequitably distributed—it is still an option to move education forward.

Hence the SDG Academy, which offers online courses on the SDGs at [www.sdgacademy.org](http://www.sdgacademy.org). These are offered freely and include videos, readings, quizzes, and a completion certificate. The courses are considered master-level and include webinars with faculty and discussion forums. The courses offer increasing technical knowledge for SDGs related to monitoring and evaluation.

Key skills for Sustainable Development?

1. Interdisciplinary learning – due to the interrelated nature of the SDGs
2. Communication – marketing/PR/branding and interpersonal dialogue

## **Day 2**

During the opening session, we worked on Youth Plan of Action Deliberations – This was an interactive worksheet that was used to help us develop action plans to put the SDGs into practice within our own communities (see attached pictures).

### **Breakout session #1: SDG 1 – Supporting Implementation of SDG1 Through Better Jobs for Young People**

A Panel discussion on SDG1 was held with **Dino Corell** (ILO Programme Analyst); **Niels Caszo**, AIESEC President; **Anna Fendley**, United Steelworkers Member (Intl Trade Union Confederation Youth Committee); **Samantha O'Brien O'Reilly**, UN Youth Delegate Ireland; and **Tchegoun Koba**, UN Volunteer Youth Programme Specialist – Senegal.

Niels Caszo – “Not just about taking this seriously, it’s about taking the SDGs personally.”

AIESEC has created Youth 4 Global Goals, using exchange and internships to promote SDGs. He stressed that education is currently not providing the skills needed to be ready for the job market, hence using experiential learning. At present there aren’t enough opportunities for the number of people applying.

Anna Findley – She stressed that increasing unemployment, underemployment, or precarious work for youth has been unsuccessful in getting people out of poverty or providing for a better future.

“There are no jobs on a dead planet.”

She discussed how workers need education in regards to the importance of global goals. One way to do this has been through the Youth Committee: ensuring economic rights are included in policies, training and appropriate transitions to work, non-discriminatory jobs, social protection, fair wages, and decent jobs.

Samantha – As the UN Youth Delegate to Ireland, she held consultations across the country with youth to understand their challenges/issues. She shared her learning, that youth unemployment was a universal theme, and the difficulty of over-promoting entrepreneurship, as it is not fair to expect all youth to be self-employed. They need supportive policies and increased access to financing.

Tchegoun Koba – Benefits of volunteering:

- a) Gaining skills
- b) Investing in youth, accelerating transition to job market
- c) Improved society – youth as volunteers can solve problems

## **Discussion**

During our discussion, Anna stressed the importance of investing in social infrastructure, labor market surveys, and creating opportunities for school-to-work transitions. Also, governments have the responsibility to plan for the jobs of the future, which includes transitioning out of carbon jobs.

Niels provided advice directed at youth looking for employment:

- Tailor your CVs and resumes, and increase your digital footprint (e.g., blogs, videos, projects).
- Info-views – hold information interviews with people who are working in your area of interest
- Build technical skills
- Take advantage of e-learning
- Don't give up, Level up

Samantha expanded on this advice with her own:

- a) Harness transferable skills – Sell your experiences and don't undervalue them.
- b) Practical skills – Don't be afraid to ask for help, mentorship. Use LinkedIn to reach out.

## **Breakout session #2 - Putting Sustainable Consumption and Production in Practice: Sustainable Lifestyles SDG12**

Panel discussion:

**Halina Brown** – Professor at Clark University

**Steve Lee** – Founder of Foundation for Environmental Stewardship

**Alden Wicker** – Founder of EcoCult Blog

### **Halina Brown**

Professor Brown shared a stimulating presentation on sustainable lifestyles and the solutions/challenges with individual action and systematic change. She described the origins of our consumer-driven society as the basis of the economy, starting in the early post-war era with the selling of the American dream, which was the driver of the industrial complex. As the American dream became bigger, along with income, so did the ecological footprint (biggest contributors: home, mobility, eating, leisure). However, the effects of GDP on happiness/social health has since waned; leading up to the 1970s the GDP increased with social health, whereas post-1970s the GDP continued to rise but social health did not.

Barriers to changing individual behavior:

Social barriers – status and the need to fit in.

Structural barriers – land use, transport, housing, institutions driven by consumerism, easy credit, etc.

### **Steve Lee**

As an environmental and youth activist, Steve highlighted the significance of climate change for youth, stating that we are the final generation with the capacity and chance to solve climate change. He spoke of the opportunities to create new rules for society as well as problem-solving sustainability. This involves caring more about the “stuff” around us, as the SDGs are encouraging us to spend less and reach for a sustainable, equitable, and just future.

### **Alden Wicker**

“Conscious consumerism will not change the world.”

Alden challenged us to think beyond conscious consumerism, as the infrastructure has not been developed to support sustainable consumers. Although conscious consumerism can be used as a tool to educate and engage people in sustainable lifestyles, it is not the solution. A sustained effort is needed to support advocacy and policy change to create infrastructure for sustainable lives.

## **Breakout session #3: The Role of Young People in Policy-Making**

Panel discussion on youth engagement at all levels of government, with the following guests:

**Saskia Schellekens** – Chief of Staff for Secretary-General’s Envoy on Youth at UN

**Pernelle Borgbo** – UN Youth Advisor for Denmark

**Pablo Angulo-Troconis** – World Federation of UN Associations (WFUNA)

**Nicole Perez** – US Youth Observer to UN

Youth engagement has been increasing globally over the last few decades with national youth councils, although the power they hold varies across the board. A good example is the Council of Europe, where young people hold 50% of votes for all youth policies, and organizations nominate people to committees. This ensures the co-partnering and co-management of policies.

### **Saskia**

Opportunities for engagement include:

UN ECOSOC Youth Forum –an institutionalized and formal way to be involved, because youth have the opportunity to speak with ministers

Major Group for Children and Youth – focuses on working with intergovernmental processes for youth

Youth Delegates – member states may designate UN Youth Delegates

Saskia strongly supports the engagement of youth at all levels, including municipal councils, as well as involvement in decision-making, including budgetary decisions. She also shared that although 122 countries have youth policies, many are not supported with a budget. For youth policy-making, a rights-based, inclusive, and participatory approach should be used, and youth should be involved in all stages of policy-making.

### **Danish Youth Minister**

Panelle described her role as developing a new strategic youth direction, being involved with all youth-related issues, and advocating for the best ideas for youth, and thus she is looking to meet with youth about recommendations for youth engagement. In her experience, she recognized how youth is crosscutting across all policies. A review of all youth policies with young people from youth organizations and from countries with these policies can help generate best ideas/strategies. Also, countries with bilateral agreements should encourage youth exchange and sharing of ideas.

### **Pablo**

Pablo stressed that youth should not be limited to “youth” policies, because youth can inform all policies. He also expressed that civil society is playing an important role in increasing youth engagement at the UN.

### **Nicole Perez**

She described her role as engaging as many people as possible in the issues they are passionate about, and bringing what she learns to the State Department and the UN. The narrative of adults and youth are changing and youth are beginning to speak out. She also highlighted the challenges, as almost 50% of young people are minorities, while most policy-makers are not. Therefore, young people need to take advantage of the power they have and speak out on their issues.

## **Closing Session**

### **UN General Assembly Hall**

Panel:

#### **Ravi Karkara**

**Shannon O’Shea**– Agenda 2030 Partnerships Manager

**Sergio Fernández de Córdova** –UNDP SDG Fund Private Sector

**Fiona Smith** - Advisor on SDGs and UN Women

The discussion reminded us of the need to develop innovative partnerships, including public-private partnerships, to help create innovative solutions. In addition, we must ensure that all people are elevated, including women, because gender equality is a human rights problem that affects everyone. Also, the panel highlighted the work that youth have already accomplished, for example having the UNSC recognize youth as agents for change and peace. This changed the narrative on youth in violent/conflict areas, and showed the power of grassroots movements. Some advice moving forward:

1. Engage
2. Get diversity of choice
3. Be humble
4. Engage institutions – bring solutions to these institutions

### **Secretary-General’s Envoy on Youth – Ahmad Alhendawi**

In the last speech by the SG Envoy on Youth, he reminded us that universal values are a relatively new concept, along with the UN, and although we have high expectations. we also need to know how far we’ve already come. It is our responsibility to ensure the UN lives up to the Universal Declaration.



“Don’t build a CV, build a good story.” – Ahmad Alhendawi

[Global Education Monitoring \(GEM\) Report](#)

Register for the Blogs: [www.gemreportunesco.wordpress.com](http://www.gemreportunesco.wordpress.com)

**Youth 4 Global Goals**

[www.youth4globalgoals.org](http://www.youth4globalgoals.org)

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