

APPLIED PSYCHOLOGY AROUND THE WORLD

Peace Building
March 2024

IAAP Bulletin
Volume 6, Issue 1
ISSN: 2639-6521

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Editorial

Pr. Dr. Christine Roland-Lévy, IAAP Past-President (2022-2026)

As 2024 started, this is the sixth volume of *Applied Psychology Around the World* and the first issue is focusing on "Peace Building".

In 2005, a new Commission was launched at the United Nations: the *Peacebuilding Commission (PBC)*. It is an inter-governmental advisory body that supports peace efforts in conflict-affected countries and is a key addition to the capacity of the International Community in the broad peace agenda. In the resolutions establishing the Peacebuilding Commission, the United Nations General Assembly and the Security Council mandated the Peacebuilding Commission:

- to bring together all relevant actors to marshal resources and to advise on and propose integrated strategies for post-conflict peacebuilding and recovery;
- to focus attention on the reconstruction and institution-building efforts necessary for recovery from conflict and to support the development of integrated strategies in order to lay the foundation for sustainable development;
- to provide recommendations and information to improve the coordination of all relevant actors within and outside the United Nations, to develop best practices, to help to ensure predictable financing for early recovery activities and to extend the period of attention given by the international community to post-conflict recovery.

The United Nations General Assembly and Security Council also stressed the importance of the Peacebuilding Commission to fulfil the following functions:

a. To bring sustained international attention to sustaining peace, and to provide political accompaniment and advocacy to countries affected by conflict, with their consent;

b. To promote an integrated, strategic and coherent approach to peacebuilding, noting that security, development and human rights are closely interlinked and mutually reinforcing;

c. To serve a bridging role among the principal organs and relevant entities of the United Nations by sharing advice on peacebuilding needs and priorities, in line with the respective competencies and responsibilities of these bodies;

d. To serve as a platform to convene all relevant actors within and outside the United Nations, including from Member States, national authorities, United Nations missions and country teams, international, regional and sub-regional organizations, international financial institutions, civil society, women's groups, youth organizations and, where relevant, the private sector and national human rights institutions, in order to provide recommendations and information to improve their coordination, to develop and share good practices in peacebuilding, including on institution-building, and to ensure predictable financing to peacebuilding.

Based on this mandate, the Peacebuilding Commission and its partners have an important role to play for maintaining Peace in a troubled world with intense threats. The PBC is composed of 31 Member States, elected from the General Assembly, the Security Council, and the Economic and Social Council.



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Within IAAP, we have been, and are, extremely concerned by the many terrorists' attacks that affect numerous parts of the planet. Violence and terrorism are profoundly changing the world we live in, affecting our effectiveness, security and well-being. In 2006, a Task Force on Terrorism was established under the leadership of IAAP President Michael Knowles (2006-2010). Chaired by Prof. Sarlito Sarwono, the Task Force submitted two reports to the IAAP Board of Directors: one in Berlin in 2008 and another one in Melbourne in 2010. As President Janel Gauthier (2014-2018) reminded us, this task force did not continue when President Raymond Fowler assumed the IAAP presidency (2010-2011). Nevertheless, a better understanding of what spurs violence and terrorism in today's world seemed needed to develop more effective approaches to thwart violence and terrorism in the world. Thus, in July 2016 at the Board of Directors' meeting, in Yokohama, Japan, President Janel Gauthier, re-created the initial Task Force on Terrorism. María Paz García-Vera was appointed as Chair of this Task Force.

When I started my term as President of IAAP, in July 2018, in agreement with the Board of Directors, we changed the initial name of this Task Force into: Terrorism and Peace Building. President Lori Foster, our current President, decided to keep this Task Force on board as there is still so much to do on the topic of Peace Building for Psychologists... A full Report, entitled *Contributions of Psychology to the Challenge of Terrorism and Peace Building*, was produced in November 2023 and will soon be posted on the [Task Force webpage](#). Also, a very rich Webinar presenting the work accomplished by the Task Force so far, was provided for IAAP members on December 7th, 2023 (It is [still available online](#)).

In today's context, for example, with the war in Ukraine, in March 2022, the *International Association of Applied Psychology* reminded that it stands for universal human rights, peace and security. We shared our deep concern about humanitarian offenses, resulting in ongoing devastating loss of life and attack on innocent civilians. We

condemned this unjustified aggression. As an international association of psychologists, IAAP recognizes the deleterious impact of violence and oppression on the mental health and wellbeing of persons and societies. Indeed, we psychologists know too well that armed confrontations leave multiple and lasting consequences on psychological and social conditions, especially for women, children, the aging, and all marginalized persons. In this context, IAAP reminded its full dedication and global commitment to peace building worldwide.

With the recent devastating terrorist attack which took place on October 7, 2023, it is noted that the drastic acts of violence have shaken the fragile groundwork of peace and stability in the world. In examining the psychological consequences of these traumatic events, we are deeply concerned for the welfare of vulnerable populations, such as children, seniors, people with disabilities, those who often experience the greatest suffering in conflict. This is where IAAP stands to contribute to building a healthier environment in a safer world. In accordance with the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Association of Applied Psychology affirms its commitment to the fundamental rights of dignity, worth, free speech, and a life without violence or fear for all people, regardless of race, religion, sexual identity, political beliefs, or economic status. As a psychological association, IAAP also recognizes the impact of violence and oppression on personal mental health and cultures and societies and stands with efforts to eliminate these practices from our global society.

It is in this context that this issue of Applied Psychology Around the World is focusing on "Peace Building". Thanks to Judy Kuriansky and the contributions of some of her students from Columbia University Teachers College, we have a full issue devoted to our topic today. Here, I wish to say a few words about who is Judy Kuriansky. She was awarded the IAAP Distinguished Professional Contributions Award in 2010 for her important role in IAAP, as she has been for 20 years IAAP representative in consultative

Editorial

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status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council at the United Nations. Dr. Judy Kuriansky is a Professor of Psychology and Education at Columbia University Teachers College. She is also the Advisor to the United Nations at the Mission of Sierra Leone. She has been a pioneer media psychologist who has given advice on radio and TV as well as print media for decades; she has also spoken widely about how to bridge the research-practitioner-advocacy gap, for scientific psychological work to be useful in policymaking, especially on the international level at the United Nations, where she has successfully advocated for inclusion of mental health and well-being in the UN 2030 Agenda, Political Declaration for Universal Health Coverage and many other important agreements. Judy is the author of many books on international issues, including disaster recovery, Ebola, grassroots peacebuilding in the Middle East (“Beyond Bullets and Bombs” and “Terror in the Holy Land”) and has edited a book on “A New Counter-terrorism Strategy” by former Iraq Ambassador to the UN Hamid Al-Bayati. She has organized innumerable events and conferences and spoken at the UN and worldwide about peace, co-founded a peace band, and conducted numerous workshops during conflicts, disaster and peacetime, on resilience, peacebuilding and conflict resolution. Judy, who is the head of the GAAP Lab (Global Advocacy and Applied Psychology), is a consultant on the IAAP Terrorism and Peace Building Task Force. worldwide about peace, co-founded a peace band, and conducted numerous workshops during conflicts, disaster and peacetime, on resilience, peacebuilding and conflict resolution. Judy, who is the head of the GAAP Lab (Global Advocacy and Applied Psychology), is a consultant on the IAAP Terrorism and Peace Building Task Force.

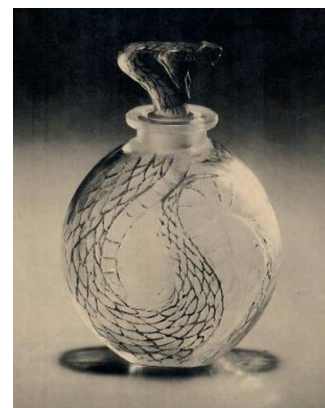
In this issue, the different papers cover a series of topics, in connection to sessions organized by and at the United Nations in relation to mental health and peace. Let me mention one particular paper which is co-written by Ambassador Carlos Enrique Garcia Gonzalez, Judy Kuriansky, Renan de Almeida Sargiani and Leslie Hernandez, on Youth Gang Prevention in El Salvador; this paper presents

a model school-community project addressing the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals.

As usual, the Editorial is followed by the Message from the President of IAAP.

I hope that you will enjoy reading this first issue of Volume 6, and note that the following one will be devoted to **gender issues in connection to the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women**.

Before closing this Editorial, let me wish you a **wonderful Wood Dragon Year**, with a fusion of beauty and purpose: the 1912 Lalique Dragon, echoing IAAP's commitment to peace-building in this auspicious Dragon Year.



A Dragon perfume bottle designed by Lalique in 1912

The Sixth P: Psychological Contributions to Peace

Lori Foster, IAAP President (2022 - 2026)

As we navigate the complexities of today's world, the quest for a sustainable future has never been more pressing. The United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) offer a comprehensive vision aimed at improving life for all, with a focus on People, Planet, Prosperity, Peace, and Partnerships. Yet, achieving these ambitious goals requires the integration of an indispensable Sixth P – Psychology. Our discipline is crucial not only for understanding the depths of human behavior and interaction but also for actualizing the aspirations laid out by the SDGs.

“There can be no sustainable development without peace and no peace without sustainable development” (United Nations General Assembly, 2015, p. 2). Peace can be considered at multiple levels - between regions and countries as well as within regions, countries, communities, organizations, and beyond. In each of these widely varying contexts, one thing remains true: Whether peace is maintained, cultivated, and achieved comes down to people - their beliefs, attitudes, decisions, and behaviors - and the systems that people have created.

This underscores the value in exploring the broad and impactful ways psychology can contribute to peace. From the insights of organizational psychology in fostering effective leadership and resolving conflicts to the influence of environmental psychology in creating harmonious community spaces, psychology offers unique and essential perspectives on building peace. Moreover, the significant role of psychology associations in unifying these diverse contributions deserves emphasis. Psychology associations serve as an important foundation for our collective action, supporting endeavors towards peace that are unified and far-reaching.

Psychology's Diverse Contributions

Psychologists contribute to peace in different ways, from research to practice, policy, and advocacy. For instance, research in organizational psychology might explore leadership styles that contribute to successful peace negotiations, while educational psychologists could develop school programs teaching conflict resolution. In practice, clinical psychologists might offer therapy to communities affected by conflict, promoting healing and resilience. In the realm of policy, psychologists have the tools to actively engage in shaping mental health frameworks within



post-conflict recovery plans, for example, directly influencing the strategies of governments and organizations. This role involves rigorous analysis, policy formulation, and collaboration with policymakers to integrate psychological insights into broader recovery initiatives. Advocacy, meanwhile, extends psychologists' influence beyond formal policy arenas engaging the wider community and decision-makers to promote psychological principles related to peace, such as mental health awareness. Through public campaigns, outreach programs, and media engagement, psychologists can advocate for societal changes, raise awareness of psychological needs in peace-building processes, and mobilize public and political support for initiatives that underpin peace and well-being at all societal levels.

Kurt Lewin's assertion that "there is nothing so practical as a good theory" (Lewin, 1951) underscores the importance of psychology's theoretical bases, not only for research, but also for practice, policy, and advocacy. Teng-Calleja and Meyer (2024) highlight the significance of Allport's

The Sixth P cont.

Intergroup Contact Theory in promoting empathy and understanding among diverse groups (Allport, 1954). They also emphasize the critical role of international psychology in bridging cultural divides for peace (Teng-Calleja & Meyer, 2024).

Areas of applied psychology, independently and in collaboration, are well positioned to contribute to peace by studying and addressing underlying social, economic, and health-related factors that influence societal harmony and well-being. For example, environmental psychologists are able to study how shared community spaces promote social cohesion, economic psychologists might examine the psychological underpinnings of economic disparities that fuel conflict, and sport psychologists can contribute their research, listening, and collaboration skills to Sport for Development and Peace programs (Guest, 2013).

One need only look to [webinars hosted by the International Association of Applied Psychology \(IAAP\)](#) for concrete examples of how applied psychology contributes directly and indirectly to peace. Illustrative topics include the following:

- **Sustainable Consumption:** Economic and health psychologists together examine consumer behaviors that promote sustainability. This is relevant to peace as sustainable consumption has the potential to reduce resource conflicts and promote environmental justice, contributing to global stability.
- **Health Psychology Lessons from COVID-19:** The pandemic highlighted the importance of mental health support and resilience strategies. Lessons from health psychology contribute to peace by fostering societal resilience against crises, reducing panic, and promoting cooperative behaviors.
- **Psychology in Healthcare:** The role of psychology in healthcare, including understanding patient behaviors and promoting mental health, contributes to peace by ensuring communities have the psychological support needed to cope with health-related stressors, thereby maintaining social stability.
- **Gender Equality:** Addressing gender inequalities through psychological research and interventions can lead to more equitable societies. Gender equality contributes to peace by reducing gender-based violence and disparities, fostering a sense of justice and harmony.

- **Psychological Aspects of Migration:** Understanding the psychological impact of migration and developing supportive interventions for migrants can ease tensions in host communities and support the integration process, contributing to social cohesion and peace.

Each of these topics illustrates the intricate ways in which psychology intersects with efforts to build and maintain peace, showcasing the discipline's broad potential to address the root causes of conflict and promote societal well-being.

The Role of Psychology Associations

Together, psychologists can achieve so much more. While the SDG 16 pertains to Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions, the 17th and final SDG underscores the importance of Partnerships for the Goals. Partnerships are important within and beyond the field of psychology when considering how to promote and achieve peace.

The isolated endeavors of individual psychologists and research teams have their limits. It is here that national, regional, and international psychology associations play a critical role. They are instrumental in coordinating efforts, harmonizing activities, amplifying evidence-based insights, and fostering partnerships. Psychology associations serve not just as hubs for communication and collaboration but also as catalysts for action and innovation through, for example, the hosting of webinars and symposia, and the creation of task forces that bring together bright minds and a diversity of cultural perspectives to tackle some of the world's toughest problems.

Moreover, psychological associations act as bridges, connecting psychologists with policymakers, humanitarian organizations, and other stakeholders, including but not limited to UN agencies, missions, and other global development entities. By doing so, psychology associations help translate psychological research into practical, actionable strategies that can be implemented on the ground. This collaborative approach is not only essential in responding to immediate crises that threaten peace, but also in contributing to long-term peace-building efforts. It demonstrates the power of collective wisdom and action in our field, where the sharing of knowledge and best practices can significantly enhance the effectiveness of our response to global conflicts.

Psychology associations are also able to provide a much-needed ethical compass on the complex road to

The Sixth P cont.

peace. The Universal Declaration of Ethical Principles for Psychologists, adopted by IAAP and the International Union of Psychological Science (IuPsyS) more than 15 years ago, is a case in point (Gauthier, 2020). This declaration provides a global ethical framework, emphasizing respect for the dignity of individuals and communities, competent care for well-being, and the societal responsibilities of psychologists. These principles are crucial in guiding psychologists' research, practice, policy, and advocacy efforts related to peace.

In essence, effectively functioning psychology associations are far more than professional bodies; they are dynamic platforms for advocacy and change, playing a critical role in shaping how psychology as a discipline responds to the challenges and opportunities related to peace. Their efforts exemplify the strength of collaboration and the profound impact psychologists can have when working together towards a common goal.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the journey towards sustainable peace is undeniably complex, requiring the concerted efforts of multiple disciplines. Psychology, with its deep understanding of human behavior and systems, plays a vital role in this endeavor. Through research, practice, policy, and advocacy, psychology offers innovative solutions and insights that address the root causes of conflict and promote societal well-being. As we continue to explore and expand the boundaries of psychological contributions to peace, let us leverage the power of collaboration and ethical guidance provided by psychology associations worldwide. Together, we can harness the Sixth P to create a more peaceful, just, and sustainable world for future generations. Our

collective wisdom, action, and innovation in psychology not only respond to the challenges of today but also pave the way for the enduring peace of tomorrow.

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Mobilizing Peace in the United Nations Agenda: Efforts of the TAP Network

Leslie Hernandez¹ and Judy Kuriansky²

Introduction

With prevailing violence in varied parts of the world, the aspiration for peace as outlined in the United Nations Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development is in serious jeopardy. Back in 2015, the 193 government Members States who adopted this Agenda outlined Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) #16 with a pledge to: Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable, and inclusive institutions at all levels” (Sustainable Development Goals, n.d.).

Achieving these goals adopted by governments requires partnership of many stakeholders, including civil society. To advance the achievement of SDG16 by involving civil society, the TAP Network -- an acronym standing for Transparency, Accountability and Participation -- was organized to bring together civil society organizations (CSOs) in every region of the world to coordinate collective global advocacy and support individual members' actions (TAP Network, n.d.).

A plus sign added to a goal (e.g., SDG16+) indicates that progress towards that goal impacts the achievement of the entire UN 2030 Agenda, with all its 17 SDGs and

1 Reported by Leslie Hernandez, a member of the International Association of Applied Psychology Division of Students and Early Career Professionals, pursuing a Masters' degree in the Department of Clinical Psychology, Columbia University Teachers College, and a student in Professor Judy Kuriansky's class on "Psychology and the United Nations." In addition to my scholastic work, I have seven years of experience working in the Healthcare Sector. I have worked as a shift supervisor in the social services department and as a care manager helping individuals with disabilities return safely in person to school and day habilitation programs, from the time when families were at home with their children due to COVID-19 when they needed immediate help finding resources for recreational programs for their children with disabilities. In addition to my work experience, I recently worked as a case manager for a shelter site/humanitarian emergency respite center and humanitarian project managed by NYC health and hospitals and "Doc Go" agency, and currently work at Cases, helping homeless and incarcerated individuals connect with programs and rehab services.

2 Dr. Judy Kuriansky is a Professor of Psychology and Education, Columbia University Teachers College, where she teaches the unique course on "Psychology and the United Nations" emphasizing the nexus mode of the interlinked SDGs. At the United Nations, she has been a senior representative of the International Association of Applied Psychology in consultative status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council (for which she also serves on their working group on Terrorism and Peacebuilding) and Advisor for the Mission of the Republic of Sierra Leone to the United Nations whose term on the Security Council started in 2024. She is also Policy Advisor to HE Sidique Wai, Ambassador of the Embassy of the Republic of Sierra Leone. The author of many books on international issues, including disaster recovery, Ebola, grassroots peacebuilding in the Middle East ("Beyond Bullets and Bombs" and "Terror in the Holy Land") and having edited a book on "A New Counter-terrorism Strategy" by former Iraq Ambassador to the UN Hamid Al-Bayati, she has organized innumerable events and conferences and spoken at the UN and worldwide about peace, co-founded a peace band, and conducted innumerable workshops during conflicts, disaster and peacetime, on resilience, peacebuilding and conflict resolution.

targets. Specifically, the broader measures of SDG16+ combines the original SDG16 targets with an additional 24 targets from seven other SDGs, taking the total number of targets to 36 (TAP Network, 2021). Thus, the + sign also indicates how the SDGs are interlinked, with analyses yielding charts and tools to track the correlations.

The over 300 Network members include local and grassroots groups, national, regional, and thematic CSO networks, international NGOs and independent think tanks. Examples are CIVICUS, Human Rights First Rwanda Association, Nepal Peacebuilding Initiative, Women for Peace and Gender Equality Initiative, Peace, and Justice Network. Also, over a hundred Partners are committed to help forward the TAP Network's agenda, including, for example, the World Justice Project, the World Federation of United Nations Associations, and Transparency International (TAP Network, n.d.).

The Informal Breakfast Dialogue on SDG 16+ Mobilization

A two-hour morning event intended as an assembly rally was held by the TAP Network on 16 September 2023 at 8:30am EST in the second-floor meeting room at the

Mobilizing Peace cont.

United Nations Church Plaza Center, a building across the street from the UN headquarters in New York City. The aim was to mobilize existing and new members about SDG16 and the urgency to meet the UN Agenda goal, which is especially important at this time, being the half way point to the year 2030.

The format of the event consisted of a panel discussion, and networking for those concerned about peace to meet each other and create potential partnerships. A light breakfast buffet was served. Tables were set out with materials about events and organizations.

A unique feature – which encouraged networking – was a poster board where people could contribute messages or pledges about SDG16 to a communal design, and a photo frame to take personal pictures of commitment to #SDG16NOW.



TAP network event attendees writing poster message and sharing contact information



TAP network participants taking pictures next to the event poster board

The event was held in-person and also broadcasted online, where people could participate in the chat and ask questions.



Announcement for “People’s Assembly Rally and TAP Breakfast” 2023, TAP Network

Progress of the TAP Network activities were outlined, focusing on the SDG16Now campaign and how it is changing peoples’ lives through advocating about human rights (SDG16Now Campaign, n.d.). The Network is celebrating the 5th-year anniversary of a campaign called “Voices of SDG16: Stories for Global Action,” initiated in 2019, wherein personal experiences are shared and recorded to spread awareness of the peace goal.

Mobilizing Peace cont.

The SDG16Now Campaign supports the 2030 Agenda centered on the three pillars: Mobilization, Advocacy, and Connection:

- **Mobilizing:** Collaboration among stakeholders is necessary to mobilize a civil society and transform action on SDG 16.
- **Advocating:** Government advocacy can accelerate actions and provide additional resources to the SDG 16 campaign.
- **Connecting:** Leadership roles can showcase and connect civil societies, including national stakeholders, with the intent to advance SDG 16 and key global processes.

An important objective is to establish a community of actors who can be accountable to achieving SDG16 by empowering communities through capacity building, monitoring, and accountability, by adopting the Theory of Change framework (TAP Network Theory of Change, 2023).



TAP Network chart outlining the Theory of Change

The targets for SDG16 (TAP Network, 2021) are:

- Target 16.1: eliminate and prevent violence anywhere and everywhere
- Target 16.2: safeguard children by protecting them against abuse, exploitation, and trafficking
- Target 16.3: promote the rule of law and equal access to justice
- Target 16.4: combat organized crime, including financial arms flows
- Target 16.5: reduce corruption and bribery
- Target 16.6: develop effective and accountable transparent institutions

- Target 16.7: respond to inclusive, responsive, and representative decision making
- Target 16.8: global governance strengthening
- Target 16.9: universal legal identity
- Target 16.10: public access to information and protection of fundamental freedoms
- Target 16.A: prevent violence and enhance national institutions to combat violence, terrorism, and crime
- Target 16.B: inform and promote non-discriminatory laws and policies

EVENT OVERVIEW

The event was attended by approximately 50 people, with additional people tuning in online.



Attendees at the TAP Network event, with John Romano (back row, center), Debra Jones (middle row 3rd from right with #16 sign) and the author of this paper, Leslie Hernandez (front row left)

Speakers

Speakers included those from the TAP Secretariat and also applied supporters.

Speakers from the TAP Network Secretariat

Two members of the TAP Network Secretariat spoke on the opening panel: Director John Romano and Strategic Advisor Debra Jones. They were introduced by TAP Network Steering Committee member Cheri-Leigh Erasmus who serves as TAP Network Programming and Learning Manager. She invited attendees to ask questions during the event.

Mobilizing Peace cont.



TAP Network event panel (left to right): Cheri-Leigh Erasmus, John Romano, and Debra Jones

Cheri-Leigh Erasmus, a TAP Network Steering Committee member, is the Programs and Learning Manager at the Accountability Lab, an NGO headquartered in Washington DC, that aims to build a new generation of active citizens and responsible leaders around the world. An advisor of non-profit organizations, she has conceptualized and implemented leadership in public and private sectors throughout South Asia and countries on the African continent.

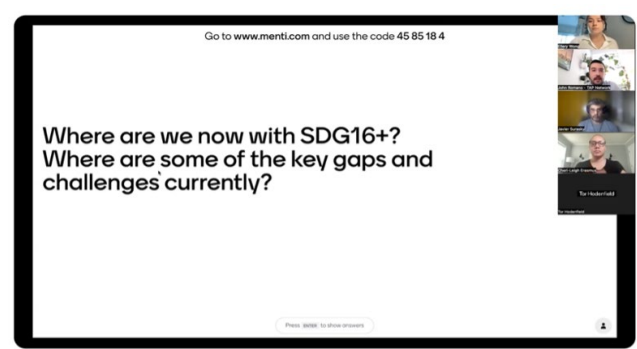
Erasmus introduced the panelists, saying, "I've been really honored over the last 18 months to serve and to share as co-chair of the TAP network Steering Committee." She highlighted that the 2030 Agenda is at the halfway point in this year of 2023, making the need to achieve SDG16 urgent, and requested attendees to think about ways to support the campaign, and to spread the work to colleagues and partners.

Panelist **John Romano**, Director of the TAP Network, thanked everyone for their participation in the campaign and explained that the SDG16 campaign has been the product of many months of consultations with a wide range of partners around the world, including those in the TAP network. He emphasized that the current year of 2023 is a critical moment with summits where Heads of States are anticipating discussion of the political reinvigoration towards achievement of the SDGs, and that SDG16 is getting back on track in approaching the second half implementation deadline of the UN 2030 Agenda. "It is important to underpin just and inclusive societies," he said, noting a significant gap that exists in awareness about

SDG16+ mobilization. Thus, he said, the TAP network needs wider participation. He elucidated the objectives of the campaign:

- A push for commitments by governments of concrete actions, telling members of the Network what they are going to do to accelerate the achievement of SDG16.
- Mobilizing inadequate financing and donor bilateral funding since financing is a big priority.

To stimulate discussion, Romano asked questions, "Where are we now with SDG16+?" and "What are current key gaps and challenges?" Answers from some attendees were: a lack of political will and funding, as well as democratic backstabbing around the world (TAP Network, 2023).



Questions to stimulate discussion (image of TAP Network event online)

Romano discussed the TAP Storytelling Initiative, launched in 2021 to produce quality online content to promote the work of the Network members and partners in order to inspire increased commitment to SDG16 as well as transparency and accountability for the entire 2030 Agenda. "This is a key opportunity to connect through the campaign," Romano said. "We do storytelling and showcasing on the great positive examples on work that's been done to advance progress, and thanks to many of you who have volunteered to become part of the kind of mobilization and Leadership structure of this campaign".

A web portal is available to submit these stories (Membership Engagement Platform, n.d.)

Romano also spoke about the importance of the SDGs and the Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) presented by Member States every July at the High-level Political Forum

Mobilizing Peace cont.

at the United Nations to report progress in the implementation of the UN 2030 Agenda. The 2024 HLPF will address the theme, “Reinforcing the 2030 Agenda and eradicating poverty in times of multiple crises: The effective delivery of sustainable, resilient and innovative solutions.” The SDGs selected for the 2024 meeting includes SDG16, along with SDG1 (no poverty), SDG2 (zero hunger), SDG13 (climate action), and SDG17 (partnerships for the Goals).

The lack of achievement in the fulfillment the agenda has been widely acknowledged. Given this, he explained that governments continue reporting progress but there are still challenges and gaps. One of the biggest challenges, he said, is ensuring data sources. He added that governments need encouragement to identify progress for civil society.

Debra Jones spoke next. A Strategic Advisor at #SDG16Now Campaign of the TAP Network, with over 30 years’ experience leading high-impact advocacy campaigns, she is also an Adjunct Associate Professor at Columbia University’s School of International and Public Affairs (SIPA) on economic, political, and sustainable development. Jones also co-founded the International Board Organization for Adolescents which aims to prevent trafficking.

Jones elaborated on how civil societies remain a pending issue and how accountability appears as one of the essential components to the adoption of a sustainable development. She agreed with Romano that there are still serious challenges in achievement of SDG16, given so many conflicts in the world. She further briefly commented that other risky situations in the world are due to climate change where vulnerable countries are left behind dealing with emergencies. Jones further mentioned that government needs to respond to environmental crises, linking to resilience and disaster risk reduction. For example, affected communities due to climate crises like hurricanes have left so many children and women vulnerable to violence, suffering and discrimination. Affected communities have been unable to manage malnutrition, ongoing lack of access to sanitized water, lack of protection, and interrupted education.

Other speakers were invited members of the TAP network who shared their personal experience and recommendations.

Ellery Wong, Communications and Outreach Officer of the TAP Network urged attendees to get involved in the SDG16+ campaign and encouraged everyone to share their support through tweet messages using civil society hashtags, to support the TAP Network campaigns and to follow TAP Network website, Facebook, and LinkedIn channels.

Tor Hodenfield, the new Managing Director of Columbia Law School Human Rights Institute, shared about the SDG16Now campaign website platform and encouraged stakeholders to participate in the campaign and better understand financial commitments. He said, “We have numerous ways to show our support on becoming a member of the advocacy group and joining the campaign and the newsletter in the national and international operations.”

Arales Bellerini, an advocate for human rights, gender, and justice, is the senior representative to the United Nations of World Vision, a child-focused ecumenical Christian humanitarian aid NGO that is also a member of the TAP Network steering committee. She congratulated everyone at the TAP Network for their hard work and dedication and described the SDG16 campaign as necessary and urgent to accelerate action towards achievement of SDG16. The campaign can re-energize momentum for SDG16, she said, while also laying the groundwork for the HLPF (High-level Political Forum) review of SDG16 which takes place in July, 2024, with World Vision’s commitment that, “We will go over the SDG16 environment component, as well as the elimination of all forms of violence against children and targets related to SDG16.2, and we are working together as leaders to have no child live in fear and or violence. We have, and continue, impacting the lives of about 268 million children.”

Mo Singh is the coordinator of the Asia Development Alliance, a regional network to empower civil society and catalyst social change, made up of 30 national CSO platforms representing over 10,000 organizations from South, Southeast, Northeast and Central Asia. She expressed

Mobilizing Peace cont.

concerns about the rapidly changing geopolitical situation since the Taliban takeover in Afghanistan, with restrictions on freedom of expression, such that digital media journalists are unable to post what is happening for all the world to witness and see. She said, “SDG16 is a very fundamental goal and its effective implementation at national and international levels is an essential precondition for realizing of many other agenda of 2030 goals and targets for the framework for disaster risk management.” She urged the audience that their collective mission must be to localize what is being done in civil societies, and to report what comes from government states.

Anika Silver Leander is the Head of North America at the United Nations’ Permanent Observer for Internal IDEA, that promotes partnerships, multilateral dialogue and UN policies that advance democracy. She shared her excitement at being named a champion of the SDG16 campaign and acknowledged the TAP Network for tracking progress to achieve the 2030 SDG Agenda and encouraged voices to be heard in the SDG16 campaign.

Question and Answer Period

Attendees in the live audience were able to introduce themselves, make a short comment or ask a question.



Attendee at TAP Network event

Networking

After the more formal part of the meeting with presentations and questions from the attendees, everyone was invited to linger to talk with each other, enjoy more snacks, take photos, and pick up more materials (flyers, booklets) from a table. A pin of the TAP Network logo (with a blue bird) was handed out. People made spontaneous statements about the event, expressing enthusiasm in their native language. All were also encouraged to exchange contact information, share about the event, their experience, and their commitments about peace, on social media.



Participant holding the SDG16 pin

Personal Reflections

Attending this event was of particular interest to me (Leslie Hernandez) since my semester project for the course on “Psychology and the United Nations” is linked to SDG16 in that the community I am examining in El Salvador emerged from a very un-peaceful and even violent state, as the result of a fascinating community initiative. Originally, gangs and violence were prevalent in this low-resource impoverished community, where youth felt hopeless and lacking future direction which influenced to them to enter the life of gangs and crime. A unique educational model was introduced which mobilized the students and the entire school system, as well as the family and community, to engage in an entrepreneurial venture, with vegetable growing that earned needed money and building a “Peace Pool” that created a sense of bonded community involved in socially appropriate activities. Ultimately, gang members themselves became involved in this new lifestyle and adopted new healthy behavior patterns and relationships.

Mobilizing Peace cont.

Working on a report about this community project and attending the TAP Network event made me more aware of the situation in my country of El Salvador – similar to other nations in Central America – concerning violence and gangs, and how to make peace. So many countries have a high rate of violence, crime, and homicide, with estimates in El Salvador of 60,000 gangs with 10,000 gang members already facing prison, and death among prisoners surpassing 100 for every 100,000 individuals, due to ongoing violence and corruption (Higginson et al., 2018). Youth gangs, particularly involving 12- and 14-year-olds, arise due to lack of financial resources and social opportunities. Gang criminalization continues to surge. Students fail academically, misbehave, and drop out of school, in a vicious cycle of stress, bad behaviors, and family confrontations (Higginson et al., 2018). Problems in the school system proliferate, with lack of funding leading to inadequate educational materials and low salary for teachers, leading to inadequate teaching strategies and a low literacy rate. About 42% of teachers or educators make as little as US\$547-US\$779 monthly, with low salaries generating poor teaching practices and low educational outcomes (Acosta et al., 2017).

The Salvadoran population, predominantly under age 30, has difficulty finding employment, contributing to poverty, personal emotional distress, and social unrest. In Central America, primary school repetition and out-of-age enrollment are common. Girls are especially disadvantaged, as they are prevented from continuing education due to being needed at home to help, or getting pregnant and having to drop out. Boys outnumber girls in out-of-school enrollment. Standardized national exam scores also demonstrate that students in low-income rural communities are underprepared and have lower chances of scholar success rate (Acosta, et al., 2017).

In collaboration with the Salvadoran Institute for Comprehensive Child and Adolescent Development, UNICEF, the UN Agency for child protection, is promoting preventive strategies based on the principle that a good education contributes to a peaceful environment where youth do not experience fear, violence, prejudice or negative feelings towards a group or a person. Efforts are being made to create a more peaceful society not just in schools but in

society in general (International Child Development Program, n.d.; UNICEF, 2018, 2022). UNICEF is also working on the 2026 agenda of the Salvadoran Institutes to mitigate effects of climate change through boosting resilience response, and to fight corruption.

Notably, the more recent approach in the country to the juvenile justice system, which has traditionally been about punitive measures, is towards integrating more access to education.

My present job as a case manager where I help families in homeless shelters has inspired me to participate in the SDG16 network I learned about by attending this event. I feel that the SDG16 campaign covers a lot about the importance of fundamental human rights. As I walk daily the beautiful streets in New York City, I witness an ongoing crisis of homeless individuals. Since 2022, asylum migrant seekers had fled their home country. Also, at my work, some migrants express concerns about uncertainty of their future. Refugees have given up their country to escape war and violence, and to live elsewhere in peace. Trauma persists among the vulnerable populations, and we, as New Yorkers, also recognize the higher needs for mental health services.

In addition, I know from my work that the temporary housing at hotel shelters is not a long-term solution for families seeking peace and bettering their lives. I also handle domestic violence cases at work. Further, it breaks my heart seeing young children who have migrated from their home country suffering in silence due to homesickness and wanting to return to their home country, suffering from being bullied, and feeling they do not belong and do not feel adequate in the educational school system due to cultural differences and language barriers. Many families who have left their country of Venezuela and other South America nations, do not know how to speak English. It is evident to me that there is much more that we can do, not only in schools and communities but in healthcare services. This situation is the same challenges that TAP Network is working on, to bridge the gaps in SDG16. I believe in their aims and also in individual rights and equity for all.

I observe that migrants have emigrated to the U.S. in hopes to better their lives as they have fled their home

Mobilizing Peace cont.

country due to ongoing crime and violence. I do my best at my work to address their needs. To this end, I conduct mammogram health fairs and outreach through organizations like the American Italian Cancer Foundation, where we reach out to low-income women ages 40 and older and provide them referrals to the free mobile mammogram bus service. My experience and expertise in the social services unit has also awakened my desire to someday open my own educational consultant agency and charity program to continue assisting the homeless population globally. I also intend to continue advocating for educational rights and equal opportunity for all children in need. I also dream someday to apply to a PhD program in psychology or earn an MD degree in pediatric psychiatry, to address the needs of children and adolescents, especially those who struggle with autism and other developmental delays.

Growing up in Guatemala City and having a background from El Salvador from my paternal family side, I experienced poverty and lack of educational resources. As I also continue finalizing my project about gangs in El Salvador, I reflect about how violence prevents people from being able to go out late at night past 8pm and how people walking outdoors late at night in Central America risk becoming targets on robberies and assaults. I also remember not having a light bulb at the entrance of my home because gang members would steal the light or break it when they were out late at night drinking and being wild. As of today, El Salvador continues to struggle to provide equal access to education and employment opportunities.

In school in El Salvador as a child, I did not have access to a computer or a library. We did not even have textbooks and had to write handwritten everything. We also had no access to tutors not after-school recreational activities. In addition, the school public bathrooms were unsanitary, and children hardly ever had clean drinking water. As of today, it breaks my heart hearing news about the lack of educational resources for children in the Central America region. In addition, triggered by attending this TAP Network event and by all my work at my job and in school, I think of my mother daily. My mom has recently been diagnosed with IPF (Idiopathic Pulmonary Fibrosis) and was being considered to be waitlisted for a lung transplant but then

tragically passed away. I wished I could have done more to help her, as she is my hero, as well as to do more on a broader basis to help other struggling communities in need. Regardless of income, we all confront fear and crisis.

We must all do our best to be resilient for our families and the broader world family. Inspired by attending this TAP Network event, I am reinforced in my hope for peace, resilience, equal educational opportunity and equality in the world.



Leslie Hernandez on the balcony of the Church Center meeting room for the TAP Network session

TAP Network and SDG16+ mobilization contact information and resources:

- Images of TAP Network event: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/199129408@N03/with/53198905036/>
- Event video. YouTube. (2023, May 18). #sdg16now campaign launch event. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tS_Sx3Xue4w
- Transparency, Accountability & Participation (TAP) Network:
Address: 205 E 42nd Street, New York, NY, 10017
Website: <https://tapnetwork2030.org/>
[Membership engagement](#)

Contact emails:

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Debra Jones: jones@tapnetwork2030.org
Ellery Wong: wong@tapnetwork2030.org

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UNICEF (2022). Country office annual report- El Salvador. [chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/https://www.unicef.org/media/135891/file/UNICEF%20El%20Salvador%20Country%20Office%20Annual%20Report%202022.pdf](https://www.unicef.org/media/135891/file/UNICEF%20El%20Salvador%20Country%20Office%20Annual%20Report%202022.pdf)

Closing the research-policy gap: How to make research matter to policymakers and practitioners

Jiayi Mai¹ and Judy Kurianski²

How Do You Make Your Research Matter to Policy Makers and Practitioners?

Friday, September 15 from 12-1 pm ET (9-10 am PT)
For more information and to register: www.spssi.org/CODAPARpolicyseries

Left to right:
Steve Newell, PhD, Assistant Director for Innovation and Equity, White House Office of Science and Technology Policy
Mary Koss, PhD, Regents' Professor of Public Health, University of Arizona
Nicholas Grant, PhD, ABPP, Clinical Psychologist, U.S. Navy

Moderated by Jacquelyn W. White, PhD (UNC Greensboro, APA Division 35) and Richard A. Sprott, PhD (California State University, East Bay, APA Division 44).



Part 3 in the CODAPAR-funded webinar series:



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Making a bridge between researchers and policymakers is very valuable since solid research findings can reveal dynamic trends in economic, social, and environmental development, which policymakers can use in their work since they hold the power to reduce barriers in challenges in those areas. Scientists from Switzerland have pointed out that incorporating uptake in research findings into policymaking can enhance policy effectiveness and promote policy influence (Erismann et al., 2021). In order to achieve this, there is a need to foster better communication and collaboration between researchers and policymakers. To bridge this gap effectively, both sides have to communicate as well as acknowledge common ground and mutual benefits of working together in order to maximize interaction and the positive impact of both their work.

1 Reported by Jiayi Mai, a member of the Student Division of the International Association of Applied Psychology pursuing a master's degree in Developmental Psychology at Columbia University Teachers College, and a student in Professor Judy Kuriansky's class on "Psychology and the United Nations." In addition to her scholastic work, she has two years of research experience and two years of experience working in NGOs supporting the educational outcomes of children with disadvantaged backgrounds and raising awareness of mental health among Chinese international students in the U.S. She is interested in applied psychology, developmental psychopathology, and social-emotional development.

2 Edited by Dr. Judy Kuriansky, Professor of Psychology and Education, Columbia University Teachers College; Advisor, Mission of Sierra Leone to the United Nations, and for 20+ years NGO representative of the International Association of Applied Psychology in consultative status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council. A pioneer media psychologist who has given advice on radio and TV as well as print media for decades, she has also spoken widely about how to bridge the research-practitioner-advocacy gap, for scientific psychological work to be useful in policymaking, especially on the international level at the United Nations, where she has successfully advocated for inclusion of mental health and well-being in the UN 2030 Agenda, Political Declaration for Universal Health Coverage and many other important agreements.

In support of these benefits of the research-policy linkage, the agenda for the second term of United Nations Secretary-General (SG) António Guterres includes translating science into policy more effectively and reducing the gap between high-quality research evidence and policy (Nature, 2022). As SG Guterres stated in "Our Common Agenda", "All policy and budget decisions should be backed by science and expertise, and I am calling for a global code of conduct that promotes integrity in public information" (United Nations, 2020).

In August 2023, a Scientific Advisory Board for Independent Advice on Breakthroughs in Science and Technology was established, further raising the voice for science-based policy and decision-making (UN Press, 2023). Also, the agenda of the President of the General Assembly (PGA) for the 77th General

Closing the research-policy gap cont.

Assembly session, H.E. Csaba Kőrösi, was based on applying science to global issues.

“We need science because it offers us neutral evidence for our actions,” said Mr. Kőrösi at the opening of the General Debate.

Consistent with this, a meeting was organized with His Excellency Kőrösi with a team of members of the psychological community advocating at the UN, organized by Dr. Judy Kuriansky, psychology professor at Columbia University Teachers College (TC) and the NGO representative of the International Association of Applied Psychology (IAAP) in consultative status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council. She had already met H.E. Kőrösi in 2015 when he was co-facilitating the negotiations for the UN 2030 Agenda and she was advocating about the inclusion of mental health and well-being (Kuriansky, 2016). These selected attendees for the meeting included two senior representatives of psychology-based UN-accredited NGOs, namely, the President of IAAP, Dr. Lori Foster and Dr. David Livert, NGO representative of the Society of Psychological Study of Social Issues (SPSSI), and Kuriansky’s graduate psychology students in her class on “Psychology and the United Nations” at TC.

Over the last decade, the number of social science journals published has increased, proving the importance of such reports and research. Yet, researchers, besides spending time on their projects, need to



(Left)Psychologists meeting with the President of the General Assembly, (left to right): Dr. David Livert, NGO representative of the Society of Psychological Study of Social Issues; TC student Camille Khallouf; PGA H.E. Csaba Kőrösi; Dr. Judy Kuriansky; TC student Nneki Okoli; International Association of Applied Psychology President Lori Foster; TC student Ibssa Abdo

invest time in translating their findings into understandable wording and points that can be noticed and understood by public audiences, and can be used by policymakers to have their work truly make a difference in making a better world.

The Webinar

This report describes a webinar aimed at how to effectively relate and translate research into policy-making and also to enhance psychologists' knowledge and skills in understanding the policy and practice implications of psychological research. This can be referred to as closing the research-policy gap.

The webinar was hosted by SPSSI, a non-governmental organization that focuses on researching the psychological dimensions of significant social and policy concerns. SPSSI has held consultative status since 1991 with the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), the UN department that plays a leading role in identifying emerging challenges and promoting innovation in achieving the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) outlined in the UN Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development.

The webinar is one of a series focused on psychological science which can heavily align with several SDGs, including SDG 3, which refers to ensuring good health and well-being for all, SDG 5 about gender equality, and SDG 10 on reducing inequality. Since the voice of science can have a bigger role in UN policymaking, it is crucial for researchers to learn about how to disseminate their relevant messages to strengthen the impact of their work.

Closing the research-policy gap cont.



Event moderator Richard Sprott, PhD (Screenshot by Jiayi Mai)

This event was held on September 15, 2023, from 12 p.m. to 1 p.m. via Zoom.

The moderator, Professor Richard Sprott, is a Developmental Psychologist teaching courses in human development and women's studies at California State University in East Bay, California, USA, and past president of the American Psychological Association Division 44 on the psychology of sexual orientation and gender diversity. Explaining the purpose of the event, Dr. Sprott said "This webinar is aimed at those who aren't sure how to make connections among different constituencies, or how to translate research to policy or practice as well as how to identify the right audiences and how to reach them with an effective message." Dr. Sprott provided an overview of the webinar. Panelists will share their experience of policy success in the first part. Then, they will address the prepared questions, followed by an open Q&A session at the end.

Dr. Sprott then introduced the panelists.

Policy Success

In the first part of the webinar, panelists were asked to briefly share an example of success from their work.



Panelist Mary Koss, PhD (Screenshot by Jiayi Mai)

The first panelist to speak was Dr. Mary Koss, a Regents Professor of Public Health at the University of Arizona in the USA. Her work includes two projects: the evaluation of a sexual assault bystander prevention program, and the first restorative justice program for sex crimes among adults.

Dr. Koss explained that she published the first national study of sexual assault among college students in 1987, entitled "The Scope of Rape: Incidence and Prevalence of Sexual Aggression and Victimization in a National Sample of Higher Education Students". The study raised awareness of the extent of rape among college students, that led to creating terms like "date rape" and "acquaintance rape". Due to the innovation of this study, Dr. Koss was invited by the American Psychological Association (APA) to participate in legislative testimonies about the issue of such gender-based violence in 1991.

"APA got me the opportunity to testify before the Senate Judiciary Committee when it was chaired by then-Senator Joe Biden," which was one of the most prominent testimonies, she said, explaining that her testimony in 1991 at the US Senate hearings gave her expertise and leadership in advocacy against gender-based violence, which in turn led to the passage of the Violence Against Women Act. This accomplishment was acknowledged in a letter from President Biden to Dr. Koss, shown in the figure.

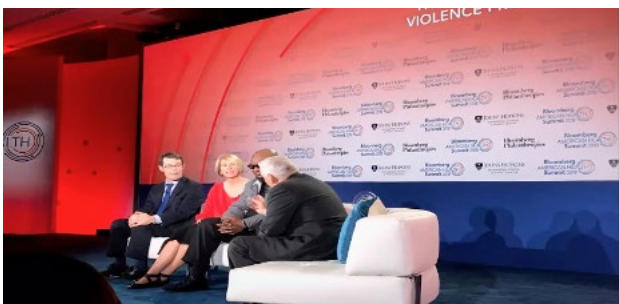
Closing the research-policy gap cont.



Letter from then-Senator Joe Biden to Dr. Koss after the 1991 US Senate hearings about violence against women (Screenshot by Jiayi Mai)

"I think it's important to keep your message out there," she advised.

Besides being engaged on the legislative side, Dr. Koss said she has also been constantly in contact with journalists who had written positively about her work. For example, she has provided a counternarrative to universities that underestimated rape victimization, making efforts always "to try to keep it [her work] in the public forefront."



Dr. Mary Koss (in red) on the panel for Michael Bloomberg-funded summit on violence prevention (Screenshot by Jiayi Mai)

At the end of her sharing about her success in her work which led to policy, Dr. Koss showed a picture of when she presented at the Summit on Violence Prevention funded by publisher, philanthropist, businessman, and former New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg. She explained that she purposefully wore a blouse that "accidentally" fell off her shoulder when pointing out that it is unfair to blame women for bringing violence upon themselves for "seductive" clothing, thus proving her point, about which she jokingly said, "I get my policy success through wardrobe choices."



Panelist Nicholas Grant, PhD (Screenshot by Jiayi Mai)

The next panelist was Dr. Nicholas Grant, a clinical psychologist who currently serves as Commander for the Naval Surface Group Middle Pacific (a U.S. Navy command responsible for maintenance and training of surface ships homeported in Joint Base Pearl Harbor-Hickman in Hawaii) and as the mental health officer overseeing the mental health programming.

Dr. Grant shared his policy success from his experience when he served in the office of U.S. Senator Kristen Gillibrand (from New York) in 2017 as an APA congressional fellow. He explained that opposite from Dr. Koss's example of getting policy passed as a result of her work, a policy success can also be defined in the opposite way, namely, preventing a bad policy from being passed. Dr. Grant said, "I think it [my experience] highlights that policy successes, especially as they relate to research impact on policy, is not just having a policy pass... Sometimes we need to make sure stupid policies don't get passed."

Specifically, in 2017, the then-President proposed a ban on military service for transgender people, but Senator Gillibrand's team had been advocating for the LGBTQ+ community and was very upset about this proposal. Dr. Grant

Closing the research-policy gap cont.

In the letter, the Senators decry the recommendations and urge Secretary Mattis to establish a fair policy that allows any Americans who are willing and capable of serving their country to join the military. The bipartisan letter was signed by Senators Gillibrand (D-NY) and Murkowski (R-AK), Senate Minority Leader Charles E. Schumer (D-NY), and Senators Baldwin (D-WI), Bennet (D-CO), Blumenthal (D-CT), Booker (D-NJ), Brown (D-OH), Cantwell (D-WA), Cardin (D-MD), Carper (D-DE), Casey (D-PA), Collins (R-ME), Coons (D-DE), Cortez Masto (D-NV), Donnelly (D-IN), Duckworth (D-IL), Durbin (D-IL), Feinstein (D-CA), Harris (D-CA), Hassan (D-NH), Heinrich (D-NM), Heitkamp (D-ND), Hirono (D-HI), Jones (D-AL), Kaine (D-VA), King (I-ME), Klobuchar (D-MN), Leahy (D-VT), Markey (D-MA), McCaskill (D-MO), Menendez (D-NJ), Merkley (D-OR), Murphy (D-CT), Murray (D-WA), Nelson (D-FL), Peters (D-MI), Reed (D-RI), Sanders (I-VT), Schatz (D-HI), Shaheen (D-NH), Smith (D-MN), Stabenow (D-MI), Tester (D-MT), Udall (D-NM), Van Hollen (D-MD), Warner (D-VA), Warren (D-MA), Whitehouse (D-RI), and Wyden (D-OR).

The text of the Senators' letter is available [here](#) and below:

April 26, 2018

The Honorable James N. Mattis

Secretary of Defense

1100 Defense Pentagon

Washington, D.C. 20301

Dear Secretary Mattis,

We write with great concern and disappointment about your implementation policy recommendations for President Trump's transgender ban that were released on March 23, 2018. The recommendations and their supporting report are contrary to medical and scientific consensus and misrepresent the most comprehensive analysis of the costs and implications of transgender service, published by RAND for the Department only two years ago. The recommendations and report break faith with the men and women serving in our military by establishing a new "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" for transgender service members, permitting them to serve only if they are willing to forego any chance of living as their true selves. Just as our mistaken policy regarding lesbian, gay and bisexual service members harmed readiness and ultimately was repealed, the implementation of your recommendations will also harm our nation's military. Accordingly, we are opposed to the implementation of this discriminatory policy.

This new policy came as a surprise to many of us, particularly in light of the many statements—from all levels of military and political leadership under your tenure—arguing that open service has had no impact on readiness or good order and discipline, and that transgender service members should be treated with dignity and respect and allowed to serve as long as they meet the standards. Just last month, Secretary of the Army Mark

Excerpt of the two-page letter by Senator Gillibrand's team to oppose a transgender ban

(Source: <https://www.gillibrand.senate.gov/>)

got assigned to submit up-to-date research on transgender health and mental health to a draft letter to the then-Secretary of Defense. Citing his professional connections with APA and other organizations to collect the most recent research, he helped draft a two-page letter that the ban was based on discrimination, therefore urging the prevention of further stigmatization towards transgender Americans. This work helped lead to a powerful rebuke of the ban that gained bipartisan support and was signed by 50 Senators.

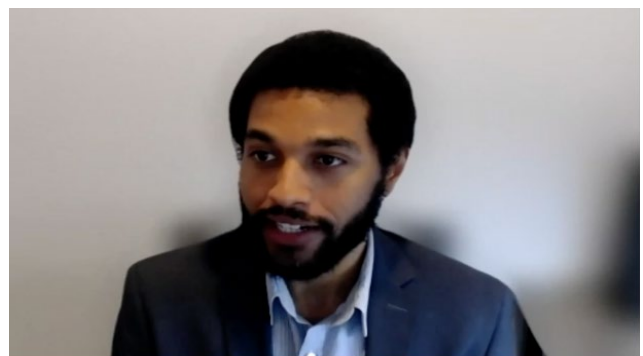
"It was the inclusion of research amongst many, many people," explained Grant, that led to the success of preventing a policy from passing. He described that this was a very meaningful experience, considered a policy success for him as it brought research together to prevent policy considered "bad" from moving forward.

The final panelist to respond to this question was Dr. Steve Newell, Assistant Director of the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy who leads the Subcommittee on Social and Behavioral Sciences of the National Science and Technology Council.

Starting off, Dr. Newell stressed the importance of research on policymaking, consistent with the Foundation of Evidence Policy Making Act of 2018. This act establishes research and evidence as fundamental pillars of policymaking, which is also the goal the current administration is working towards.

"Right now, we're in an incredible moment for research and evidence mattering to policy makers," Dr. Newell said.

Prior to his current role, Dr. Newell spent a few years working to bring research to state and local policymakers, including about issues of election security. He and his colleagues from a variety of scientific communities put together a science brief and open letter stating that the U.S. did not have enough technology to hold a secure online ballot. They also discussed how to best expand the access of ballots across the country for the 2020 election. The work was shared with every governor, director of state election, and Secretary of State.



Panelist Steve Newell, PhD (Source: screenshot by Jiayi Mai)

Closing the research-policy gap cont.

"[The work] helped ensure we didn't have a critical mass of unverifiable ballots which could have resulted in chaos," said Dr. Newell. "Instead, we had the most secure election in American history." He considered this experience as his policy success with research put together to boost the security of the election.

The moderator, Dr. Jacquelyn White, then posed pre-prepared questions to the speakers.

Question 1: What have you learned that policymakers most want to hear about your work? Given that you work on some seen-as-controversial topics, how have you navigated political waters and how did you decide which policymakers to approach?

Answers:

Dr. Koss replied by acknowledging APA for arranging opportunities before the Senate for her to give testimonies as an official spokesperson. With regard to appearing bipartisan, it is tricky, she said, because "In reality, you're invited by one side of the aisle or the other as a witness, and so generally you become politicized no matter what you do." She explained, it is important to understand with whom you can match your findings and engage organizations like APA to help you advocate for your policy.

Dr. Grant replied with three points:

- (1) Make connections with policymakers on a personal level with your evidenced-based priorities. Connect your priorities to what they are working on, so that you can develop and sustain the relationship.
- (2) Present a real-life experience so that the person can see the interconnection better between your research and the policy. Clearly outline the cost, not just financial, but also the cost to the system and to people.
- (3) During the initial meeting/cold calling/outreach, think as if you are building "allyship" and that you are working towards developing it into partnerships. Make sure they understand the mutual benefits.

Dr. Newell replied by agreeing with the two panelists. He said that members from the executive and legislative branches are often very clear about what their interests

and priorities are. Enhancing the appeal of your approach involves careful consideration of their current programs and policies. Paying attention to things like advisory committee meetings can be helpful for you to learn how to align your work with the outcomes policymakers are trying to push forward. "It's very helpful if you can directly relate how your work connects with a particular program or policy of theirs," he advised. "Build the bridges and connect the dots for them."

Question 2: Please share the strategy that works best for you and what has been the nature of your relationship with policymakers.

Dr. Grant shared two examples in response to this question.

(1) Don't be afraid to initiate contact through cold emails. State your interest clearly in the emails. Dr. Grant explained that he got the opportunity to work in Washington D.C. Mayor's LGBTQ+ Advisory Committee by offering to be a volunteer after sending a number of emails to the committees that matched his interest.

(2) Affiliate with larger organizations to help boost more opportunities, he recommended, since "When you have an affiliation, you have more opportunity" and then take advantage of this association by power building with your expertise in the organizations that you work with.

Dr. Newell mentioned that it is important to reach out even though you think you don't have the perfect expertise. "I think one of the main things that folks really need to think about is just getting out there more and trying to do it and not worrying so much," he advised. Another useful approach to advocate is doing an op-ed with your local news because every member of Congress has their staff look at local news. This will be a useful hook to connect with the Congressional members by bringing up the op-ed you wrote about their policies.

Dr. Koss responded with two points:

(1) Ensure that your messages reach a wider audience by translating your research from journalistic language or jargon into "normal" language that can reach the public, so people can use it for advocacy.

Closing the research-policy gap cont.

(2) Actively look for opportunities to foster collaborations with advocates who can assist you in disseminating your information effectively.

Question 3: What's a good strategy to maintain the connection and influence?

Dr. Newell responded with three points:

(1) Pay attention to timelines of the annual Congressional Appropriations process. There are specific time points when you can take advantage of the timing to talk about your programs.

(2) Researchers working in universities can connect with the university's government relations team, who can provide valuable connections to close the research-policy gap.

(3) Collaborate with agencies and check in regularly with them to keep them posted on your work.

Dr. Koss responded to Dr. Newell's second point with a qualification and challenge for social scientists by pointing out that while the government relations staff in her university have an interest in promoting research and pay attention to projects that could get them bigger grants, unfortunately, social sciences is not traditionally a popular field for such support since researchers who work in big organizations or in the military instead of those who work in universities, have more access to resources. But that should not stop efforts.

Dr. Newell acknowledged this point that some topics receive more attention than others, but the topic of equity has been a core focus for the current administration, which poses a more optimistic picture. "The slow grinding in many cases is continuing," said Dr. Newell.

Dr. Grant shared that thinking about how you can be a resource for the offices/agencies can help continue the relationship. Periodic check-ins with new updates are helpful.

The next section was a Q&A with the audience which were posted on the site. A question posed was: "How do we talk in a way that is effective in a bigger political climate?"

How to bring up some controversial issues in conservative areas?"

In answer to this question, **Dr. Newell** said, "It's a combination of balancing your focus on empirical evidence and your narrative." He advised to find common ground with the people you speak to since you are coming from different backgrounds. To summarize his recommendations, he again emphasized his point to regularly check in with policymakers to help them better understand your study.

Dr. Grant shared four points:

(1) Recognize that it will be a collaborative effort, not an individual one. Find various pathways to success.

(2) Dr. Grant shared his experience when he took courses with Toastmasters, a nonprofit educational organization that boosts confidence in public speaking skills.

(3) Help the policymakers understand the highlights of your findings by talking about how the potential policy changes will aid the community with which you are working.

(4) Keep in mind that everything takes time!

Before closing remarks, Dr. Koss asked Dr. Newell a question, "What do you do when legislation gets passed? Unintended effects are discovered, you want changes but there are groups of people who already benefited from it. How do people handle fixing legislation?"

Dr. Newell responded by saying that advocates will have to be prepared for the possibility of legislation falling apart before its passage. The goal must consistently be to achieve the best possible legislation, even if it may not always be flawless. There will always be competing interests and compromises, he explained, "but that shouldn't stop you from making positive changes." He punctuated his point by stressing the significance to all of society of evidence-based policies, in other words, policy that is based on scientific findings of researchers.

Closing Remarks

Moderator Dr. Sprott thanked everyone for their participation and valuable advice.

Reporter's Key Takeaways

- Researchers should gather all the resources and connections they can muster, to bring their findings to bigger stages, and translate their research into understandable language/wording, since evidence-based research is in high demand these days. For example, relate and contextualize your research to global challenges that address the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the United Nations Agenda 2030, that can help tackle issues in these SDGs.
- Take steps to form working relationships with agencies, local news journalists and advocates. Regular check-ins will also help.
- Never hesitate to make connections with policymakers who match your interest; even a cold email might bring about some changes.
- Future events like this one should focus on advice for those people who don't work with organizations or who work in the fields with the possibility of big grant money.

Personal Reflections

I appreciated this webinar and hearing from the three panelists with amazing insights on how to bring research to a bigger stage. As a student in the field of Developmental Psychology, research is always the central topic in my coursework. A research question from social sciences is usually driven by issues or challenges, and what motivates us to conduct the research is how we can improve the situation. Thinking about how to bring findings from research projects to a bigger stage, outside of a university, is a question worth considering every time you initiate research or are in the process of it. For example, my previous research assistant experience focused on studying the relationship between daily activities, social interactions, stress, and depression symptoms in college students. Also, we looked at whether an intervention of "positive memory-savoring"

when thinking about the details of a happy experience and sharing it, helped reduce stress and negative emotions. Once we notice the patterns, we can go from there and see what we can do to help people relieve their stress. Furthermore, we can push effective strategies that work in our university to more universities nationally. Another of my research experiences involved testing whether a functional rehabilitation therapy would help enhance the function of the upper limbs of children who suffer from cerebral palsy. If the therapy worked, we could advocate for implementing this approach into occupational therapy for children from the same population and increase the positive impact. We cannot just depend solely on the research teams, instead, we need advocates to push out the positive findings, to reach more people, because not everyone will read about your research, and not everyone who reads research will notice yours. Then, approaching policymakers can apply your research into resolutions and laws. Therefore, it is very important to reduce the research-policy gaps – as addressed in this webinar, and to have people outside of scientific fields learn about the highlights of your work and benefit from it.

Event Overview:

TITLE: CODARPAR WEBINAR SERIES 3: How Do You Make Your Research Matter to Policy Makers and Practitioners?

Date/Time: Friday, September 15, 2023, from 12-1 pm ET (9-10 am PT)

Location: Zoom

Moderator: Jacquelyn W. White, PhD (University of North Carolina, Greensboro, Division 35) and Richard A. Sprott, PhD (California State University, East Bay, Division 44)
Panelists: Steve Newell (Ph.D., Assistant Director for Innovation and Equity, White House Office of Science and Technology Policy); Mary Koss (Ph.D., Regents' Professor of Public Health at The University of Arizona); and Nicholas Grant (PhD, ABPP, Clinical Psychologist, US Navy)

Closing the research-policy gap cont.

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Youth Gang Prevention in El Salvador: A model school-community project addressing the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals

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Abstract

Youth in developing countries have long faced multiple personal and social problems in their school and community, threatened by gangs in the context of poverty, social disconnection, and low self-esteem (Stover, 1986). An innovative program initiated by the Ambassador of the Mission of El Salvador to the United Nations was implemented in small municipality in El Salvador in a school community dominated by gangs which started with a core intervention and expanded when other ideas emerged and organizations offered complementary programmatic elements. The school program over time introduced several arts, cultural and income-generating activities becoming a more holistic curriculum. Multiple positive outcomes were observed, including cessation of gang recruitment, increased community cohesion, higher youth self-esteem and future ambitions, leadership training and development of economic opportunities for youth. Multiple stakeholders contributing to the project-over a three-year period included government (including on the international level, with the United Nations Mission of El Salvador), civil society non-governmental organizations, and the private sector. The project addresses several Sustainable Development Goals of the United Nations 2030 Agenda, including insuring quality education, equitable societies, decent work, promoting well-being, ending poverty, implementing multi-stakeholder partnerships, and importantly, insuring peace and security. The approach reveals possibilities for replication and adaptation in similar settings and implications for policy regarding gang violence reduction and improvements in education.

Keywords:

Youth gangs; gang prevention; school-community programs; youth entrepreneurship; Sustainable Development Goals; well-being; multistakeholder partnership;

UN Agenda; policy; quality education; peaceful societies, well-being; arts education; mind-body programs

Introduction

Over past decades, violence by gangs has been a growing problem in many countries worldwide, including in the Caribbean and Latin America, with an extreme case being that of El Salvador, a small country in Central America, which has one of the highest per capita murder rates in the world, coupled with one of the lowest rates of prosecution for these crimes (Seery, 2014). Gang recruitment of young people is particularly troublesome, as it perpetuates a culture of violence, interferes with opportunities to pursue education, and undermines chances for a healthy future, personal and social development, and positive social transformation of their community and country.

This paper presents an innovative model program in El Salvador applied in a school in an extreme setting, namely, a high-risk community dominated by two rival gangs who recruit young children into violence. An extreme setting includes any setting where factors like “acute or chronic forms of social disruption, such as disaster, illness, poverty, injustice, exclusion or conflict, impact on the well-being of children, and undermine the ability of significant adults in a child’s family or community to safeguard their physical, emotional or social well-being” (Skovdal & Campbell, 2015).

The role of schools has been expanded in recent times beyond providing traditional classroom education to increasingly address complex personal and social problems faced by youth, including to provide social protection, and to promote their psychosocial health and socialize them to become “responsible citizens” (Skovdal & Campbell, 2015). Specifically, innovative strategies for school-based interventions can influence a variety of outcomes that can impact student susceptibility to gang involvement

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(Sharkey et al., 2011). Further, school programs that integrate activities other than those that are purely academic (e.g., learning history, math, English and other subjects), have been shown to be helpful in improving academic and social skills to prepare students for the workforce and for life (Daniel, 2010; Hartz & Thick, 2005; Isis et al., 2010; Nelson, 2009; Nutting, 2013; Sabol, 2010; Spisak, 2008). Arts programs, for instance, are ideal to promote pro-social skills and entail a creative 'thinking space' and safe environment, which is conducive for pupils to obtain a higher level of well-being (Noble & Wyatt, 2008). Unfortunately, in many countries around the world, funding for such activities has greatly curtailed this approach (Daniel, 2010; Hourigan, 2014). The model presented in this paper integrates cultural activities – as well as income-generating activities – in the school curriculum.

Background About El Salvador

The Republic of El Salvador is the smallest country in Central America, the most densely populated country in the Western Hemisphere, and also vulnerable to climate disasters (CDKN, 2024). It is bordered on the northwest by Guatemala, on the north and east by Honduras, and on the south by the Pacific Ocean. The local government is divided into 14 departments and 262 municipalities including cities, towns, and villages (Worlddata.info, n.d.). The US dollar is the legal currency (Swiston, 2011). The average age is 27 years, with a quarter of the population under 15. Spanish is the official language, Christianity is the most predominant religion, and the population is composed of mixed races, with 86% identifying with mestizo ancestry. Most of the land is devoted to agriculture, with the population concentrated in industrial and agricultural areas centered in the capital of San Salvador, for better job opportunities and higher salaries. In 2023, the World Bank classified El Salvador as an upper-middle-income country.

Crime in El Salvador

Currently, El Salvador is a country in an accelerated process of transformation, from earning the infamous label in the year 2015 for being "the homicide capital of the world" - having one of the highest per capita murder rates coupled with one of the lowest rates of prosecution for these

crimes (Allison, 2017; Watts, 2015) -- to being considered the safest country in Latin America. As shown in the statistics from the Salvadorean National Police in figure 1, El Salvador started the year 2024 with half the daily rate of homicides per compared to the year before (0.23 versus 0.42) and dramatically less than 18.24 in the year 2015, and even 10.92 in the year 2010. Coincidentally, the number of homicides per 100,000 people was 1.3 in 2024, almost halved from the year before (2.4), and dramatically fewer than 103 in the year 2015, and 65.2 in 2010.

This historic change has been attributed to actions like legislation and security measures -- including the "Territorial Control Plan" and "Exception Regime" -- promoted by the current administration of President Nayib Bukele, as well as changes in the education system.

Accordingly, the gang situation has also abated, from previously when gangs controlled around 70% of Salvadoran territory by early 2019, creating a culture of crime, with massacres, robbery, extortion and rape of the Salvadoran people (Van der Borgh, 2019). Besides local gangs, members of the most dangerous Mara Salvatrucha (MS) and Barrio 18 had been deported by the United States back to El Salvador (U.S. Department of Justice, 2021).

In reaction to this drastic crime situation, an innovative project was carried out in a high-risk school community dominated by two rival gangs who recruited young children into violence - at the Italia District School Center in the municipality of Tonacatepeque, El Salvador. This paper describes the evolution of this project from its beginning to the addition of many elements and stakeholders, its positive outcomes, and implications for policy and program applications in similar communities in Central America or societies experiencing similar socio-economic challenges.

The students were considered to be living in an "extreme setting" defined by factors like "acute or chronic forms of social disruption, such as disaster, illness, poverty, injustice,

El Salvador Homicide Rate			
Year	Total Homicides	Daily Homicide Rate	Homicides per 100,000 inhabitants
2024 *Jan 1 to Jan 13	3	0.23	1.3 *Estimated
2023	154	0.42	2.4
2022	496	1.36	7.8
2021	1147	3.14	18.1
2020	1341	3.67	21.2
2019	2398	6.57	35.8
2018	3346	9.17	50.4
2017	3962	10.85	60.2
2016	5280	14.47	81.0
2015	6656	18.24	103.0
2014	3921	10.74	61.3
2013	2513	6.88	40.6
2012	2594	7.11	42.1
2011	4371	11.98	71.2
2010	3987	10.92	65.2

Homicide rate in El Salvador

exclusion or conflict, impact on the well-being of children, and undermine the ability of significant adults in a child’s family or community to safeguard their physical, emotional or social well-being” (Skovdal & Campbell, 2015).

Gangs

The largest and most violent gangs worldwide operate in Central America and Mexico (Ribando, 2005; Seery, 2014; Seelke, 2016) engaging in drugs, kidnapping, trafficking, violence and abuse particularly targeting women and children (Fogelbach, 2011). The high rate of gang membership, especially in El Salvador, has been ascribed to several factors, including wide availability of guns due to conflict in the country dating back to the 1980s resulting in a high tolerance of violence among Salvadoreans, as well as social exclusion and a lack of educational and vocational opportunities for at-risk youth (Cruz & Portillo, 1998; Ribando, 2005).

The culture of gangs in El Salvador developed in the mid-1990s, when small local gangs emerged in the context of

the struggle to recover from extreme violence due to the 12-year long Salvadorean Civil War (Cruz & Portillo, 1998; Ribaldo, 2005; Seery, 2014). This civil war between the military-led government of El Salvador and the Farabundo

Martí National Liberation involved extreme violence on both sides, including terrorizing and targeting civilians by death squads, recruiting child soldiers, and violating human rights (Cruz & Portillo, 1998; Seery, 2014). The United Nations peace negotiations which began in 1990 led to an agreement in 1992 signed by the combatants in Mexico City that formally ended the conflict (UN, 1993). The conflict was country-wide, with the war mainly in rural towns although guerrillas did attack the capital city (Fogelbach, 2011).

In 2018, it was estimated there were about 65,000 gang members in El Salvador (Ribando, 2005; Seelke, 2016) with many citizens wither connected to the maras or sympathizers and beneficiaries of the criminal activities (Siza, 2015). However, after the implementation of the Territorial Control Plan and the Exception Regime in 2022, about 74,000 gang members were in jail and approximately

46,000 dispersed in some parts of the rural areas or running away outside the country.

Many Latin America governments, such as Costa Rica, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, and Panama, as well as El Salvador, have attempted to solve this problem of gangs, with variable and incomplete results, implementing programs to deal with the issue (Rodgers, Muggah & Stevenson, 2009). In El Salvador, these included the “Mano Dura” (i.e., firm hand) program (Bakrania, 2013) and the “super Mano Dura” with stiffer penalties and gun control. Non-profit organizations continued to pressure the government to focus less on tough measures punishing and criminalizing youth – an approach that raised human rights issues (Bakrania, 2013) -- and more on prevention of violence and rehabilitation of gang members (Ribando, 2005), arguing that prisons became “gangland finishing schools” instead of correctional facilities.

Youth and gangs

Gang recruitment of young people has been particularly troublesome as it perpetuates a culture of violence and disproportionately impacts youth, impeding their pursuit of education, and undermining their chances for a healthy personal and social development or contributing to positive social transformation in their community and country (Guillermoprieto, 2011; Rodgers et al., 2009). Risk factors (and therefore also protective factors) associated with gang affiliation among high-risk youth are multidimensional (Hughes & Adera, 2006; McDaniel, 2012). These include factors are social (academic failure, delinquency, conduct problems, scarcity of educational and developmental opportunities); familial (family conflict and disintegration or separation, neglect, family membership in gangs, violent domestic environments, poor parenting); school; financial (poverty, unemployment); psychological (feeling excluded or misunderstood, low self-esteem, and a need for belonging and status through distinctive attitudes, jargon, rituals, and symbols of gangs) (Fogelbach, 201; Higginson et al., 2018; Howell, 2010; O'Brien et al., 2013; Sander et al., 2010). Moreover, young people are vulnerable to joining gangs from a developmental perspective, as they face changes in their physical, cognitive, social, and emotional lives. Further, gangs offer a platform to

protest against elements of society or protection against more dangerous alternatives for unemployed youth and school dropouts to be indentured into forced labor, trafficked for sex, or becoming undocumented migrants (UNDP, 2014). Also, young people are coerced into gang affiliation, forced to choose between joining the gang or being tortured or killed, since allegiance to the gang way of life is insured by threats to “support us, or we will kill you”(Seery, 2014). A multi-level public health approach is essential to mitigate these factors (McDaniel, 2012).

Gang interventions

A review of gang interventions at the time of the intervention reported in this paper reveals significant gaps in understanding what programs are most successful to prevent gang involvement (Sharkey et al., 2011). Several theories proposed different risk factors and ways to address those factors. These included: strain theory (aimed at the risk factor of inability to achieve conventional success); social learning theory (using a family and peer model to address criminal/gang behavior); a systems approach (based on the theory of a broken or unavailable family system); social control (blaming a lack of clear community expectations and reinforcement on how to achieve conventional success); and self-control (focusing on lack of self-control to delay gratification and engage in academic pursuits). Empirical evidence regarding school-based interventions at the time to prevent gang involvement was rare. The need was evident to expand the study of school-based gang prevention from a single educational intervention or strategy to a broader focus on school climate and student engagement for schools to make a significant and lasting impact on at-risk youth development and prevention of gang involvement. The present program in this paper addresses this very approach.

Education

The public education system in El Salvador is free of charge to students through high school (web.stanford.edu, n.d.). but severely lacks resources, with teaching often substandard given low pay teaching salaries, which correlates to poor educational outcomes (Acosta et al, 2017). Those who can afford private schools have better conditions and

Youth Gang Prevention in El Salvador cont.

education, based on American or European systems. Only 42% of children from the poorest households complete primary education and master the basics, compared with twice as many (i.e., 84%) of those from richer households (UNESCO, 2014)

Salvadoran students must complete 9 years of basic education (elementary to middle school) after which they can choose between two options: a two-year high school allowing transfer to a university, or enrolling in a three-year high school leading to entering the workforce in a vocational career or transferring to a university for further education.

Until recently, cultural activities or nonformal courses were not a part of the school curriculum nor considered acceptable as pursuits or careers. The role of schools to provide learning opportunities beyond traditional academic pedagogy (e.g., history, math, science) has been increasingly recognized – to address complex personal and social problems faced by youth and to promote psychosocial health and socialization to become “responsible citizens” (Skovdal & Campbell, 2015). as well as to impact student susceptibility to gang involvement (Sharkey et al., 2011; OJJDP, 2022, n.d.)). The use of various arts (e.g., music, painting, drama drawing) in school programs has been shown to be a valuable addition to student education in parts of the world, to facilitate a sense of empowerment and resilience, which is especially helpful for youth in the face of trauma, including those living in poverty conditions, coping with sex abuse, illnesses, or recovering from natural disaster (Chilcote, 2007; Kuriansky, 2019; Kuriansky et al., 2015; Orr, 2007; Sarid & Huss, 2010). The value of arts education is explored further later in this paper.

The project described in this paper supports this approach.

In more recent times, UNICEF has implemented after-school sports and recreational programs like swimming in the San Marcos, San Salvador region, to stay active and to keep children safe from gang and street violence (UNICEF, 2018). Similarly, USAID expanded and implemented the Salvadoran Ministry of Education’s Full-time Inclusive School model, offering extra-curricular after-school activities (art clubs, recreational sports, and music programs) and tutoring, to promote equitable

access to education, a safe learning community, and higher academic achievement, and to prevent violence and crime (USAID, 2017). Outreach workers organized local committees to raise awareness about crime prevention. Also, young students were provided access to counseling services to identify root causes of problems and improve family communication. (USAID, 2020).

The Urban Centers for Wellbeing and Opportunities (CUBO), run by the government’s Directorate of Reconstruction of the Social Fabric, provide more development opportunities for youth (CUBO, n.d.). Children and young people take courses in arts, literature, culture, languages, sports, computers, communication technologies, and other subjects. The goals are to prevent violence and to promote the potential for a culture of peace, by working closely with children and young people.

As in all cases, increased funding and more legislation is needed to increase these programs especially to reach marginalized community.

Context of the current project within the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals

Throughout this paper, reference is made to how the project addressed the UN Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development and its Goals (SDGs). This is because Ambassador Carlos Enrique Garcia Gonzalez who initiated this project and was integrally involved in its stages, was serving at that time as the Ambassador and Permanent Representative of the Mission on El Salvador to the United Nations with responsibilities -- and thus his lens -- on how the project and partners could contribute to the achievement of the international agenda. The current project was implemented during the period of the transition from the United Nations Millennium Development Goals operant from the years 2000-2015, to the UN Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development with its framework of 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and 169 targets (United Nations. Department of Economic and Social Affairs, n.d.) agreed upon by the government member states of the UN to achieve within their countries over the years 2015-2030.

Youth Gang Prevention in El Salvador cont.

The school-community project described in this paper, with all its evolutions and expansion, addresses these SDGs.

Specifically, the project addresses: Goal 1 (end poverty) by income-generating activities (selling bakery goods and artwork); Goal 2 (end hunger and improving nutrition, and promote sustainable agriculture (through the youth planting vegetable gardens providing food for their families); Goal 3, promoting mental health and wellbeing (raising self-confidence, self-efficacy and skills in the youth); Goal 4 (provide quality education and employable skills especially to young women and men, safe learning environments, and participation in non-formal as well as formal education training (training in new cultural skills, accessing technology through computers, instituting interim high school classes to prepare for higher education, and providing teacher training); Goal 8 (promote decent work for all); Goal 11 (sustainable cities); and Goal 17 (multistakeholder partnerships) including government, the Salvadorean diaspora, and public and private sectors. It further addresses transfer of technology (through the computer program) that is a cross-cutting goal. The program also addresses Target 3.4, to “promote mental health and wellbeing”.

An over-riding SDG addressed by the various elements of the project over time is SDG16, creating peace. The individuals involved felt more peaceful and fulfilled themselves and the group activities led to a more peaceful community as whole. Additionally, bringing together so many partners exemplifies SDG 17 on partnerships.

The project has been a valuable example of the success of what Ambassador Garcia refers to as “Building Bridges between the United Nations Agenda and the Salvadorian community.” This means the project put into practice goals about development intrinsic to governments at the UN.

The emergence of the project idea

The idea for this project was born in the year 2010, when the Salvadorian Minister of Foreign Affairs called a meeting of the Ambassadors of El Salvador serving in countries abroad to discuss policies and new directions. These Ambassadors were assigned into groups to visit projects that different cabinet ministries were implementing on

the ground in the country. The first author of this paper, then-Ambassador of El Salvador to the United Nations Carlos Garcia, and two other Ambassadors, visited three programs. Two projects were related to environment protection and reduction of vulnerabilities from natural disasters. The third project, being local and therefore technically outside his international role as a United Nations ambassador, nonetheless intrigued him since throughout his diplomatic career, he had been committed to the development of his country which included, of course, reducing the high crime rate. Also, he (accurately) sensed the potential of the project to address the governments’ commitment to the goals of the newly adopted UN Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development, which included economic and social development, quality education and good health and well-being, and building social peace in sustainable cities.

This third project involved a school located in a poor rural community called Distrito Italia, in the municipality of Tonacatepeque, located about 30km from the capital city of San Salvador. Being in-between an urban and rural context, the area in general and the school in particular was vulnerable to violence from the two major rival gangs of the Mara Salvatrucha and MS 18. Shockingly, gang members were considerably younger (6-7 years old) than typical adolescents. This was due to several factors, including the location being accessible to the city (where the gangs are) and the fact that many students had close relatives, neighbors or friends in gangs (being a small community of about 7,000 residents).

One solution to the problem of gang recruitment and violence devised by the Ministry of Education at the time was to expand the time that students spent within the premises of the school (which was normally from 7:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.) but was changed to staying in school continuously (from 7:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m.) without a break to go home or to outside school grounds where they would be vulnerable to gang recruitment. Another solution was persistent vigilance on the part of authorities from the Ministry of Security and Justice to identify, publicly denounce and arrest gang members, as well as to carry out collateral activities that empower community members to resist being recruited.

Youth Gang Prevention in El Salvador cont.

On arrival at the school, Ambassador Garcia and his two colleagues were invited to a large room with a basketball field. Sitting on wooden bench, facing a wall painted with gang slogans and graffiti, they noticed a few 8-to-10-year-old children who had brought musical instruments to school and were playing the Four Seasons set of violin concertos by the famous composer Vivaldi. The startling contrast between the school context and this sophisticated activity, led Ambassador Garcia to make a valuable connection between the possibilities for these youth and his knowledge about, and commitment to, the goals of the UN Agenda, for example, about quality education, well-being, social development and peace.

In discussions with the principal, he learned about several interesting projects that had been initiated in the school. For example, a garden had been started where students grew vegetables (tomatoes, cucumbers, lettuce) that helped them understand the subject of science and also provided needed food for the youth to take home.

Another interesting discovery was the story of two teachers. One story concerned the substitute mathematics teacher who had accepted this position as a second job but whose his main job – and passion – was music, as he was in an orchestra in San Salvador. When this teacher informed the principal that he wanted to quit teaching in order to focus on music, the principal suggested that he stay at the school and teach music instead of math – even though music was not then within the curricula of the Ministry of Education. His doing this led to considerable benefit for the students, opening up new arenas for them. Additionally, the teacher's passion for music infused the youth with "soul" – not just rote technique – in their playing sophisticated pieces of music.

In the second story, a teacher initially teaching literature made a similar deal with the principal to instead teach painting which was the subject of his passion.

These examples are significant because few people in El Salvador at that time made a living using culture (music or painting), or considered the arts as a viable career or profession.

As this paper outlines, this new exposure to and involvement in music and art, led to many positive changes for the youth and transformation of the community including from a culture of gangs and violence to a culture of peace.

Changing the mindset of gangs

Changing the mindset of gang members is difficult (Howell, 2010). Techniques that have not been productive include preaching about the evils of gangs or attempts to convince members to leave, given the gang culture benefits noted above (Fogelbach, 2011) and the threats to life of refusal to join (Seery, 2014). Three strategies with pre-delinquents and delinquent gang members represents a balance of 1) prevention, which provides alternatives to gang life 2) intervention, which provides sanctions and services for youth actively involved in gangs, and 3) law enforcement suppression which targets and rehabilitation of the most violent gangs and older criminally active gang members (Howell, 2010).

The school project described in this paper uses two principles: 1) a "bottom-up rather than "top-down" model of social development (Larrison, 2000), whereby "bottom-up" relies on community participation compared to "top-down" which indicates professional leadership to plan, implement and evaluate programs; and 2) applied concepts popular at the United Nations at that time, particularly the "critical mass" concept used by the executive board of UN agencies, like The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), UNICEF, and the United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS) (ECOSOC, 2011; UNICEF, 2014).

The "critical mass" concept involves providing multidimensional resources (administrative, management and programmer costs) needed to adequately respond to the needs of the program and to produce results expected in strategic plans. This approach resonated with Ambassador Garcia's role as Vice President of the Executive Board of UNDP and UNFPA. To apply the concept of "critical mass" to this school initiative, resources from other sources needed to be brought to the school project.

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This was accomplished in part by a partnership with a Korean NGO, with headquarters in New York, called the International Brain Education Association (IBREA Foundation, n.d.). Ambassador Garcia had met this group when attending an event at the UN headquarters in New York where the group presented their work and announced their willingness to partner with any government in a pilot project, going to the country and teaching their techniques of using the power of the mind to control emotions and deal with stress. Ambassador Garcia thought this seemed promising to address situations in El Salvador of social discord, poor mental health, inadequate education, and gang violence.

Overview of the pilot project

The pilot program carried out by the IBREA volunteer trainers in the Italia District School Center was implemented over a period of three months. The program consisted of mind-body activities including breathing routines and movements (e.g., stretching, reaching out) to facilitate inner awareness, relaxation, concentration, and stress-reduction (Guzman, 2019). The participants were 40 children, between the ages of 14 and 16, and 24 educators (21 teachers and 3 health workers).

Outcome

According to the pre-post surveys and trainers report, significant positive outcomes were found on several levels: positive personal changes in the students (increased self-regulation, better stress management, decreased levels of anxiety symptoms of trauma); interpersonal changes (increased connection among peers, improved communication between the teachers and students); increased attendance to classes; fewer school dropouts; and decreased incidence of violence in the school and community. Students also stated that they feel happier and more connected to their body (Guzman, 2019).

Several success stories of students improved behavior included that (a) two students stopped using drugs in the

3-month period; and (b) a pregnant teenager named Laura who had dropped out of school to take care of her baby and who had learned about the project returned to school to resume her studies and became a top student.

It was deemed that the intervention provided positive involvement of the target youth group which provided a protective factor against vulnerability to gang recruitment, and further that the program valuably involved the people in the community – at all ages – which contributed to a stronger social structure.

Further development of the project

The trainers and Ambassador Garcia brainstormed about what more could be done. Ambassador Garcia suggested, “Let’s ask the kids.” In response, the students said that they wanted a swimming pool. To raise the needed \$50,000 funds, the idea was born to have the student Laura (mentioned above) go to Korea for a month with the two IBREA female trainers, to visit schools and collect donations from students to build the pool. Other funds were raised from websites hosted by IBREA and from individual El Salvadorian donors.



Students at the Italia District School Center having fun in the Peace Pool Opening event of the Peace Pool at Italia District School Center



An important approach was not to hire a company to entirely build the swimming pool but to involve the youth, teachers, parents, and other community members (of course, while also hiring some technical help). This created ownership of the project by the people themselves - which fulfilled the principle of building social development and cohesion in the community, and another potential insulation factor from gang culture. Additionally, this approach made the project consistent with the principles and goals of the UN Agenda.

The resulting Olympic size swimming pool became the first and only pool in a public school in El Salvador. Because of its impact to bring the community together and to provide an alternative to violence, the pool became referred to as the "Peace Pool."

Many positive outcomes were deemed to result from this step. These included: pride of the community; (unexpected) fun being introduced into this kind of rural community where few things were just for fun; and community cohesion, in that from Mondays to Friday, the swimming pool was for the students only, but on Saturday, the pool was open to the larger community. This strategy provided an open space for community members to bond in a pleasant environment and also to air and address their differences in a peaceful manner.

An important lesson learned was that actions undertaken in good faith and intention lead to positive outcomes, including results that are unplanned. For example, the Minister of Education – who was at the same time also the Vice President of El Salvador -- visited the school in 2011 (for a different reason than to assess the project) and was

told by the principal about the program. After observing a class of the NGO's training lesson, he requested the NGO to replicate the model in four other schools, equally mired in violent and conflict contexts as the Distrito Italia. Also, the Vice President was invited by the school principal to the opening of the swimming pool. This resulted in considerable positive publicity and further excitement and pride of the community from having the first swimming pool in a public school in a rural area, from overcoming many challenges to launch such an opening event, and from receiving recognition from high level officials for their efforts.

By the end of 2014, this former Minister of Education and Vice President of El Salvador had become President of the country; thus, the project had enjoyed a direct connection with the most senior politician president, which in itself is impressive and significant.

Other partnerships

Other partnerships evolved for the project. The Taiwanese government and a California-based NGO from Taiwan called "Help Aid," with the support of their office in New York, donated 50 desktop computers to Distrito Italia. The Embassy of Taiwan in El Salvador further helped by creating a computer room for the school. This fulfilled the United Nations principle of "International Cooperation," meaning to bring financial and technological assistance to developing countries.



Principal Edwin Perez with the NGO visitors in the computer room in the Italia District School Center donated by Taiwan and Help Aid

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This computer donation led to yet another valuable evolution of the project, providing the opportunity for the school to be connected with science teachers in New York who were teaching mathematics and English as a Second Language. This development, essentially addressing STEM education (referring to Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) is interesting because these two steps in the now ever-evolving project were implemented by two different organizations with no previous connection. This part of this project -- teaching mathematics and English as a Second Language -- was sponsored by Dr. Leena Doshi, an Indian humanitarian medical doctor living in New York, through another connection made by Ambassador Garcia.

As part of this new partnership, changes were also made in the curriculum. For example, Latin as a second language that being taught in New York (to prepare students for higher studies) was replaced with English as a second language for the El Salvadoran youth. As part of this pilot project, Dr. Doshi brought her project coordinator in the New York schools to the school in El Salvador for a needs assessment. Given that the school in El Salvador had been given an advanced computer room, there was no need for in-country visits of other teachers; instead – in just one week – an exchange was planned for a distance course through the Internet for teachers from New York to communicate with teachers in El Salvador.

Thus, the mathematics and English as a Second Language (ESL) classes were taught via the internet from New York to the school in the Italy District in El Salvador. In this process, the math teachers in New York consulted with the ESL teachers when the students spoke in Spanish. At the same time, the students in the Italy District School Center had the English teacher next to them, and when they did not understand what the teachers in New York were saying, the school's English teacher translated it to made it easier for the students to understand.

This curriculum change served several purposes: to assist students to understand English, to connect learning science and mathematics with the English language, to involve participation of the local teachers, and to promote utilization of the computers.

In a further development, the project got the attention of some local universities in El Salvador, that then offered some scholarships for the youth in three rural schools.

These scholarships were intended to recruit the best students from these school in Tonacatepeque for their universities.

A new challenge

A challenge emerged that there was a gap between 9th grade and university, making it difficult to implement the above-mentioned offer. Having the students change schools (to attend a high school) would have impacted their attitude and all the efforts made in motivating them, and worse, left them vulnerable again to gangs and a cycle of violence.

However, this problem also presented an opportunity, because it triggered discussion about different options with the School Director, Mr. Edwin Mauricio Perez Juarez. The solution was to create the level of high-school education in the same school in the Italy District. To make this happen, the Director of the school talked with authorities at the Ministry of Education to authorize the creation of the high school level in their school.

After several months of conversations with the Ministry of Education, the decision was reached to authorize the creation of the high school at the Italia District School.

However, another barrier emerged: the Ministry of Education made it clear that they did not have funds to finance the hiring of new teachers.

Once again, in conversations with the Director of the School and Ambassador García, it was concluded that the solution was to put the creation of the high school into practice, at least temporarily, by motivating the teachers already on the payroll, to participate voluntarily. The teachers agreed.

Other partners bring more elements to the project

At this point, it must be emphasized that this project kept morphing as more partners joined and contributed new elements to the project.

The Peace Boat

Another valuable contact Ambassador Garcia made for the school was with The Peace Boat, a non-governmental organization that promotes direct cultural contact between people to generate positive change in communities, and actually has a real boat that travels to different countries. In this case, it did so through the Academy of Music and Art (MAPA). Ambassador Garcia knew about this organization through his work at the Permanent Mission of El Salvador at the United Nations since the Peace Boat does events with groups at the UN. In this case, a group of high school students, university students, musicians, artists and volunteers from New York had arrived in El Salvador by plane to join the Peace Boat which had arrived at the port of Acajutla in El Salvador from Tokyo, Japan.

Thanks to Ambassador Garcia, the group was invited to visit the Italia District School Center in Toncatepeque. The third-grade students received this group of New Yorkers on August 8, 2014, with the aim of learning about the unique school programs and their success in turning students away from gangs and violence.

For these visitors, the director of the Italia District School, Edwin Pérez, along with the teachers and students, mobilized all their resources and creativity to present the play “La Petaca” (box made of duffel bag) showcasing what they learned in the school's theater workshop and also in workshops about music, painting, sculpture, jewelry and baking. The school children also performed a violin concert and teachers prepared typical Salvadoran dishes such as “riguas” (thin cakes of fresh, tender corn cooked in banana leaves).

Impressed with the demonstrations and treats, the international coordinator of Peace Boat, Emilie McGlone, said, “We came to the Italia District school because we are in contact with the Permanent Mission of El Salvador to the United Nations in New York, and they taught us about this school. We bring musicians, artists and volunteers who are

interested in using art, music and theater as a tool to promote peace and make social change in communities.”

She emphasized that the school is a very important example of how art, music and theater can be used in education as a tool to change communities.

“They come to learn how other countries, other schools work with social issues, and they can learn from El Salvador and take it to New York to teach their friends and families too,” she added.

For example, she said that three of the young people traveling with the group, between 16 and 19 years old, came from poor homes in the United States, and were able to learn how students in other countries whose families are low-income and affected by violence can turn that situation around.

The delegation donated musical instruments to the school. This was an exceptional gift to the school, allowing the music teaching to flourish.



Ambassador Carlos García (second from right) meeting with Peace Boat US representatives at the United Nations prior to their visit to El Salvador

Nelson Mandela Foundation (South Africa).

Yet another valuable contact was made by Ambassador Garcia for the school. As part of efforts to support the financing of the new high school in the Italia District School Center, a meeting was held in New York with representatives of the Nelson Mandela Children's Fund, which strives to empower children and youth living in seriously disadvantaged circumstances. After learning about the experience of the School Center of Distrito Italia in El Salvador, they suggested hiring women to teach at that level

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(instead of having teachers volunteer), which would also support the empowerment of women in the labor-educational sector and facilitate the operations of the school system. This strategy was welcomed by the El Salvador school director. The meeting included a representative from Rwanda of an NGO, with whom Ambassador Garcia also collaborated on an event.



Ambassador Carlos García meeting with representative from South Africa of the Mandela Children's Foundation and a representative of an NGO from Rwanda at the Permanent Mission of El Salvador to present the project of the Italy District School Center

More elements of the school program

As the ever-evolving project of the School Center in Distrito Italia progressed, more elements were added, including:

The Bakery

The bakery introduced the entrepreneurship at early school grades, and promoted a shift in mindset and understanding among children about dealing with money.

A group of parents taught students how to bake bread in a school facility, and then how to sell the product in the community.

Boys as well as girls baked the bread early in the morning (5 a.m.) to have it ready by 6 a.m. or 6:30 a.m., to go with the principal to sell the bread in the community. The money earned was then reinvested in other projects of the school.

This approach had multiple benefits. Young students' learned tools and resources to survive in a very practical, not just theoretical, way. In fact, many youths began to think about opening up their own bakery. Youth also were able to economically support their families. Learning this income-generating activity that requires participation of a group in a business (at even such a young age of 6-7 years old) also stimulated ambition and skills of collaboration with others in a team approach.

Further, by both genders interacting in a natural way within a conducive environment – such as that offered at the school – conflict deriving out of typical cultural “machismo” was minimized. At the same time, participating in the Bakery program created an opportunity to connect entrepreneurship with gender equality and with extracurricular activities.

This bakery aspect of the program addresses the SDGs, including the SDG5 focus on gender issues and SDG8 about economic development and decent work, as well as SDG 11 about sustainable cities. As with all the other elements of the program described above, this bakery also addressed SDG 16 about creating peace in the community.



Representatives of the Connecting Dots organization from New Jersey visiting the Bakery project of the Italy District School Center in El Salvador

The School Garden

The school garden was an initiative of the school's natural sciences teacher, who motivated his students to put into practice the theoretical concepts regarding the process of growing vegetables for self-consumption. This project

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had several valuable impacts including teaching students about how nature works for planting, growth and development of vegetables, and motivating students to think about consumption of these vegetables to provide a healthy school lunch to the students.

Teachers also benefited, being motivated to think about other similar projects. As a result, they raised tilapia (fish) in a pond made at the school with cement and bricks. Similarly, a space was built to raise hens, chickens, and rabbits.

These types of small projects had the additional benefit of "thinking in commercial terms", that besides these products being used for self-consumption, they were sold to the community, thereby generating additional funds to finance other projects and creating a virtuous circle of creativity, innovation and entrepreneurship.

The value of vegetable gardening in El Salvador has been shown to promote family agriculture and left people out of poverty (Ayala & Andréu, 2014).

Painting component

The painting project at the school began modestly, teaching the students techniques for drawing and coloring. This first step had an unexpected turn when it involved the participation of the Permanent Mission of El Salvador to the United Nations, since to expand this effort, Ambassador García engaged the support of Ms. Sonia Melara, a professional Salvadoran artist who lives in New York, whom Ambassador Garcia appointed as Ad-honorem Cultural Attaché to the Permanent Mission.

Subsequently, support was sought from the non-governmental organization "Helping Hands Charity Organization", based in Texas in the United States. Its President, Kaushalya Siriwardana, personally traveled to El Salvador together with Sonia Melara, representing the Permanent Mission of El Salvador to the United Nations, to develop a painting workshop for young people for two weeks.

At the end of the workshop, and upon returning to the United States, communication was maintained with Mrs. Siriwardana, and from that conversation the idea arose to organize an exhibition of paintings by the children of the

Italy District School Center at the Permanent Mission of El Salvador to the United Nations in New York.

This exhibition was successfully mounted at the headquarters of the Permanent Mission of El Salvador to the United Nations in New York City, displaying 42 paintings by the students of the Italy District School Center. A collateral achievement was that each painting was sold for \$100.00, with part of the proceeds going to the school, to reinvest in painting materials, and the other part to the painters, who were able to do Christmas shopping, since the exhibition of paintings was held in December 2013.



Also, as part of the exhibition, a Salvadoran living in New York, Mr. Matias Guardado composed a song dedicated to the children of the Italia District, which was very popular among the attendees. That led to the song being recorded on a CD later sold and generating additional funds.

The CD recording had an unexpected turn, in that Mr. Guardado is a soloist and some friends of Ambassador Garcia who live in New Jersey have a rock band who offered to accompany Matias musically to record the CD. Again, a virtuous circle of collaboration was created for a charitable purpose.



Exhibition of Italy District School Center students' art at the El Salvador UN Mission

Value of arts-based education

Integrating creative expressive arts into programs to address psychosocial stress has been shown to have considerable benefits (Phillips & Becker, 2019).

The components described above in this project constitute comprehensive cultural experiences and classes – in art, music, and theatre – that created a population of young people in El Salvador who have training and experience in performing. There are now well-recognized youth from this school who are violinists and guitarists, who have formed their own musical group and done public performances.

The value of arts-based education had been supported in literature at the time of this project and has become increasingly well documented, showing how liberal arts instruction and experiences (music, painting, drama) have many positive outcomes (Haner et al., 2010; Lim et al., 2013; Nutting, 2013; Vermeersch, & Kindekens, 2014). These play a critical role in providing students with skills that boost their personal well-being, improve behavioral conduct, heighten responsibility and facilitate insight of youth self-management and collective interests (Hartz & Thick, 2005); increase self-confidence and self-concept, and present more opportunities in social life (Daniel, 2010, Nelson, 2009; Nutting, 2013, Sabol, 2010); enhance self-regulation skills that leads to higher achievement

and well-being (Kindekens et al., 2014); provides a safe environment (Noble & Wyatt, 2008); empowers students through creativity (Isis et al., 2010; Spisak, 2008); improves academic and social skills (Schiller, 2008); prepares youth for the workforce and for life (Nutting, 2013); improves attention behavior and reduces suspensions (Lorimer, 2011); and prevents violence (Long & Soble, 1999; Nelson, 2010). Such benefits of students' learning cooperation with each other, support and respect through arts education further leads to positive relationships at school and in the community and includes more involvement of the family and community in education (Bamford, 2007; Seidel et al, 2009). Overall, youth are more prepared to live full lives as well as improve their academic performance that prepares them for careers and makes them successful and competitive workers.

Arts programs are particularly appropriate for young children, who generally enjoy using crayons and markers to draw pictures, creating stories, and engaging in pretend-play that serves as personal expression (Nelson, 2009). Such high-quality arts programs contribute to the intellectual, physical, and emotional well-being of these young children by making learning more interactive; fostering interdisciplinary learning; building self-esteem; and facilitating student success despite differences in languages or learning styles.

In keeping with this support, the acronym STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) referring to curricula, has now been called STEAM, with the introduction of the "A" referring to the Arts.

Expressive arts programs in underprivileged communities

A review of arts and arts education in diverse underprivileged communities (Koo, 2015) reported four case studies where community-based art projects had positive impacts for youth: 1) A volunteer program of the Pacific Asia Society (PAS) in the Philippines offered elementary students who were especially depressed by lack of facilities, ways to express their artistic ability; 2) the Korea Internet Volunteer (KIV) program in Moscow, Russia, which provided Korean-Russian middle school students and teachers with

ways to learn cultural diversity through art education using computer programs; 3) A mural painting project with handicapped students supported by the Student Council at Ewha Woman's University in Seoul, Korea; and, 4) A non-governmental organization in Peru where volunteers taught a new art-making skill to Peruvian elementary students.

Given that the teachers in this project also reported benefits, it is worthwhile to note that the systematic review, as well as other research, also found benefits of a program for older persons who created a mural reflecting their natural environment and scenes in their daily life, and engaged in activities like card playing, games and dancing.

Despite these programs' differences in cultural, economic or physical situations and backgrounds, similar positive outcomes were observed, namely that participants enjoyed interacting with arts, wanted more expressive opportunities, and became more aware of current social issues and the development of their community.

Case Example of expressive arts in peace program in Mexico

A program in Mexico City called "Journeys for Peace" engages youth in artistic expression (painting, theatre production, puppetry, and choirs) as a way to understand about peace (Kopeliovich & Kuriansky, 2009) at the same time as they are experiencing what it feels like to be understanding, tolerant and non-violent with others. The children also participate in social service projects, interview major world leaders, and participate in mini-parliaments that spark debate about issues as peaceful coexistence and diversity.

Beneficiaries: Expanded to the school and community

The present project reported in this paper benefitted not only the youth, but also teachers and the principal, who similarly had an opportunity to develop skills, confidence and pride, and to have international exposure and interactions. The principal, Edwin Perez, proved to be a natural leader making major contributions to the students, teachers, and community. His cooperation in participating in partnerships allowed the project to grow. Additionally, his

appreciation for entrepreneurship training for the youth also allowed the business aspects of the program to flourish through, for example, music and the bakery.

International recognition and collaboration

The school project and the student's efforts have been highlighted in other countries, providing a cross-cultural experience. For example, Ambassador Garcia, being the head of the Permanent Mission of El Salvador, organized an event in New York City held at a meeting at the United Nations, to tell the story of the project to the international community and the broader public. The principal of the El Salvador school, Edwin Perez, came to New York City to participate in that meeting to share the experiences on the school.

At that time, organizations from other countries became partners, again in the spirit of SDG 16 about partnerships for the goals. For example, Italian Assistance collaborated with the Italia District School Center for many years, offering financial aid and also training teachers from the School Center, as part of the international cooperation that the Government of Italy provides to El Salvador. Diplomats from the Permanent Mission of Italy to the United Nations participated in the meeting organized by the Permanent Mission of El Salvador to the United Nations, and after learning about the project in greater detail from the presentation made by Director Perez of the Italy District School Center, they offered much more support to the school through Italian Assistance. This is why the school is referred to as the Centro Escolar Distrito Italia (Italy District School Center).

Growing entrepreneurship opportunities and economic development

The "critical mass" theory mentioned above maintains that you don't have to end a project once a predetermined or specified goal, or certain number of donors, is reached. Instead, attention can be paid to continual giving, to escalate results for the larger community. This principle is evident in the present case by so many stakeholders in El Salvador and elsewhere becoming involved in the project as time progressed.

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“I took every possible opportunity to bring attention to this worthy project and in the process, make connections for the good of the school and everyone,” says Ambassador Garcia. Indeed, many such connections were made.

In this expanding and evolving process, new financial opportunities were also generated in terms of entrepreneurship for the youth and economic growth for the community.

For example, on one trip to the country, Ambassador Garcia met a woman, Ms. Lilly Zepeda, who manages a tourist facility “Thermal Paradise Villa” located in Caluco, Sonsonate, a lovely place to have lunch, commemorative parties, birthdays, and other social activities. Ambassador Garcia told her the story of Distrito Italia – which she found impressive – and invited her to visit. That led to brainstorming ideas for their company to invite the youth violinists from the school to play music and entertain their guests, and to provide bakery goods from the youth at lunches they may be organizing. This would further create business opportunities for the youth. While this did not materialize due to logistics of the tourist facility being too far from the school, the idea could be implemented in another way.

“To do good for the school and for any potential partners requires thinking ‘outside the box’, connecting the dots to seeing any connections and brainstorm possibilities,” said Ambassador Garcia.

In yet another example of this approach, Ambassador Garcia had a friend who connected him to a Middle school in Jericho on Long Island, New York, which had a practice of dedicating a day to celebrate different countries. At Ambassador Garcia’s suggestion, a day was dedicated to El Salvador, where the students learned about the country and the culture, and decorated a colorful poster saying “Me encanta El Salvador” (“I love El Salvador”). The day was specifically organized to happen on the day the principal of the Italy district School from El Salvador, Edwin Perez, was in New York for the art exhibition mentioned above. The schools became “sister schools” and the New York students raised money they sent to their new “sister school” in El Salvador. Also, the students in both schools became “computer pals,” continuing contact through computer, thanks to the computer lab set up in El Salvador allowing those students such access.

All of these connections continued to demonstrate the “critical mass” theory put into action, and the program evolving into a tapestry of creative elements.



Thermal Paradise Villa, Caluco, Sonsonate tourist attraction that showed interest in supporting students at Italy District School Center in Tonacatepeque, El Salvador



Students at the Jericho Middle School, New York, library in 2015 in support of education in El Salvador holding the patriotic flag and colorful poster saying "I love El Salvador" (Me encanta El Salvador)

Engaging the private sector

The growing entrepreneurship aspects of the program, and the cooperation of the principal, positioned the project for productive and prolific partnerships with the private sector, including corporations, enterprises or companies, to increase business opportunities for the youth, school and community. For example, the idea arose that companies that have meetings or workshops with "coffee break" recesses, with participants drinking coffee and eating the Spanish tradition of "pan dulce" (a sweet bread pastry), can use the services of the students to provide these refreshments. Such promotional business ideas can constantly be created and pursued. In this way, a self-supporting positive cycle of economic development is created, whereby the proceeds from such ventures can be reinvested in other projects.

Transformation of gang culture

The program was deemed to have had a positive impact on reducing gang activity in the school and community, as well as transforming gang members. The principal of the school reported to Ambassador Garcia that he was visited

by the two rival gang leaders in the community who told him that they will stop recruiting kids at that school because their own children are studying in the school, and they want them to be safe. Further, gang members told parents of the schoolchildren that they, too, want to have fun swimming in the pool, playing violin or guitar, or painting. After all, gang members are also parents,

aunts and uncles, and other relatives or family members of the same kids who live in the communities. Since everyone is connected to a gang for different reasons, when the gang leaders saw how the school transformed the life of the students -- many of whom were their kids -- they decided that they wanted a better future their own kids than the gang lifestyle. Thus, the program offered the possibility for changing the mindset as well as the behavior of gangs and therefore reduced violence in the community. Gang leaders told the principal, "We stop because you act, not talk sh-t," (personal communication, March, 2014). By this, they meant that politicians usually make promises for change that never get put into practice, in contrast to this program that was producing positive results for their children and families.

Another deliverable reducing gang membership was that the multidimensional aspect of the program addressed needs of the youth that gangs normally provide. This includes social cohesion and a sense of belonging to a group, as well as self-importance (in terms of learning skills and being recognized) in addition to learning skills in leadership as well as team building) and economic opportunity (healthy socially acceptable entrepreneurship in the form of baking and selling bread, as an alternate to gang income).

Involvement of the Diaspora and private sector

The population of El Salvador is 6.5 million people, living within 20,000 square kilometers, but 3 million Salvadorans live abroad, representing 1/3 of the total population. Involvement of this Diaspora sector, leading to collaboration among the Salvadorans living in El Salvador with

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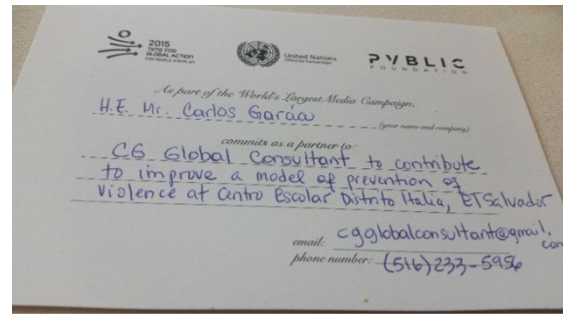
the Salvadorans living abroad and with the International Community, is key to success of local projects. The Diaspora became a key player in a collaboration for success of this local project -- in the spirit of SDG 17 about multi-stakeholder projects being essential for progress -- and also in involving the private sector. For example, Ambassador Garcia made another connection for the benefit of the school by introducing the project to a friend of his, an entrepreneurial Salvadorian living on Long Island, Mr. Carlos Felissari, who owns sport stores selling uniforms and equipment like soccer balls. Felissari donated two complete uniforms sets for the school's boys' soccer team and for the girls' softball team.



(left to right): Salvadoran entrepreneur Carlos Felissari (second from left) who donated uniforms for the school's sports teams, between a friend (left) and (right) Principal Edwin Perez and Ambassador Carlos Garcia

Acknowledgment of the Project at a UN event

Ambassador Garcia, as Founder and CEO of CG Global Consultant, was acknowledged for all his dedication and unflinching efforts preventing gang violence and promoting the model of the Italy District School, at a luncheon held at the United Nations in the Delegates Dining Room by three organizations: the United Nations office for Partnerships, the 2015 Time for Global Action for People and Planet, and the Pvblic Foundation, a non-profit organization that mobilizes media, data, and technology for sustainable development and social impact around the world.



Certificate to Ambassador Garcia for his efforts to end gang violence

Timing of the Project

The short timing of the evolution of this project from a simple idea to its burgeoning into its various iterations described above, is impressive, when such a venture would normally take many years. This program with its various projects in the school itself and in the local and international community, and its international exposure, essentially happened over less than a four-year span, starting at the end of the year 2010, when Ambassador Garcia first visited the school.

Reflections of the co-authors

Ambassador Garcia: Most people do not understand how the United Nations work, since it is such a complex body, but this project demonstrates how to translate the framework of the UN and the goals of the agenda, into a real example of implementation. It is significant that we did this project in a real community in need. The outcome shows the validity of the "critical mass" principle being effective in practice, and how such an approach can benefit a society. I am grateful for having the opportunity to make difference for this community in my country, and to see it serve now as a potential model that will continue, and to the School Director and all the multistakeholders who contributed, and to the government of El Salvador that is now making the country a safe place as a beacon of hope in Central America and the world.

Dr. Judy Kuriansky: It was a significant blessing over the years to know Ambassador Garcia during his post as

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Ambassador of El Salvador to the United Nations, to watch his dedication throughout the process of this program, and to participate in the events that were created showcasing the project. It is particularly inspiring and rewarding for me to be at the United Nations for 20+ years, advocating for mental health and wellbeing (in the UN Agenda and other agreements), knowing the importance of having models such as this one for development at the grassroots level with support from the international level. This project is a shining example of the spirit of several of the Sustainable Development Goals, including SDG 17 promoting partnerships, SDG 16 promoting peace and security, SDG 3 insuring health and mental health for all, SDG 11 about safe and sustainable cities, and all other goals addressed by this initiative. This project is especially meaningful in the aftermath of the pandemic and in response to the call for gold standard examples of implementing the UN Agenda for Sustainable Development. Having helmed similar “on the ground” projects in communities worldwide, I know the devotion and energy required to make such a project successful. Ambassador Garcia deserves tremendous credit for what they have accomplished, as do all the multi-stakeholders who offered their resources, the youth, the community, and indeed the gang members themselves who responded to the elements of this project and transformed their community. Congratulations to the government for continuing its policies and support of this model, serving as an example for others. The “Peace Pool”, garden, bakery, painting exhibit, and all the innovative ideas that were generated and reported in this paper offer an exciting example that can benefit neighbor countries in Central America and others throughout the world.

Renan de Almeida Sargiani: Coming from Brazil and now being a Professor of Educational Psychology at the School of Education at the University of São Paulo, I am impressed with the possibilities of adapting this program to the situation in Brazil, which has many conditions similar to that in El Salvador and has also implemented some programs similar in success. For example, in 2000, to strengthen ties between the community and the school in an attempt to reduce violence in their surroundings, the UNESCO Office in Brazil launched the Open Spaces Programme: Education and Culture for Peace (Programa Abrindo Espaços:

educação e cultura para a paz), also called the Family School Program in Sao Paulo and Peace Schools in Rio de Janeiro, during the celebrations of the International Peace Culture Year. Public schools are open on weekends, to students and their family, offering sports activities, leisure, culture, computer classes and preparation for the work (Rolim, 2008). The program is founded on principles of peace culture: to encourage interaction between different groups and facilitate conflict resolution through negotiation. Based on research about youth made by UNESCO in Brazil, the programming helps young people who have traditionally engaged in violent situations both as agents and victims and breaks the school's institutional isolation to instead occupy a central role in community articulation. This project is an impressive and useful example of a multi-stakeholder project aligned with Goal 17 of the UN Agenda, and serves as an excellent example of what can be replicated and adapted elsewhere.

Leslie Hernandez: Coming from Guatemala City with a El Salvadorean heritage from my paternal family side, and going to school in El Salvador as a child, where I experienced poverty and lack of educational resources - no access to a computer, library, textbooks, tutors, or after-school recreational activities, and suffering unsanitary drinking water and school public bathrooms -- I know intimately the conditions of the school in this paper. Also, I know how violence puts youth at risk and prevents them from realizing their potential. From my current work with migrants from the region who have come to America, I also know how many are homesick for their country and struggling to adapt to their new adopted country and how help from many directions is essential. Thus, I appreciate the contributions of so many people and countries who cooperated in this model. Becoming familiar with the impressive success of this program inspires me with dedication to continue advocating for educational rights and equal opportunity for children in need and hope for the future. With this current model, and the situation improving so impressively in El Salvador with government support, I am particularly emotionally touched and connected to this project, proud to showcase it, and excited

to let the world know of its possibilities to achieve my own hope for peace, resilience, equal educational opportunity and equality in the world.

Conclusions and recommendations

The project initiated in a gang-dominated school community in El Salvador was shown to be successful in accomplishing multiple positive outcomes for many members of the community, including the students, teachers and families. Besides addressing the initial goal to reduce gang domination, other outcomes included that the students engaged in informal (arts-based) educational skills and learned income-generating skills (baking bread, growing vegetables, and making artwork) which led to increased self-esteem, skills-building, and even income-generating opportunities. These results support the value of holistic education that includes both traditional academic subjects as well as arts-based components.

The project was initiated by the then-Ambassador of the Mission of El Salvador to the United Nations, Carlos Enrique Garcia Gonzalez, whose vision noted the possibilities for the local school to be an example of the implementation of the international global goals set by the governments of the United Nations, outlined first in the Millennium Development Goals and subsequently in the Sustainable Development Goals. The project started small, as a training by an NGO in mind-body activities for the students and evolved in an organic way into many partnerships emerging from his many contacts and the innovative creativity of the many diverse stakeholders who became involved.

After only several years' time, the results demonstrate the value of leadership, teamwork, commitment, and brainstorming to develop new aspects the program, and being open to engage more actors from the local as well as international community. The project became an example of a collective model, with many stakeholders contributing to its growth and benefits, following the concept of critical mass, whereby it became a living and developing entity, evolving into many forms through innovative thinking and action, some happenstance meetings, and deliberately hosting events to engage more stakeholders to develop new aspects. Each event contributed to a positive cycle

of the local El Salvador community and the international community in New York, which then redounded back into benefits to the local community and kept expanding to connect with different national and international organizations.

An increasing number of different NGOs subsequently traveled to El Salvador to learn about how to start a similar project in their school and community, in particular from Guatemala and Honduras, two neighbor countries that had learned about this project in the United Nations in New York. The follow-up of these contacts was developed by the Principal, Edwin Perez, in El Salvador.

The program grew from in-school to out-of-school activities, and through involving local government as well international individuals and organizations. This project represents a model that addresses United Nations principles outlined in the UN Agenda for Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) for countries to achieve by the year 2030. The goal of multi-stakeholder partnerships is addressed, e.g., by the local school working with international NGOs, the El Salvadorean Diaspora, national government representatives, and private sector companies.

In addition, the program addresses the sustainable development pillars of social and economic development, and provides means of implementation of several SDGs, including quality education, sustainable and safe cities, attaining healthy lives and wellbeing for all, and ending poverty, as well as importantly creating peace in a previously violent gang-dominated community. In this way, it is aligned with the mission of the TAP Network SDG16+NOW campaign, which is focused on mobilizing, advocating and connecting partners for peace and commitments by government and civil society (Hernandez & Kuriansky, 2024).

The program has gotten considerable well-deserved local as well as broader attention but deserves even wider recognition.

The considerable deliverables described here from observations and self-reports would benefit greatly from rigorous scientific methodology of assessment, in order to be established as "best practices," which could then serve as a

gold standard for other communities and countries, which is called for at the United Nations.

It is therefore recommended that the project elements be replicated and adapted in schools in other settings. It is further advised to follow the concept of critical mass that is a continuum process and evolving cycle of programs and partners.

This project presents a valuable narrative of the potential for transformation of a school and community from being run by gangs and exploiting very young children, into a multi-dimensional venture and learning environment, teaching youth life skills, talents, and income-generating activities. The beneficiaries were not only the students but also the parents, teachers and the broader community. Perpetrators of violence – gang members- even transformed as they saw the positive impact on their own children.

All the evolutions of the program – the “Peace Pool”, bakery and artwork – provide a powerful example of success. Publicity about this school and its projects in El Salvador benefitted the community members and also spread to other directors or principals of different schools who visited the school and wanted to replicate the results in their own context. This local to national growth can inspire adaptations of the program, with cultural appropriateness, to other countries. Such a model is especially significant and useful now, and for the coming years, where identifying means of implementation and best practices for the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals set by the United Nations is necessary.

NOTE about the authors relationship: The first author, Ambassador Garcia, was the initiator of this project and its ensuing iterations. He informed the second author, Dr. Judy Kuriansky, about this project, as she was integrally involved in these issues at the United Nations where they knew each other from collaborating on other projects. Being very intrigued and impressed with this brilliant initiative, she subsequently followed the project’s progress over several years and attended events about the project held at the United Nations and at the UN Mission of El Salvador. Knowing its importance to the professional and

international community, she began documenting Ambassador Garcia’s work as a model and involved the third author in research for this paper as he was then a student member of the International Association of Applied Psychology, an NGO which she represents at the UN. In time, she invited the fourth author in writing up the project, as the latter is her student in the class about “Psychology and the United Nations” at Columbia University Teachers College and also is a native from the Central America region.

Acknowledgements from Ambassador Garcia

This work would not have been possible without the passion, persistence and commitment of Dr. Judy Kuriansky with youth around the world. I am also especially indebted to Leslie Hernandez and Renan de Almeida Sargiani for the dedication and contribution to the success of bringing this project to light; their passion for true and academic rigor is refreshing. I am grateful to Mr. Edwin Mauricio Perez, Principal of Italy District School Center for his leadership and teamwork spirit that was key to implement all the different projects and initiatives in that school. A special acknowledgement to all the members of the Permanent Mission of El Salvador to the United Nations who contributed to the success of these projects in Distrito Italia, as well as to Cultural Attaché Sonia Melara, Carl Dash, Kaushalya Siriwardana, and all the other sponsors and leaders of each and all aspects of the project that were implemented in El Salvador. Finally, nobody has been more important to me in the pursuit of this project than my lovely wife, Ines E Oviedo de Garcia, and my daughter, Melanie E Garcia Oviedo, whose love and support were valuable inspiration to keep going.

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Cross-cultural perspectives in mental health education; International students giving back to their homeland: Implications for peace and the case of Cameroon

Bemsimbom Nkuo and Judy Kuriansky

Overview of Event

This event, held online on December 11, 2023, at 12:00pm EST, emphasized the critical role of cultural sensitivity in global mental health education. Organized to fulfill a requirement of the “Psychology at the United Nations” course taught by Professor Judy Kuriansky in the Department of Psychology at Columbia University Teachers College, the event featured international students from the course who represented various regions of the world who were keen to return to their home countries and contribute to the mental health resources there. The overarching goal was to explore the importance of cross-cultural psychology and its implementation in diverse countries around the world, and to combat prevailing stigma. These goals align with the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the new General Assembly Resolution on Mental Health, and the Political Declaration on Universal Health Coverage, all of which are being studied in the course with relation to the achievement of mental health and well-being worldwide.

Introduction

Mental health, a fundamental aspect of human well-being, encompasses our holistic emotional, psychological, physical, social and even spiritual well-being, influencing how we think, feel, including our ability to cope with stress, build relationships, and make healthy decisions. Challenges to mental health and well-being are prevalent in all societies worldwide, while the specific expression of mental health concerns can vary across cultures as they are shaped by diverse societal norms, beliefs, and healthcare systems (Norman et al., 2008; Manago, 2015). In recent years, there has been a growing recognition of the need for cross-culturally sensitive and effective mental health interventions. This recognition stems from the understanding that traditional Western-based approaches may not be universally applicable, and that tailoring interventions to specific cultural contexts is essential for improving outcomes (Rathod et al., 2018; Smith & Griner, 2006). Furthermore, education about mental health, prevention and treatment, and particularly dispelling myths,

is gravely needed in low-resource countries with high prevalence of stigma. The United Nations has been placing higher priority on education and mental health and well-being (Kuriansky & Zinsou, 2019) which has increased in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic when these issues became more prominent (de la Fuente et al., 2024).

Cross-Cultural Perspectives in Mental Health

Valsiner (2003) defines culture as a group of people who not only belong to a culture but also to which a culture belongs. Cultural factors play a significant role in shaping perceptions and experiences of mental health. For instance, in some cultures, mental health concerns may be attributed to spiritual or supernatural causes, leading individuals to prefer to seek help from traditional healers rather than formal healthcare providers (Subu et al., 2022; Teferra & Shibre, 2012). Similarly, expressions of distress vary across cultures, with individuals emphasizing somatic symptoms rather than emotional or psychological ones (Kirmayer & Young, 1998).

Cultural beliefs and practices also influence help-seeking behaviors. Stigma associated with mental illness is a major barrier to seeking treatment, particularly in cultures where mental health issues are associated with shame or weakness (Adewuya et al., 2007). Moreover, traditional family structures and support networks influence individuals' decisions to seek professional help or rely on informal support systems (Kirmayer et al., 2011).

Call to Action

Many countries throughout the world have inadequate infrastructure to provide mental health support that is direly needed; a situation which has been well-documented as the “treatment gap.” Besides the lack of resources, other factors interfere with both prevention and treatment of conditions, as well as creating a society where mental health and wellbeing is insured for all.

Cross-cultural perspectives in mental health education cont.

Many international students in the United States, in the field of mental health, are committed to returning to their country to boost well-being in their homeland. This important goal requires understanding many cross-cultural factors inherent in what is called the “social determinants of health”.

Cross-cultural perspectives are essential for developing effective mental health interventions that address the unique needs and experiences of individuals from diverse backgrounds. By understanding and incorporating cultural factors into prevention and treatment approaches, mental health professionals can improve positive attitudes towards mental health and access to care, reduce stigma, and enhance treatment outcomes for individuals.

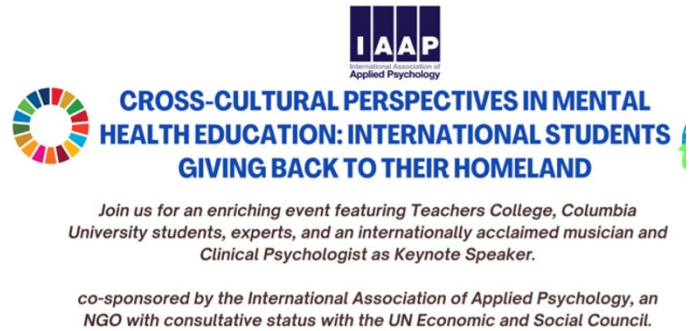
An increasing number of international students specializing in mental health are devoted to bringing practices back to their country to fulfill the goals set by the UN Agenda and other international agreements. Such youth and young professionals have an important role to play in advancing mental health education in their countries as well as being a partner in the important multi-stakeholder approach necessary to improve mental health care in countries in need, especially those in low- and middle-income countries. Understanding the issues populations in these countries face, and supporting them, can greatly increase the effectiveness and the wellbeing of their country.

Logistics

The event consisted of five main parts: Part I: moderator introduction and closing; Part II: Keynote, featured and expert presentations; Part III: Cultural interlude; Part IV: Panel discussion of students’ first-hand experiences; Part V: Closing Statement. It was sponsored by the International Association of Applied Psychology (IAAPsy.org), an NGO in consultative status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council, of which all the panelists were members of the Division of Students and Early Career Professionals. All students were also members of the Fall 2023 class on “Psychology and the United Nations” (Kuriansky, 2024) as well as members of the GAAP Lab on Global Advocacy and Applied Psychology led by Professor Kuriansky, who were involved in global projects involving promoting mental health and wellbeing, and education, in their own or other countries. They were selected to purposefully represent countries from diverse regions of the world,

namely, Sweden, India, Chile and the Democratic Republic of Congo. The flyer announcing the event was distributed, and attendees included other students from the class on “Psychology and the United Nations.”

The event was held online, recorded, and subsequently posted on Youtube.



The flyer features the IAAP logo at the top, a colorful circular graphic, and the event title in bold blue text. Below the title, it lists the event details: date and time (Dec 11th, 2023 | 12 PM - 1:30 PM), location (On zoom), and a registration link. It also mentions the event is co-sponsored by IAAP and the UN Economic and Social Council.

Dec 11th, 2023 | 12 PM - 1:30 PM

Location: On zoom

[Click Here to Register](#)

Event Speakers

Judy Kuriansky
Clinical Psychologist, Author and
United Nations NGO representative
Keynote Speaker

Neha Srinivas
Clinical Psychology PhD Candidate,
Fairleigh Dickinson University
Expert Speaker

Bemsimbom Nkuo
MA Clinical Psychology, Columbia University
Moderator

Mbah Nadine
Founder Empower Her, Cameroon
Guest Speaker

Niklas Nyblom
MA Clinical Psychology, Columbia University
Panelist

Himaja Boinapali
MA Counseling Psychology, Columbia
University
Panelist

Josefina Streeter
MA Clinical Psychology, Columbia University
Panelist

Theo Ntwari
MA International Education
Development, Columbia University
Panelist

Flyer for Webinar on “Cross-cultural perspectives in mental health education: International students giving back to their homeland”

Part I: Introductory Speech by Moderator Bemsimbom (Bemsi) Nkuo



Bemsi Nkuo picture taken during Tedx speech on "Unity in Isolated Events"

The event started with Ms. Bemsimbom (Bemsi) Nkuo expressing her gratitude to take on the role as a moderator for this event as her first experience doing so.

She presented the event's focus on culturally sensitive mental health interventions, aiming to raise awareness and initiate dialogue about the importance of implementing such approaches. She highlighted the critical theme of Global Mental Health, acknowledging the prevalent "treatment gap" in mental health support services worldwide - the difference between the need for, but lack of, services. She underscored the importance of delving into this issue and understanding the pivotal role played by international students who are studying mental health in the United States but who want to bring their rich knowledge back to serve their country, and thus bridge the treatment gap.

Throughout the conversation, Ms. Nkuo conveyed the significance of exploring mental health interventions and education from a cross-cultural perspective. The international students and speakers participating in the discussion were positioned as valuable contributors, shedding light on challenges they face and how mutual support can create positive change.

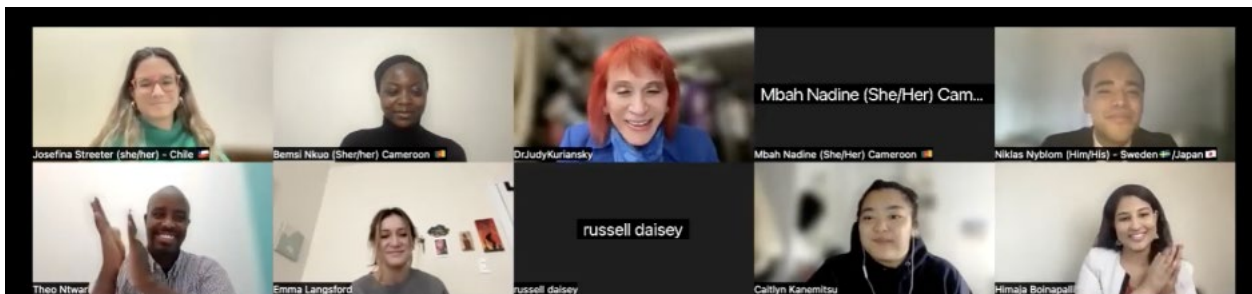
Ms. Nkuo encouraged a collective effort, not only to aid the students but to elevate mental health globally, regardless of geographical boundaries.

As the event progressed, Ms. Nkuo set the stage for a dynamic conversation filled with learning and innovative ideas, envisioning a world where mental health becomes a top priority for everyone. She thanked the audience for their presence and urged them to approach the discussions with excitement and a "can-do" attitude.

Agenda:

- Keynote Address
- Professor Judy Kuriansky, Representing the Department of Clinical Psychology at Columbia University Teachers College and the International Association for Applied Psychology
- Featured Address
- Mbah Nadine, Founder of "Empower Her" NGO located in Cameroon
- Expert Presentation
- Neha Srinivas, Clinical Psychology PhD candidate
- Cultural Interlude
- Russell Daisy, internationally-known musician and composer
- Moderated Panel Discussion
- Teachers College Columbia University students in Dr. Kuriansky's class on "Psychology and the United Nations"
- Moderated Q&A Session

(Below) Screenshot of webinar speakers, panelists and some attendees. (bottom row, left to right): Panelist Theo Ntwari, course student attendee Emma Langsford, musician Russell Daisey, course student attendee Cailtyn Kanemitsu; panelist Himaja Boinapalli (top row, left to right): panelist Josefina Streeter, moderator Bemsi Nkuo, plenary speaker Dr. Judy Kuriansky, featured speaker Mbah Nadine, panelist Niklas Nyblom



Part II: Keynote, Featured and Expert Presentations

Keynote Presentation



Professor Dr. Judy Kuriansky is a renowned clinical psychologist and Professor of Psychology and Education on the adjunct faculty at Teachers College, Columbia University. As the senior NGO Representative at the United Nations for the International Association of Applied Psychology and the World Council for Psychotherapy, she played a pivotal advocacy role in successful inclusion of mental health and well-being in the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Political Declaration for Universal Health Coverage. Dedicated to international development, Dr. Kuriansky has provided training and workshops on psychosocial support globally, particularly after natural disasters in Japan, China, Iran, Haiti and Sint Maarten, and during epidemics of HIV/AIDS, Ebola, and COVID-19. Dr. Kuriansky serves as a Policy Advisor to the Ambassador of Sierra Leone to the United States and advisor to the Mission of the Republic of Sierra Leone to the United Nations. An award-winning journalist and pioneer of "media psychology," she has published numerous articles and books ranging from personal relationships to international issues. She and her music partner, Russell Daisey, create original songs addressing global issues. In her popular course on "Psychology at the United Nations" and her Lab on Global Advocacy and Applied Psychology (GAAP), she significantly supports her international students in bringing mental health and well-being to their country.

Keynote presentation: Professor Judy Kuriansky

Commencing the event with enthusiastic praise for the moderator, her student Bemsì Nkou, Dr. Kuriansky set a positive tone for the discussion, acknowledging how young students are developing very valuable skills that will greatly benefit their country. She elaborated about Bemsì's exceptionally accomplishment developing a

concept paper, flier, and program for this webinar for her first time, rare for students to accomplish at such a high level equal to expert organizers. Diverse Panel Introduction: Top-Notch Students Discussing Global Mental Health

Introducing a panel of top-notch students from Columbia University Teachers College, Dr. Kuriansky showcased their diverse backgrounds, representing different countries, thus highlighting the international cross-cultural theme of the event, related to mental health and youth, that the student panel will discuss, creating a rich and varied perspective.

Global Mental Health Advocacy and Sustainable Development

Emphasizing the critical role of mental health in achieving global goals under the UN Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development, Dr. Kuriansky praised the students' commitment to taking their knowledge back to their respective countries. This aligns with ongoing global advocacy for mental health being done by the students engaging with high-level guests and Ambassadors of their countries. Attention to the mental health needs in their country is especially important in the ongoing COVID-19 recovery period.

Major psychosocial issues (clinical and environmental psychology)

- **Meaning of "home"**
 - national sovereignty/borders; stable home leads to "ontological security"
- **Place attachment**
 - "settlement identity"
 - "homesickness"
- **Sense of belonging**
 - Cultural
 - Tied to concepts of: self-esteem, happiness, self-efficacy, acceptance, meaning in life



Slide of meaning of "home" from Professor Kuriansky's presentation

Exploring "Home" and Cultural Identity: Psychological Implications

Dr. Kuriansky delved into the fundamental psychological concept of "home" and its implications for individuals' sense of belonging, cultural identity, and well-being, which is particularly important for international students far away from their homeland.

Cross-cultural perspectives in mental health education cont.

Common Ground and Shared Humanity: Fostering Connection

Highlighting the common ground shared by people globally, Dr. Kuriansky emphasized safety, joy, and connection. Various exercises and activities were showcased as tools to foster resilience, empowerment and unity across cultural differences.

Global Projects and Collaborative Well-Being Initiatives

Providing an overview of students' global projects and initiatives, the focus was on mental health, education and empowerment. Examples were given from projects being done by students in collaboration with partners in Ukraine, Djibouti, Sierra Leone and Jamaica illustrating collaborative efforts for well-being.

International Collaborations and Amplifying Impact

Students getting involved with NGOs greatly facilitates their development and experience, including those sponsored by the International Association of Applied Psychology. Collaborations with United Nations Ambassadors and Missions from various countries, as happens in my course, give them a rare opportunity to connect with power players in the world, showcasing their maturity and the global impact of their work.

Psychological Principles for Global Understanding: Promoting Peace

Introducing psychological principles such as social identity theory, the contact hypothesis, and nonviolent communication, Dr. Kuriansky laid the foundation for understanding and addressing prejudices, fostering collaboration, and promoting peaceful communication.

Students' Global Advocacy Events: Focused Efforts

Highlighting students' active participation in global events related to mental health, AI, digital health, and access to justice, Dr. Kuriansky emphasized their collective efforts to advance mental health education and awareness on a global scale.

Conclusion: Transforming Trauma into Happiness

Concluding by reiterating the goal of transforming trauma into happiness, Dr. Kuriansky emphasized the universal nature of gratitude. The importance of education, advocacy, and a shared understanding of mental health was also underscored as students continue to develop their skills

and make connections to make a difference in the world globally.

Featured Presentation



Mbah Nadine is a 20-year old Cameroonian humanitarian. She earned a bachelor's degree in Journalism and Mass communication, has worked with the Cameroon Baptist Conventions in Bamenda as a media personnel, and partnered with other organizations in empowerment programs to better support her vision of empowering and serving the community. She officially started her career as an actor in 2022, fueled by her burning passion for acting. She was nominated, and won – an award for Best New Actress for the Collywood awards 2022. Apart from acting, Mbah Nadine is a Human Rights Activist who founded a charity organization called Empower Her aimed at empowering young girls and women, serving the community and actively participating in community building activities.

Featured Presentation: Mbah Nadine

Mbah Nadine initiated her presentation by defining how wellbeing is perceived in Cameroon. shedding light on the significant stigma attached to mental health in the country, often associated with terms like "madness" or "insanity." This cultural perspective contributes to discrimination and isolation, particularly affecting individuals dealing with common disorders such as depression, anxiety, and bipolar disorder.

Statistics

Cameroon faces alarming mental health statistics, with suicide ranking as the second leading cause of death among the youth. In 2019, 6% of the population experienced depression, and 1 in 5 women faced perinatal

Cross-cultural perspectives in mental health education cont.

depression. Shockingly, over half of severe cases involve individuals being restrained at home. With just one mental health specialist per 100,000 people, over 75% of the population cannot access necessary care.

Impact on Society

Ms. Mbah emphasized the ripple effects of mental health issues across various facets of society, affecting education, productivity, relationships, crime rates, and substance abuse. The crisis in the Anglophone regions exacerbates these issues, leading to increased violence and a rise in depression, gender-based violence, financial instability, and displacement.

Awareness and Education



Picture of Mbah Nadine creating awareness and educating the youth

Acknowledging the challenge of low awareness and understanding of mental health issues in Cameroon and throughout the Africa region, Ms Mbah underscored the need for public campaigns and educational initiatives. These efforts are crucial to inform the population about signs, symptoms, and available treatments. Additionally, she emphasized the urgent need for more mental health professionals and improved accessibility to services, especially in rural areas.

Effects of the Crisis

The ongoing conflicts in the country intensifies mental health challenges in Cameroon . attacks on schools and persistent violence in the community contribute to heightened anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder. The consequences further include increased gender-based violence, financial instability, family separations, unemployment, and academic disruption. Interventions by her organization, Empwoer Her, providing

financial, physical, psychological, academic, and moral support, aim to alleviate the mental health burden imposed by the crisis.

Hope Amidst Challenges

Despite the grim statistics and challenges, there is a glimmer of hope through initiatives hosted by Empower Her. Ms Mbah emphasized the importance of these initiatives, focusing on promoting awareness, education, and support within Cameroon's evolving mental health landscape. She underscored the collective efforts needed to address and mitigate the mental health challenges faced by the population.



Pictures of Mbah Nadine and her Empower Her team giving back to the community.

Expert Presentation



Neha Srinivas Bio

Neha Srinivas is a 4th-year graduate student in the Clinical Psychology Ph.D. program at Fairleigh Dickinson

University (FDU) in the USA. Originally from India, Neha is passionate about reducing stigma around mental health issues and preventing violence against women. She is an extern at the Center for Traumatic Stress, Resilience, and Recovery at Northwell Health in New York, and previously was a Clinical Psychology extern at the International Rescue Committee, conducting individual and group therapy for refugees from Afghanistan, Syria, and South America. Her other clinical experiences include providing individual therapy and psychological assessments to marginalized populations at FDU's Center for Psychological Services and as a School-Based Mental Health Clinician. Her clinical interest is in crisis and trauma work with adolescents and young adults. Her research interests are within the field of global mental health and specifically focus on cultural variations in psychopathology and how stigma affects the risk, prevention, and intervention of psychological disorders. Her dissertation focuses on investigating cultural variations in risk factors for suicide ideation by individual-level cultural orientation.

Exert Presentation: Neha Srinivas

Ms. Srinivas commenced her presentation by extending gratitude to the audience, emphasizing the timeliness and critical nature of discussing cross-cultural mental health interventions in our interconnected world.

In a globalized society, Ms. Srinivas acknowledged the enriching aspect of cultural diversity and underscores its significant influence on mental health. She pointed to psychological research revealing the ways culture affects mental health, encompassing subjective experiences, expression of symptoms, diagnosis, treatment, and outcomes.

Researchers attribute cross-cultural variations to socio-economic factors, lifestyle, and the cultural orientation of collectivism or individualism. Ms. Srinivas explained how collectivist cultures prioritize group benefits, while individualist cultures focus on individual success and competitiveness.

Her discussion expanded to the influence of culture on stigma surrounding mental health, highlighting how stigma can act as a barrier to seeking mental health services, affecting pathways to care and intervention timing.

The one-size-fits-all approach is ineffective, she said, instead advocating for cross-cultural mental health interventions to address disparities. Cultural competence becomes pivotal, involving the integration of cultural factors into every step of the mental health process.

Language emerges as a crucial aspect, as Ms. Srinivas underscored the significance of effective communication. Overcoming language barriers fosters understanding, trust, and connection between individuals and mental health professionals.

Further, Ms. Srinivas posited that cross-cultural interventions contribute to destigmatizing mental health within diverse communities. Embracing cultural diversity in approach sends a powerful message that mental health is a universal concern.

Community engagement is crucial in these interventions, she said, emphasizing the importance of actively involving leaders and figures within specific cultural groups. This collaboration facilitates outreach and ensures interventions align with the community's needs and values.

In conclusion, Ms. Srinivas emphasized the paramount importance of cross-cultural mental health interventions, working towards an inclusive society that requires accessible, culturally competent mental health services that respect diversity. Through these efforts, she envisions a responsive mental health landscape that caters to the needs of all individuals.

Part III: Cultural Interlude

Russell Daisy Bio



Russell Daisey is an internationally recognized singer and songwriter who has performed for U.S. and African Presidents, Prime Ministers and First Ladies as well as Reverend Desmond Tutu and HH the Dalai Lama. Also, he co-writes global anthems with Dr. Judy Kuriansky; for example, their 911 Anthem "Towers of Light" has been performed worldwide and their Happiness Anthem, "Happy People Happy Planet" was used to name the 2022 World Children's Day/Be The Change celebration in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. "We are One" is the theme for the UN World Interfaith Harmony Week events "Every Woman, Every Child" is aligned with the UNICEF project of the same name, and "Honor Our

Girls” supports the First Lady of Sierra Leone Fatima Maada Bio’s project to protect girls from abuse, violence and early marriage.

Mr. Daisey presented the “Honour Our Girls” anthem and discussed its significance as an example of honoring cultural heritage and respect for girls but all diversity and humanity.

[Russell Daisey - Honor our Girls \(Music Video\) - YouTube](#)

Part IV: Moderated Panel Session: Student panelists

Panelists Bios



Theo Ntwari from the Eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), is a graduate student in the International Education Development program at Teachers College, Columbia University. Specializing in Education in Emergencies and Refugee Resettlement, Theodore is actively engaged in substantial work related to these areas in New York. His educational pursuits revolve around understanding how education systems can effectively foster both academic and personal development in a dynamic and ever-evolving world. He is also a passionate advocate for youth mental health and environmental well-being, actively participating in projects partnering with United Nations Missions based in New York. He is a Youth Representative of the International Association of Applied Psychology (IAAP) accredited by ECOSOC at the United Nations, and a member of Dr. Kuriansky GAAP (Global Advocacy and Applied Psychology) Lab, working on projects about education in Djibouti and migration, youth and climate change in Tuvalu.



Niklas Kei Nyblom is a Clinical Psychology graduate student at Columbia University, Teachers College. Born in Tokyo, Japan, Nyblom was raised in Stockholm, Sweden, in a multicultural household including his Swedish father and Japanese mother. Enrolled in the class “Psychology at the United Nations” where he is working on a project about interventions worldwide that support resilience and well-being in youth worldwide, Niklas also passionately attends events at the United Nations and advocates for human rights. His motivation behind his educational pursuits surround the factors in creating and developing sustainable well-being on a global level. His research interests are in the fields of global mental health and positive psychology with a focus on factors that enable people to flourish.



Josefina Streeter is a Chilean psychologist and current student in the Teachers College masters degree program in Clinical Psychology, with a concentration in Spirituality, Mind, and Body. Previously, Josefina worked in three Chilean government entities that address gender and equity issues. She has created and implemented nationwide programs, working with migrant, incarcerated populations and women victims of violence. She also has worked as

a consultant for an NGO that works promoting sexual and reproductive health in marginalized communities, and currently is participating in various research projects about mental health and social support. Additionally, she spent a year and a half in Kenya, working with teenage girls who are survivors of abuse. Her work in Chile and Kenya focuses on vulnerable populations, sexual health, gender violence, trauma, crisis, women empowerment and mental health issues. In alignment with these interests and experience, in Dr. Kuriansky's class and the GAAP Lab, she is working on developing a convention to access to justice for survivors of sexual violence, a project promoted by the First Lady of Sierra Leone and supporting the UN General Assembly resolution and International Day on that topic.



Himaja Boinapalli is a 2nd-year Masters' degree student in the Counseling Psychology program at Teachers College, Columbia University. In Dr. In Kuriansky's class she is evaluating resilience workshops in international youth and Indian students at the World Children's Day conference in Malaysia, as part of the GAAP Lab. She is also collaborating with Josefina Streeter on developing a convention to access to justice for survivors of sexual violence, a project promoted by the First Lady of Sierra Leone and supporting the UN General Assembly resolution and International Day on that topic. With eight years of experience in the field, she is dedicated to advancing mental health equity through practice, advocacy, policy, and research. Himaja is a NY-state licensed psychotherapist in training who specializes in trauma-informed counseling, particularly in relationships, abuse, and intergenerational trauma. In her previous role as a mental health policy intern at the NYC Mayor's Office, Himaja has spearheaded workforce initiatives, conducted research on youth mental health, and organized campaigns to reduce stigma. Himaja has presented her research internationally and was engaged

in leadership experiences with Student Government of Teachers College and global organizations like AIESEC. Her blog promotes intersectional mental health awareness and alleviates stigma.

Panel Questions and Answers

Q1: What does wellbeing look like in your country?

Niklas Nyblom shared insights into Japan's collective community-oriented approach to wellbeing, emphasizing the cultural significance of communal dining. In contrast, Sweden, with its individualistic culture, prioritizes personal goals over collective well-being.

Josefina highlighted the unique demographic landscape of Chile, being the world's longest country. In Chile and many Latin countries, community plays a pivotal role in defining well-being, with food being a significant cultural component.

Himaja Boinapalli provided perspective from India, the world's most populated country, where various cultural practices shape well-being. She underscored the influence of traditional, social, and gender norms on the Indian perception of well-being. In India, activities like food, cricket, spirituality, yoga, cinema, and community engagement take center stage.

Theo Ntwari shed light on the challenges faced in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), including a decade-long civil war and generational poverty impacting youth mental health. Describing the DRC as a collectivist culture, Theo emphasized the shared experience of pain and happiness within the community, such as collective mourning for a week in the event of a family death.

Q2: How can Western approaches to mental interventions be adapted to be culturally sensitive to suit your country?

Niklas emphasized the significance of learning about different cultures as a key approach to making mental health interventions more culturally sensitive.

Josefina drew attention to Chile's recent surge in immigration, doubling within the past two years, and the unpreparedness to address the resulting mental health concerns. She stressed the importance of culturally sensitive interventions, considering the accessibility of mental health services, with only 5 psychologists for every 100,000 people.

Himaja highlighted the prevalence of alternative forms of medicine and faith-based healing in India and South Asia. She pointed out the gap between the demand for mental health support and the number of professionals available. Recommending family and community-centered interventions, Himaja emphasized the need to tailor therapeutic approaches to the collectivist culture in India.

Theo shed light on the challenges in the DRC, including a large population, lack of infrastructural development, and diverse local languages. He stressed the importance of understanding the local context and engaging with traditional leaders to address mental health stigma. Theo advocated for using culturally appropriate language and strategies, considering the high levels of illiteracy among the indigenous population.

Q3: What actionable steps are you planning to implement in your home country in order to create mental health awareness?

Niklas highlighted the cultural nuances in Japan, where strength is highly valued over vulnerability. In this context, he emphasized the necessity of creating safe spaces, like the proposed "barber shop therapy," to encourage individuals to open up about their emotions. Barber shop therapy involves men visiting their regular barbers, who, in addition to providing grooming services, are trained mental health first-aid providers or therapists. In this unique setting, conversations are facilitated in a gentle and approachable manner, creating a safe space for men to express vulnerability and discuss mental health concerns. Additionally, he suggested that in Sweden, where conversations around mental health are more accepted, increasing resources, including the "barber shop therapy" model and communal discussions over Fika (the "coffee break" common in Sweden) could effectively address mental health needs.

Josefina underscored the connection between gender-based violence and mental health outcomes. Stressing that 1 in 4 women is a victim of gender-based violence, she identified it as a significant risk factor for mental health disorders. In her proposed actions, Josefina called for increasing the mental health funding budget to 3%, alongside educational initiatives, safe spaces, and leveraging nature for healing, recognizing the urgency of addressing gender-based violence as a crucial element in mental health advocacy. Also, recognizing the high prevalence of mental health disorders among youth (estimated to be about 38%), she also advocated leveraging nature for healing.

Himaja, identifying as an advocate and leader, shared her multifaceted approach to mental health awareness. Through blogging and Instagram content, she engages in continuous advocacy, considering it an extension of her therapeutic work. Himaja stressed the importance of collaboration with various stakeholders, including NGOs, schools, universities, cultural and spiritual leaders, and public figures. On a societal level, she highlighted the need for policy changes and credited advocacy efforts in India for launching a digital mental health intervention program and a crisis hotline.

Theo discussed the importance of emotional vocabulary in Congo and other African countries, emphasizing daily emotional expressions within families. He advocated for focusing on the positive aspects of emotions before delving into disorders, especially in stigmatized societies. Recognizing Africa's latecomer status in mental health awareness, Theo viewed it as an opportunity to avoid mistakes. He suggested leveraging traditional storytelling, particularly during the evening when electricity is limited, to reach a majority of the population not engaged in formal education or jobs. Theo underscored the necessity for professionals to be embedded in communities rather than confined to offices.

Q3: Words of encouragements to people wanting to create mental health awareness

Theo shared words of encouragement, embracing the role of a "Wounded Healer." He emphasized the transformative power of personal struggles in becoming a source of healing for others.

Himaja offered words of hope and love, highlighting their significance in the journey of creating mental health awareness. She acknowledged the positive impact that these elements can have on individuals and communities.

Josefina's message focused on the importance of connecting and practicing kindness. She encouraged fostering meaningful connections and cultivating a culture of compassion to support mental health initiatives.

Niklas offered words of bravery and inspiration. Recognizing the courage it takes to address mental health, he underscored the potential for individuals to serve as beacons of inspiration for others.

Dr. Kuriansky emphasized the triad values of love, hope and connection. Her words highlighted strength that

comes from unity and the importance of a dedicated approach to mental health awareness.

Part V: Closing Statement

In closing, as moderator, I, Bems, invited everyone to carry these words with us as we embark on the journey of mental health advocacy. Each individual's contribution, no matter how big or small, plays a vital role in fostering understanding, support, and compassion for those navigating mental health challenges. Together, we can create a world where mental health is a shared priority, and where everyone feels seen, heard, and supported. Thank you for joining us in this important conversation.

[Link to Youtube video](#)

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Building Trust, Communication and Negotiating in the Current War Between Israel and Hamas

Lea Bochtler¹

Introduction

Hamas is a militant organization that has been ruling the Gaza strip since 2007 (National Counterterrorism Center, n.d.). It is identified by the US, UK, Australia, Canada, the EU, and Japan as a terrorist organization (Responsible Reporting, n.d.). On October 7, 2023, Hamas launched the deadliest attack on Israel in history, killing approximately 1,200 civilians and taking roughly 240 people as hostages including men, women, children, the elderly and Israeli soldiers (Bigg, 2023). Captors, gleeful in their brutal murders, made videos of their savage acts and gleefully promised to eradicate Israel and all Jews.

In response, Israeli military forces attacked Gaza, intending to eradicate Hamas to prevent any further attacks. Israel's military has said that it has killed thousands of Hamas fighters, though no exact figures are available, and as of December 7, 2023, reports by the Palestinian Authority claim that an estimated 15,000 civilians have been killed in Gaza and more than 1.5 million Gazans displaced (Sawafta, 2023; United Nations, 2023).

The situation has been called a humanitarian crisis, given the lack of food, medical and other supplies in Gaza. As a result, United Nations bodies have addressed resolutions in emergency sessions. The General Assembly adopted a strong (non-binding) resolution on December 12 calling for an immediate humanitarian ceasefire (UN General Assembly votes, 2023), consistent with the position of the UN Secretary-General (SG). In contrast, a Security Council (SC) resolution on December 21 stopped short of a ceasefire, instead calling for expanded humanitarian access, with a SG-appointed monitor, and creating conditions for ending hostilities. Both required compliance with international law, but neither condemned Hamas as an extremist group, which had blocked previous agreements.

Ending this war is at the forefront of UN priorities now, as it impedes the achievement of numerous Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the United Nations 2030 Agenda, specifically SDG 16 (peaceful societies), SDG 11 (safe sustainable cities), and SDG 6 (water and sanitation

for all) as well as SDG 11 (safe cities); SDG 1 (end poverty), SDG 2 (end hunger), SDG 3 (health and well-being), SDG 7 (access to energy), SDG 8 (sustainable economic growth), SDG 9 (resilient infrastructure, and SDG 13 (combat climate change).

According to the UN, sustainable development is difficult to achieve in the face of war (United Nations Chronicle, 2015). For example, war causes poverty by destroying people's homes and taking away their jobs, thus, causing food insecurity, reduces the availability of water, sanitation, energy, and destroys infrastructure. Also, war worsens climate change in three major ways: "militaries consume enormous amounts of fossil fuels, which contributes directly to global warming" (How War Impacts Climate Change, 2022); bombs and other weapons harm wildlife and biodiversity; and war pollutes water, soil and air, making areas unsafe for people to live.

After decades of military conflict between Israel and Palestine and countless innocent lives lost, a solution to stop fighting has yet to be found. "Death, injury, sexual violence, malnutrition, illness, and disability are some of the most threatening physical consequences of war, while post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression, and anxiety are some of the emotional effects" (Rathi, n.d.).

Thus, the purpose of this paper is to examine how to build trust and effectively communicate and negotiate to end the current military conflict between Israel and Palestine, especially the current war between Israel and Hamas. Many of these techniques are acknowledged in psychological practice, since dealing with any opposition, including terrorists, involves communication skills and taking into account psychological dynamics and emotions, including fears, anger, and need for control (Al-Bayati, 2017, p.213).

This paper is divided into two main parts. Part 1 focuses on how Israeli and Palestinian civilians can effectively communicate and build trust in order to foster peace between civilians. Part 2 covers how Israeli and Palestinian governing bodies can effectively communicate and build

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trust, especially considering that a major governing body of Palestine is Hamas, a terrorist group, and that the prevailing belief is that one does not negotiate with terrorists. Evidently, communicating and building trust with terrorists is not the same as with level-headed civilians. Thus, this paper will go beyond effective communication techniques between civilians by discussing terrorist/hostage negotiations.

It is emphasized that the author's personal views are noted in the below descriptions, where I outline accepted processes for peace, and propose how they might be applied to the current Israel-Hamas conflict.

Background

Before elaborating specific communication techniques used in the field of conflict resolution and psychology, it is important to note that the Israel-Palestine conflict has existed for decades, with the current war as a manifestation of years of tension. Israel was established as a country in 1948 to be a safe haven for Jewish people after more than six million Jews were killed by German Nazis in the Holocaust. "Immediately following the announcement of the independence of the state of Israel," the Arab-Israeli war of 1948 started (Office of The Historian, n.d.). After Israel winning that 1948 war, tensions between Palestinian territories of the West Bank and Gaza have flared. In 2006, Hamas ousted the Palestinian Authority from power, becoming the governing body in Gaza, issuing a stated goal to take back the land given to Israel in 1948, establish an Islamic Palestinian state, and wipe out Israel "from the river to the sea" (Kellman, 2023). This history is important in order to understand the outrage of both sides in the current war. On one hand, Israel is outraged by Hamas' brutal inhuman attack on their innocent civilians at a dance and others living at home, and subsequent hostage-taking, and on the other hand, Palestinians are outraged by the retaliatory bombing and killing of civilians by the Israeli military.

Communication and Building Trust Between Civilians

2.1 Nonviolent Communication

A known method in the field of conflict resolution to build trust between parties with opposing views is use Non-Violent Communication (NVC). NVC is a process involving four steps, shown in Fig.1: Observation, Feelings, Needs, and Request. Observation means objectively identifying the actions affecting a person. Feelings means expressing feelings related to the observed actions. Needs means communicating underlying values driving the stated feelings. Lastly, Request means communicating a request of others to meet the stated needs (Rosenberg, n.d.).

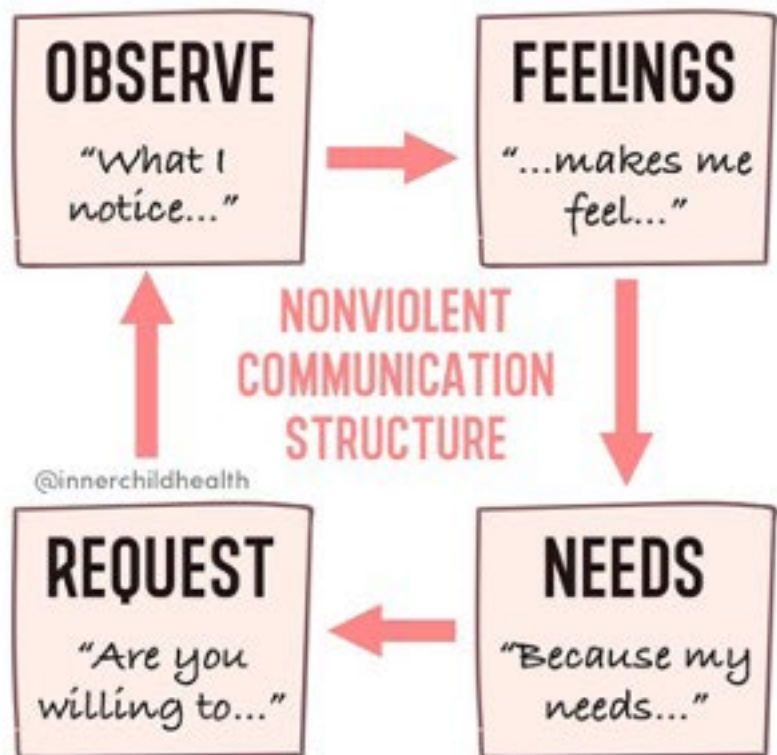


Figure 1: The Four-Step Process for Nonviolent Communication (2022)

In my view, in terms of applying this model to the current Israeli-Palestinian tensions as an outbreak of the war with Hamas, Israeli and Palestinian civilians/supporters can use NVC to increase compassion for each other. Since October 7, 2023, there have been numerous protests in many countries by both sides, with some pro-Palestinian groups turning violent, even deadly. For example, on November 7, 2023, a pro-Israel protester died after pro-Palestine

protesters struck him on the head with a megaphone (Jewish man, 2023). In another example, Gal Gadot, a globally renowned Israeli actress and model, faced severe criticism and backlash on social media for speaking at a screening of footage about the Hamas attack (filmed by Hamas terrorists by Go pro cameras mounted on their heads) and her public statements, including: "I stand with Israel, you should too," and "My desire is to promote Israel globally" (Gal Gadot, 2023).

A possible application, in my view, is to bring Israeli and Palestinian civilians/supporters together and use the NVC to understand each other. In this hypothetical process: Israelis may start by saying that on October 7, 2023, Hamas killed 1,200 civilians and 240 captured hostages, which makes them feel angry, outraged, and resentful. They believe no innocent lives should be barbarically massacred like this, thus, request that all hostages be released and that Hamas surrender and stop killing Israelis forever. For their part, Palestinians may start by saying that since October 7, 2023, Israeli forces have killed more than 15,000 innocent Palestinians, the majority of whom are women and children (Sawafta, 2023), leaving them heartbroken, desperate for survival, and angry, believing that innocent lives should not come at the cost of trying to kill Hamas fighters. Thus, they request a ceasefire in Gaza, and that the Israel-Palestine conflict be dealt with without military aggression.

Currently, many people are polarized as either pro-Palestine or pro-Israel, with protests making it easy for people to take one side or the other. In addition, the severity of emotion associated with the violence have shut down people's empathy and willingness to "hear" or understand the opposing side. This means, many people are not listening to each other and hold firm opinions about their own position, thinking they are right and the opposing side is wrong. Thus, NVC can help people see and understand others as humans, rather than as enemies.

The following is an example of how NVC was used by the founder of the Center for Nonviolent Communication, Marshall Rosenberg:

Rosenberg recalls teaching NVC to 170 Palestinian Muslim men at a mosque in a refugee camp in Bethlehem (Rosenberg, n.d.). Their attitudes towards Americans were unfavorable at the time; thus, as soon as a Palestinian man realized that Rosenberg was from the United States, he exclaimed "Murderer!". Immediately, dozens others joined, and started yelling "Assassin!," "Child-killer!" and other accusations. Fortunately, Rosenberg, being an expert on

non-violent communication, knew how to deal with this calmly and effectively. He focused his attention on what the angry Palestinians were feeling and needing. Knowing that certain weapons Israel had fired at the Palestinians had "Made in U.S.A." written on them, Rosenberg asked: "Are you angry because you would like my government to use its resources differently?" An angry Palestinian answered, "Damn right I'm angry! You think we need tear gas? We need sewers, not your tear gas! We need housing! We need to have our own country!". Rosenberg acknowledged what this man said by repeating parts back to him (using the reflective listening technique), in the next question. "So, you're furious and would appreciate some support in improving your living conditions and gaining political independence?" The angry Palestinian replied, "Do you know what it's like to live here for twenty-seven years the way I have with my family – children and all? Have you got the faintest idea what that's been like for us?"

The conversation continued for 20 minutes, with Rosenberg asking questions, listening, and acknowledging the pain Palestinians had been through. He barely spoke, did not agree or disagree, and received the Palestinian's words "not as attacks, but as gifts from a fellow human willing to share his soul and deep vulnerabilities with him" (Rosenberg, n.d.). Once the Palestinian men felt understood, their stigmatization of Rosenberg faded, and they listened to Rosenberg for the remainder of his talk. An hour later, a Palestinian man who initially accused Rosenberg of being a murderer invited Rosenberg to his home for dinner.

Rosenberg says this is an excellent example of how people can transform from feeling like enemies who refuse to listen to the other's point of view, to feeling more like "friends" who respect each other, in a short amount of time.

Grassroots Peacebuilding

Another method to build trust between civilians of opposing sides is to use grassroots peacebuilding – whereby people come together to do activities which foster understanding, common ground, and peace. An extensive description of these grassroots activities are chronicled in the book, "Beyond Bullets and Bombs: Grassroots peacebuilding between Israelis and Palestinians" (Kuriansky, 2007), including eating together, trekking, playing sports, learning who to use a computer. This technique builds on the above process whereby each side learns they have common interests and challenges in the same areas, e.g., about women and children (Kuriansky, 2006).

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A good example of such a grassroots peacebuilding organization is “Seeds of Peace” founded in 1993 that has brought together dozens of Palestinians, Israelis, and Egyptians (Middle East Programs, n.d.). At summer camps, youth of different racial, religious, political, and socioeconomic backgrounds participate in activities that foster “community-building, dialogue, leadership development, and action-taking through fun activities” (Middle East Programs, n.d.). Currently, Seeds of Peace works primarily with youth from Israel, Palestine, Egypt and Jordan, helping them develop into leaders of peace in the Middle East. While visiting the borders that separate Israel and Palestine, their experience of the participants together has broken down symbolic walls, to see each other as “friends”. Many participants describe an awakening experience, feeling more empathetic towards neighboring countries. It is noted, though, that sadly, when they return to hateful home environments, gains can be lost.

Projects like this aim to restore peace at a local, person-to-person level.

In my view, Israelis and Palestinians can join these organizations to become better informed about the “other” and become changemakers at their local or national level, in what’s called “bottom up.” Some participants working in government to enact change from the top level of leadership, called “top down.”

Collating these grassroots peacebuilding organizations is an umbrella organization called the Alliance for Middle East Peace (ALLMEP), which aims to “secure and scale funding to radically expand trust-building interactions between Israelis and Palestinians” (ALLMEP Member Services Guide, n.d.). ALLMEP is the “largest and fastest-growing network of peacebuilding organizations in the Middle East” with 150 members (ALLMEP Member Services Guide, n.d.). They provide two main forms of support to member organizations: training/advising and exposure/funding. Training and advising can include capacity building, crisis management. Since 2008, ALLMEP has received approximately US\$380 million, which it allocates to member organizations based on their needs. An international fund for Israeli and Palestinian peace was set up, due to advocacy of Congresswoman Nita Lowey, allowing this umbrella organization to have far greater resources than individual organizations which depend on individual/small donations. Organizations who need training, advice, exposure, or funding can join ALLMEP to get support they need (ALLMEP Member Services Guide, n.d.).

Communication and Building Trust by Governing Bodies in the Face of Terrorism

While the above interventions address how to foster effective communication and peace between civilians at the local level, another level is governing bodies. Ultimately, governments/leaders who control key resources in a society (e.g., water, food, electricity, military) decide the fate of civilians. No matter how effective local peace operations are, if governments keep using military violence, civilians will suffer (Thomsen, 2023).

Before talking about negotiation techniques (including with terrorists), some background information must be provided about Hamas and the unique challenges of negotiating with a terrorist governing body. Granted, many experts maintain never negotiating with terrorists. Since 1937 -- even before the formation of Israel as a country -- a two-state solution was proposed whereby Israel and Palestine would be independent states with independent territories. However, while some consider this an ideal solution, others in Israel and Palestine have opposed this. For example, when the peace process peaked in 1993, Palestinian terrorists attacked Israel and Israel expanded settlement in the West Bank (Palestinian territory), which decimated trust between the two. Also, Palestinian extremists like Hamas have always rejected the two-state solution because they believe Palestine should take over Israel completely; as they do not recognize Israel’s right to exist as a country. Thus, any time a two-state solution is proposed, Hamas tries to derail any progress, typically via terrorist attacks on Israel. Attacks then lead to lower willingness to cooperate by Israel, and retaliation, creating an unending cycle of conflict.

Thus, in my view, any non-violent solution to the Israel-Palestine conflict would require Hamas and any other governing body in Palestine to recognize Israel’s right to exist, and establish at least a baseline level of trust between Israel and Palestine (Thomsen, 2023).

FBI hostage negotiators have attempted to aid in negotiating with terrorists. As former FBI special agent Jack Cloonan says, the first rule is to keep communication with terrorists alive because terrorists can be negotiated with, pointing to cases of successful negotiations which led to the release of hostages or other resolutions (Negotiating With Terrorists, 2014).

Further, renowned former international hostage negotiator Chris Voss offers considerable insight into high-stake negotiations, recorded in his book, *Never Split The Difference* (Voss & Raz, 2018).

In my view, many of the strategies Voss shares, which I outline below, can be used in negotiations between Israel and Hamas to resolve the current conflict.

Negotiation Techniques of Chris Voss

The first rule of Chris Voss is that negotiation begins with listening, because every human wants to be understood and accepted. By listening, we demonstrate empathy and a desire to understand the other party (Voss & Raz, 2016). Listening, of course, is a foundational technique in psychological counseling, as are many of the other techniques he outlines.

Thus, applying listening to the Middle East current war, if Israel and Palestine want a peaceful solution to the conflict, they need to listen to each other with a genuine desire to understand each other's beliefs.

Voss encourages negotiators to "be a mirror" (Voss & Raz, 2016). This technique is as simple as repeating the last few words, or the critical one to three words, someone just said. Mirroring works well because it creates a feeling of familiarity and similarity, and being "heard" by the other, which facilitates understanding and bonding. Also, it encourages the other party to elaborate on what they just said, which can reveal hidden beliefs, intentions, or strategies.

Applying this technique hypothetically to the current Israel-Hamas conflict, if Hamas uses this mirroring technique, they can find that Israel will be more inclined to listen to them as well.

Further, Voss recommends three voice tones in negotiations (Voss & Raz, 2016). The first is called the "The late-night FM DJ voice", which entails lowering the voice, keeping it calm and slow at points, as a radio disc jockey would do, to get attention and also to "create an aura of authority and trustworthiness without triggering defensiveness." The second tone of voice is the positive/playful voice, which Voss says should be the default voice. As hard as it may be to speak to a terrorist in a positive/playful voice, Voss claims that it is effective because when one party is positive, it makes it easier for the other party to be positive, as well as to both to think faster, collaborate, and problem-solve. Regardless of the specifics, the tone of voice should always convey, "I'm okay, you're okay, let's figure things out."

As a negotiation progresses, assessing that our understanding of the other person is accurate is accomplished by using a technique called "labeling". Typically, labeling

is used to highlight and clarify an emotion, as emotions drive beliefs and behaviors. According to Voss and his colleagues, the easiest way to use labeling is to begin with a phrase like: "It seems like...", "It sounds like..." or "It looks like" (Voss & Raz, 2016). Since the words "seem", "sound", and "look" are not definite, the other person will typically not get defensive. Rather, they will agree or disagree and provide more context. Even if they disagree with the label, says Voss, "We can always take a step back and say, 'Sorry, I didn't say that was the case, I just said it seems like that.'"

Given that the purpose of labeling is to see if the other person agrees or disagrees, it is crucial to be silent after saying the label, so the other person naturally continues the conversation. Labeling is also helpful in de-escalating angry confrontations, because in Voss' view, "it makes the person acknowledge their feelings rather than continue to act out."

According to Voss, structure -- referring to what we talk about first, next, last -- is also imperative for a successful negotiation. He claims that the reasons an opposition will not make an agreement are often more powerful than why they will. Thus, he advises, focus on clearing barriers first, so the opposition has nothing obstructing them from an agreement. Then, focus on the details of the agreement (Voss & Raz, 2016).

In the case of Israel and Palestine, following my hypothetical view, this means first getting Hamas to acknowledge Israel's right to exist and getting Israel to trust that Hamas can keep a promise, even though this is very unlikely given Hamas' affirmation that they will not stop until Israel as a country, and all Jews, are eradicated. After that, the parties can broach agreeing on terms and specifics of a solution.

One way Israel can encourage Hamas to acknowledge its right to exist is by saying the worst things Hamas could say about Israel before Hamas has a chance to say it. This is another Voss technique. These "worst accusations often sound exaggerated when said aloud, [thus], speaking them will encourage the other [side] to claim that quite the opposite is true." This is related to a psychological technique called "anticipating the resistance."

Another of Voss's recommendations is using the power of "No." Voss argues that "no's" are the start of a negotiation, not the end. "No" is easier for humans to say than "Yes" because "Yes" means commitment and possible threat; thus, people's default is often "No" at the start of a negotiation. Also, pushing hard for a "yes" typically does not lead to a deal, and instead, angers the other side or creates more resistance. But, "No" gets people closer to a deal as it "clarifies

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what [both parties] really want by eliminating what [they] don't want" (Voss & Raz, 2016).

"No" can mean many things, including: "I am not ready to agree yet," "You are making me feel uncomfortable," "I do not understand," "I want to talk it over with someone else," etc. Thus, it is important to understand why someone says "No." Voss calls these "solution-based" questions, which can sound like: "What about this doesn't work for you?" "What would you need to make it work?" and "It seems like there's something here that bothers you."

According to Voss, it is also important to be able to tell between these three types of "Yes": Counterfeit, Confirmation, and Commitment (Voss & Raz, 2016).

A counterfeit "yes" is the lowest level of commitment, because it does not actually mean "yes." Instead, someone simply says "yes" because it is an easier escape route or in order to continue the conversation to "get more information/some other kind of edge." This "yes" can be dangerous if one side trusts it, but then gets stabbed in the back by the side who deceptively said "yes." Next, a confirmation "yes" is usually innocent (not deceptive) but is usually a reflexive response/simple affirmation which does not promise anything. Lastly, a commitment "yes" is what Israel and Palestine need (Sawafta, 2023). This could involve signing an agreement on paper, which represents something official which cannot be breached and if breached, should have serious consequences for the side who breaches it.

"That's right" is another powerful response that shows mutual understanding (Voss & Raz, 2016). One of the most effective ways to get the other party to say "that's right" is to summarize what they said. A good summary includes a label (according to the aforementioned technique) and paraphrasing what the other party said. As Voss says, "Identify, rearticulate, and emotionally affirm the world according to the other person."

Voss claims that another powerful word in negotiations is "fair" (Voss & Raz, 2016). Despite negotiating with terrorists they may hate, Israeli governing bodies must maintain a reputation of fairness in order to make a deal. To get leverage in a negotiation, the other party (e.g. Hamas) must feel that they have something to lose if the deal fails.

The following six techniques, Voss proposes, bend the opposing side's reality in monetary negotiations:

1) Anchor emotions. Acknowledge the other person's fears. "By anchoring their emotions in preparation for a loss, you inflame the other side's loss aversion so that they'll jump at the chance to avoid it" (Voss & Raz, 2016).

2) "Let the other guy go first... most of the time," Voss says. Let the other person state their terms. For example, if you are bargaining for a sale, let the other person give their price first, because the first price given is the anchor which sets up the rest of the negotiation. The side who states price first risks overpaying. In terms of the Middle East war, there are still more than 100 Israeli hostages in Hamas' hands, and money is often one of the things terrorists demand to free hostages.

3) Establish a range in favor of the negotiator. "When [asked to name] your terms or price, counter by recalling a similar deal which establishes your 'ballpark,' albeit the best ballpark you wish to be in." Instead of saying "I'm willing to pay maximum X amount," say, "In all previous negotiations, a deal was struck between \$X-Y amount." This gets the point across without making the other party defensive and can get them to consider possible solutions they had not considered previously.

4) Pivot to non-monetary terms. When two parties find it difficult to agree purely on a price, add non-monetary benefits for the other party. It is the cherry on top that pushes a deal through the door. Hypothetically, if Israel and Hamas need to agree on more than price to release all hostages, Israel can offer something that is of little value to them, but great value to Hamas.

5) When talking numbers, start with odd numbers when stating a price because odd numbers are perceived as more calculated, thus less negotiable. Then, you can switch, for example, any number ending with zero seems easier to negotiate with than, say, \$987.

6) Surprise with a gift. Surprising the other party with a gift can help tilt a negotiation in one's favor, says Voss. In the hypothetical Middle East situation, to agree on a two-state solution between Israel and Hamas, Israel might consider giving Hamas a bit more land than desired/planned, or some other resolution.

Voss says another crucial step to a successful negotiation is guaranteeing execution. "Yes" is nothing without "How" it will be executed/accomplished (Voss & Raz, 2016). The trick to "how" is that it often represents a gentle "no" at first, because it hints that a solution may not clear/accepted yet. Thus, when one person explains their idea/proposal for a solution, they provide an opportunity to negotiate a better solution, closer to the one the other person may want. Moreover, once a solution is agreed on, asking "how" it will happen helps clarify how the solution will be implemented. Says Voss, the chance of a solution being executed is a lot higher when the other party articulates exactly what will be done, as opposed to just saying "yes."

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Furthermore, humans are much more likely to execute their own ideas. Thus, by getting the opposition to articulate the solution/implementation in their own words, they are more likely to follow through. The process Voss poses that, "There are two key questions you can ask to push your counterparts to think they are defining success their way: 'How will we know we're on track?' and 'How will we address things if we find we're off track?'" When they give an answer to these questions, the other person summarizes their answers until getting to the proposing person saying, 'That's right.' Then you'll know they've bought in.

Another important point Voss makes is that negotiators must be wary of using the word "try," because "try" often means "I plan to fail." If the other party says they will "try," negotiators must ask "how" questions until the implementation is clearly defined.

A final step in this process is to summarize. If the opposition replies, "that's right," to a suggested summary, it is a strong sign that a solution is reached or near.

Other rules, says Voss, contribute to successful negotiations. These include: The "7-38-55 Percent Rule", The "Rule of Three", and The "Pinocchio Effect".

The "7-38-55 Rule" says that only "7% of a message is based on words, while 38% comes from the tone of voice, and 55% from the speaker's body language and face (Voss & Raz, 2016). The premise of this rule is that it is much easier to lie through words than body language. When we lie, typically we blink faster, touch our face and neck more, physical responses that happen naturally and subconsciously, thus, are difficult to control.

In my hypothetical application to the Middle East war, Israeli and Palestinian governing bodies would have a significant advantage if negotiating in-person or on video calls, where they can observe the opposition's body language, instead of solely relying on words.

The "Rule of Three" constitutes getting the other party to agree on the "same thing three times in the same conversation" (Voss & Raz, 2016). Again, this is an indicator of one side's level of commitment. The first time the opposition agrees to something, that is 1/3. Then, if one person summarizes the agreement, and the other person answers "that's right," that is 2/3. Lastly, if one person asks a "how" or "what" question about implementation or what constitutes success, and the responses sound convincing, the solution has a high chance of being implemented/successful.

The "Pinocchio Effect" -- referring to the classic fictional character whose nose grew longer than he lied -- states that "on average, liars use more words than truth tellers and use far more third-person pronouns" (Voss & Raz, 2016). Thus, people often use pronouns like "he, she, it, they" instead of first-person pronouns (i.e., "I") when telling a lie. Also, liars tend to "speak in more complex sentences in an attempt to win over their suspicious counterparts."

In the Israeli and Palestinian context, negotiators need to pay attention to these verbal clues to tell if the opposition is lying or telling the truth.

Another major crucial point to a successful negotiation is understanding that no one is "crazy." Everyone's point of view needs to be respected.

Thus, in my hypothetical postulation, in the Middle East war context, no matter how crazy, irrational or inhumane Hamas may look from the outside, there are reasons they do the things they do. Harvard Business School Professors Deepak Malhotra and Max H. Bazerman identified three common reasons "negotiators mistakenly call their counterparts 'crazy'" (Malhotra & Bazerman, 2008). The first reason is that people are wrongly or not fully informed; thus, negotiators must identify information the opposition is missing and provide it to them. The second reason is that the opposition is constrained, meaning that in a negotiation where the opposition is acting "wobbly," it can be because there are things they cannot do but do not want to reveal. The third reason is that the opposition has other interests, so they may be complying with needs and desires the other does not understand.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this paper aimed to answer the question: How can Israelis and Palestinians use communication and negotiation to establish trust and find an alternative solution to the military conflict?

The paper started with basic techniques, including non-violent communication and grassroots peacebuilding. These are effective in promoting peace, but only if governing bodies with access to weapons and the military both cooperate.

The second part of the paper focused on communicating, building trust, and making agreements with terrorists, which requires the highest level of negotiation skills. Two core requirements were identified to end the current Middle East war. First, Palestinian terrorist governing bodies

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(Hamas) must recognize Israel's right to exist, and Israel must recognize Hamas' right to exist. Second, Hamas and Israeli governing bodies must establish at least a baseline level of trust, in order to negotiate and reach an agreement.

Despite Hamas shutting down the idea of any solution multiple times, Voss' negotiation techniques suggest that a solution is not impossible, though sceptics would say it is highly improbable because the terrorists are not operating rationally or with common values.

In a hypothetical situation expecting successful negotiation that I am entertaining here, I recommend that Israel's negotiators use techniques outlined by Voss about mirroring and labeling, in order to understand the assumptions, values and underlying beliefs behind why Hamas refuses to recognize Israel's right to exist. History cannot be overturned, so instead of arguing about land, the negotiation would have to focus on common ground. For example, negotiators would have to ask Hamas, "What are some fair solutions for both parties?" or "How can we both live in peace, respecting both countries' rights to exist?" The key would be to get Hamas thinking in terms of "we," instead of "us versus you."

In addition, each side would have to acknowledge the hardship of the other. Expressing genuine empathy and/or sympathy can be very effective in de-escalating an angry opposition. Once emotions are recognized, they can calm down, and negotiation can begin.

I also recommend that for any of the techniques to work that are outlined above, neither Israel or Hamas could enter negotiations with the intention of completely wiping out the other. Wiping out the opposition is a difficult strategy, given that both sides have thousands of fighters, dispersed in different areas; thus, wiping out either side is unlikely, and would cause unjust damage to civilians, animals, and the climate.

The week-long ceasefire that recently had occurred between Israel and Hamas showed some glimmer of hope for peace. After five weeks of negotiation, over 100 hostages were released by Hamas in exchange for over 200 Palestinian prisoners who had been held in Israeli prisons, hundreds of aid trucks entered Gaza, and Israeli suspended drone surveillance for six hours a day. Sadly, to date, Hamas has subsequently refused to continue any negotiation to release hostages and their supporters in Iran continue to pledge to eliminate Israel and all Jews.

Despite this, I still felt it was worthwhile to explore the above possibilities in this paper.

At the end of the day, no one is born to hate or to be a terrorist. People, and children, are taught to hate and brainwashed into engaging in terrorism. For any solution, in my view, terrorist negotiators need to use these techniques outlined above to help resolve the current conflict. Although it can be seen as idealistic in the current milieu, these approaches could bring about communication between the opposing sides, and unequivocally teach people, and especially children, not hate but acceptance and love.

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Reported by Lea Bochtler, pursuing a masters' degree in Adult Learning and Leadership at Columbia University, Teachers College, and a student in Professor Judy Kuriansky's class "Psychology and the United Nations" who is particularly interested in communication techniques for conflict resolution and leadership skills.

Women's Leadership and Psychological Perspectives in Middle East Peacebuilding

Yocheved Rabhan

Voices of diplomacy, civil society, youth and music, joined to host a parallel event on Women's Leadership Role and Psychosocial Perspective in Middle East Peacebuilding. The event was held virtually under the umbrella of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) NGO Forum that happens annually that aligns with the goals of CSW and of the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 5 of the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development which all governments of the United Nations agreed to achieve. The event, held on 25 March 2021, focused on three Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the Agenda: SDG16, calling for peace, justice and strong institutions; SDG 5, which calls for gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls; and target 3.4, "to promote mental health and wellbeing". This unique synthesis of the SDGs and the CSW goals allowed the event to inspire and touch many aspects of peacebuilding work in which women in the Middle East are involved.

The objectives of the event included to raise awareness of the importance of the inclusion of women in peacebuilding and to highlight the contributions of the science and practice of psychology and psychosocial components of peacebuilding in the Middle East region.

Specifically, the panel explored the psychosocial issues in peacebuilding addressed by Israeli and Palestinian women, focusing on women's unique transformational leadership style in people-to-people peacemaking and how collaboration between Middle East women contributes to ending regional intractable conflict and increases mutual understanding, security and prosperity.

Presenters included Ambassador Alicia Buenrostro Masieu, Deputy Permanent Representative of Mexico to the United Nations, H.E. Ambassador Katalin Bogyay, the 15th permanent Representative of Hungary to the United Nations, psychologist and professor Dr. Judy Kuriansky, grassroots peacebuilders Huda Abu Arqoub, Hela Lahar, Yael Krieger and Karen Doubilet, youth Malak Ayoub and Toot Imbar, and musicians Yael Deckelbaum and Russell Daisey. Two of Dr. Kuriansky's students from her class on "Psychology and the United Nations" at Columbia University Teachers College. Her students Yocheved Rabhan, who is Israeli, and Layla Al-Neyadi, a native Emirati from the United Arab



Emirates, jointly moderated the event, which in itself reflected the principle of the event, and the value, of women from different backgrounds working together.

"One cannot speak about peace without speaking about women," Ambassador Massieu said, expanding upon the essential nature of applying psychosocial skills to women and peacebuilding.

Similarly, Ambassador Bogyay suggested the importance of psychologists and diplomats "joining forces." H.E. Bogyay spoke about women's unique capacity to embody the role of peacebuilder and peacekeeper. She explained that despite women's involvement in peacebuilding, women are still under utilized and potential remains nascent. H.E. Bogyay believes that empowering women into peacebuilding and peacekeeping roles will be beneficial for all humankind long term. Bogyay ultimately suggests that "peace is action, not words; peace is a verb."



Dr. Judy Kuriansky followed Ambassador Bogay with inspiring words and stories relevant to peacebuilding in the Middle East region. Notably, Kuriansky celebrated women-led government and their agendas that, among many issues, focus on mental health and wellbeing. She highlighted the vital virtue of empathy displayed by women government leaders who champion mental health and wellbeing. In her role as a psychologist and first responder, she has led workshops in the region after terrorist attacks. Born out of an experience being asked to mediate a peace session between Palestinians and Israelis who were engaged in a heated debate, she successfully got them to participate in contributing to a book about "Terror in the Holy Land: Inside the Anguish of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict" chronicling issues of women and children shared by both sides. That led to an encyclopedic volume presenting impressive and courageous efforts of groups bringing both sides together in activities like cooking, camping, and computers-- many of which belong to an umbrella organization called ALLMEP (Alliance for Middle East Peace) -- called "Beyond Bullets and Bombs: Grassroots Peacebuilding between Israelis and Palestinians."

The work of these groups addresses the psychological theory, Kuriansky described, of Social Identity Theory and the Contact Hypothesis, which suggests that compassion, empathy, and connection for the other unfolds when interacting with the "other side", by learning their story and knowing the other as people with hearts, minds, and bodies. Ultimately, Kuriansky explained that psychological principles familiar to Rogerian therapy -- listening, empathy, compassion, respect for each other's narrative -- are essential for peace.

Professor Kuriansky's presentation provided the perfect platform for the other women panelists, both Palestinian and Israeli, to share their stories and work that allows for the Contact Theory to occur in real-time every day.

Among the speakers who spoke about their work in peace building was, Huda Abu Arqoub, Hela Lahar, Yael Krieger, and Keren Doubilet. These Palestinian and Israeli women shared their personal stories of growing up in the region and personal connection to the land. For each of the women, their personal and emotional connection to the land resulted in actions towards solving the conflict and connecting with the "other."

Hela Lahar from OneVoice Movement explained that their organization's mission is to "engage in constructive discourse and action around the Palestinian-Israeli conflict" as she is inspired by "being the granddaughter of three Holocaust survivors."

"Women have always been at the forefront of paying the price of any conflict," she said, and therefore are positioned to be leaders in ending the conflict.

Notably she was followed by Karen Doubilet describing her organization Peace Players where youth Israeli and Palestinian girls are brought together through sport. Doubilet explained that Peace Players "aim to bridge divides and change perspectives" and this is accomplished through "basketball to foster friendship between Palestinian and Israeli's but mostly its goal is to empower youth, girls and women."

Two of the team girls in Peace Players, Malak Ayoub and Toot Imbar, presented their stories. Their passion and excitement were palpable and felt by all. Toot, an Israeli youth, said that "living in a Jewish community, going to a Jewish nursery and kindergarten and then on to only Jewish school, all my life I was only around Jews. Until Peace Players, when that changed everything for me."

Toot spoke of the transformation that occurs when you know "the other side" when you become friends and forget animosity that others espouse.

Similarly, Malak, a Palestinian girl on the basketball team, explained that she similarly was isolated as Toot described, not knowing Israelis until joining Peace Players.

"I started playing basketball and had so much fun," she said. "Honestly, at the beginning I tried to ignore the Jews on my own team, I tried to not pass to them and just ignore them and no eye contact. That didn't work for long

because they were my teammates and we learned to become a team."

Malak and Toot are now great friends today thanks to Peace Players.

Another of Dr. Kuriansky's students, Dina AlGhabra from Kuwait, commented that the event shows the importance of an environment where everyone feels safe and can be heard" and where "women stand together."

The event was timely, with the passage by the United States Congress of the Nita M. Lowey Middle East Partnership for Peace Act and Fund to finance these types of people-to-people projects. Also at the time, several Arab states (UAE, Bahrain, Morocco and Sudan) had signed Abraham Accords normalizing relations with Israel.

Music brings the message of peace. Internationally-acclaimed musician Russell Daisey, a team member of representatives to the United Nations of the International Association of Applied Psychology (IAAP), performed the song that he and Dr. Kuriansky wrote called "One in Faith" that has become the IAAP anthem for many UN events. The refrain appropriately is: "Your faith, my faith, his faith, her faith, one in faith."

A talented musician Yael Deckelbaum, a platinum-award winning Israeli-Canadian singer/songwriter who founded the Israeli folk band Habanot Nechama performed her song Prayer of the Mothers. Deckelbaum, a member of the organization Women Wage Peace, said that her life's mission is "empowering and inspiring women through my music to bring that beautiful change from within and without." She wrote that song to support Palestinian and Israeli women who continue to pursue peace each and every day.

Halfway through her song, she asked everyone to sing the following lyrics with her, "From the north to the south, from the west to the east, hear the prayer of the mothers, bring us peace." This song is a song for all. Similar to the message of the event, the song is the beginning of a conversation to bring compassion, empathy and connection to "the other" through the openness and dedication of women.

The Rally for Peace: A celebration of women, peace and security

Rachel Pharn¹ and Judy Kuriansky²

Introduction

The pursuit of peace, a universal aspiration, is deeply intertwined with the principles of equality and human rights. This quest becomes even more significant when viewed through the lens of women's contributions and experiences. The dynamic role of women in fostering peace and security, forms an essential part of global conversations, especially in contexts where their voices have historically been marginalized. This paper delves into the essence of peace, its importance to and by women, the role of the NGO Committee on the Status of Women, New York (NGO CSW/NY) in this dialogue, and the landmark United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325.

Peace: A Universal Aspiration

Peace is more than the absence of war; it is a state of harmony that encompasses societal well-being, justice, and the protection of human rights (Galtung, 1969; Boulding, 1978; United Nations, 1948; Sen, 1999). It forms the foundation upon which societies can grow and prosper. The quest for peace is a universal aspiration that transcends boundaries, cultures, and epochs, shaping the destiny of nations and the global community at large.

The Role of Women in Peace

The involvement of women in peace processes is not just a matter of equality and rights; it is also about the unique

perspectives and skills they bring. Women's experiences and insights are crucial in creating comprehensive and lasting solutions to conflicts (Reardon, 1985; Anderlini, 2007; United Nations Security Council, 2000). Their active participation in peacebuilding contributes significantly to the resilience and stability of communities and nations.

NGO CSW/NY Forum

The NGO Committee on the Status of Women, New York, is a committee of the Conference of NGOs in consultative status with the UN (CoNGO) representing civil society, compared to the United Nations Committee on the Status of Women (CSW) which is the global intergovernmental body comprised of representatives of Member States (governments). Similar to CSW, the NGO committee plays a pivotal role in advocating for women's rights and gender equality at the United Nations. This forum provides a platform for NGOs to engage in dialogues, share best practices, and influence policies related to women's status worldwide (NGO Committee on the Status of Women, New York [NGO CSW/NY], n.d.). It is a crucial space for amplifying women's voices in international policymaking, particularly in the areas of peace and security. Every year in March, the Forum is held parallel with meetings of CSW, with about 800 events (now online as well as in-person) organized by and for civil society, NGOs and advocates, to profile grassroots efforts around the world about gender equality (NGO CSW New York, n.d.). The second author

1 Reported by Rachel Pharn, a graduate student in the program in the Spirituality Mind Body Institute in the Department of Psychology at Teachers College, Columbia University. Rachel is also privileged to be a student in Professor Judy Kuriansky's class on "Psychology and the United Nations," deepening her expertise in global peace and humanitarian efforts. As the visionary Founder and CEO of Seeds of Asha, established in 2022 and based in New York City, Rachel leads this emerging organization with a commitment to nurturing global citizens who are empowered, engaged, and committed to discovering and embodying their highest purpose. Her work at Seeds of Asha is dedicated to guiding individuals towards enhanced human flourishing. Rachel's innovative approach uniquely merges scientific knowledge and intuitive insight, which she uses to develop world-class leadership training and development programs. Her methodology, honed through extensive training with global masters in peace and purpose, seamlessly integrates scientific principles with a deep understanding of intuition, creating a distinctive blend of science, spirituality, and global community insights. Rachel's career spans diverse roles, from shaping peace and justice perspectives at the Department of Justice and FBI, to advancing strategy and leadership development in tech startups like Contractor HQ and EnerKnol. At Teachers College, Columbia University, and New York University, she has enhanced student experiences through student government, teaching assistant roles, and spiritual psychology research. Beyond these, Rachel offers spiritual life coaching for conscious leaders, including entrepreneurs and a UNESCO Chair member in human rights, through her collaboration with Mindvalley and the Dharma Coaching Institute. This unique blend of science and ancient wisdom underscores her commitment to fostering growth and empowerment in various domains.

2 Dr. Judy Kuriansky, an avid advocate of the rights of women and girls, and Sustainable Development Goal 5 of the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and a long-time member of CSW NGO/NY as well as an organizer, moderator and speaker at innumerable of their annual Forum events. A Professor of Psychology and Education, Columbia University Teachers College, teaching the unique course on "Psychology and the United Nations," she is also a representative of the International Association of Applied Psychology in consultative status with UN ECOSOC (for which she also serves on their working group on Terrorism and Peacebuilding), and Advisor for the Mission of the Republic of Sierra Leone to the United Nations whose term on the Security Council starts in 2024. She is also Policy Advisor to HE Sidiq Wai, Ambassador of the Embassy of the Republic of Sierra Leone in Washington, DC. She co-developed a Girls Empowerment Camp in Africa, supports the #HandsOffOurGirls initiative of the First Lady of Sierra Leone Fatima Maada Bio, co-founded the Stand Up for Peace Band, conducts innumerable workshops and trainings after disasters and during peacetime, on resilience, peacebuilding and conflict resolution, and co-edited a book on "Women Around the World."

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of this paper has participated in innumerable events for the NGO CSW/NY Forum over years which have been organized by her students (Kuriansky et al., 2020; Kuriansky, 2022a, 2022b, 2022c) and advocated extensively about issues related to women and to peace at the United Nations (Kuriansky, 2019a, 2019b).

United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325

Security Council Resolution 1325 – referred to commonly as simply “1325” -- adopted by the United Nations Security Council in October 2000, marked a turning point in recognizing the importance of women in peace and security. It calls for increased participation of women at all levels of decision-making in national, regional, and international institutions (United Nations Security Council, 2000). The Resolution addresses the need for protection of women and girls during conflicts and emphasizes the role of women in conflict prevention, resolution, and peacebuilding. It stands as a testament to the growing acknowledgment of the integral role women play in the pursuit of global peace and security (Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs, 2023).

The Rally for Peace

In a powerful testament to unity and advocacy within the global peace movement, the NGO CSW/NY orchestrated a dynamic assembly at the Rally for Peace on Wednesday, 25 October 2023, beginning with a march starting from the Church Center for the United Nations to Dag Hammarskjöld Plaza, a public park nearby UN headquarters in New York City, named after a former UN Secretary-General. The event was intended to celebrate 1325 and the Global Women Peace and Security Agenda, and to mobilize more action around women’s role in peace.



Flyer of the Rally for Peace (source: NGO CSW/NY)

The gathering, which lasted for an hour, drew a crowd of over 70 individuals committed to striking a harmonious call for peace and celebrating the anniversary of the adoption of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace, and Security. Speakers from various parts of the world took to the podium at the Plaza to highlight issues related to women’s role in peace and security.

Their powerful messages were punctuated by the resounding chants of “Give peace a chance,” emphasizing the collective desire for a more peaceful world where women’s contributions to decision-making are recognized and amplified.



Participants at the Rally for Peace in New York City (source: Rachel Pharn)

The rally was intended to:

- Demonstrate the power of women in the peace movement
- Mobilize participation from a mosaic of advocates representing diverse organizations, united in their call for peace and gender equality.
- Inspire a holistic focus on collective advocacy for peace
- Encourage redirection from militarization to arenas promoting gender equality and peace.
- Dedicated to empowering women through service and advocacy.

The rally marked a milestone in promoting the Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) agenda, to commemorate the 23rd anniversary of the Security Council Resolution 1325 which addresses the deleterious impact of war on women and reaffirms the role of women in the prevention and resolution of conflicts, negotiations, peacebuilding, peacekeeping, humanitarian response and post-conflict reconstruction.

Like its equivalent on the governmental level (CSW), the NGO CSW/NY champions women's rights and gender equality, bringing together voices to echo powerful messages, insights, and calls for practical steps towards global peace and gender equality.

The event started with a gathering at the Church Center for the UN, located on 44th Street and First Avenue, and a march three blocks north to Dag Hammarskjöld Plaza. The

mass gathering in the park emphasized solidarity, with speakers taking the microphone for short interventions, statements, expressions, and acknowledgments of global crises, reinforcing the urgency and relevance of the rally's objectives and calls for action.

Prominent figures from various organizations, clearly sharing a common aspiration for global peace and enhancement of women's rights, highlighted the importance of actions taken towards promoting peace and justice in navigating the world towards a peaceful future.

Background about Dag Hammarskjöld

Dag Hjalmar Agne Carl Hammarskjöld was a Swedish economist and diplomat who served as the second Secretary-General of the UN from April 1953 until his death in a plane crash in September 1961 while on his way to negotiate a ceasefire in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. It is significant that a peace rally was held in this place under his name, as Hammarskjöld was known for his peacebuilding efforts and diffusing conflict to resolve global crises. For example, he presided over the creation of the first UN peacekeeping forces in Egypt and the Congo and personally intervened to defuse or resolve diplomatic crises. He was the driving force behind building the meditation room, located in the lobby area near the main entrance of the UN headquarters, offering a place for people of all faiths and backgrounds to reflect in silence. He is the only person to be awarded the Nobel Peace Prize posthumously, in 2001, which he shared with another former UN Secretary-General, Kofi Annan.

Participants at the Rally

Esteemed participants from the UN community, NGOs, and civil society united at the rally, each co-sponsor bringing a unique focus to the forefront of peace advocacy. Each co-sponsor's commitment aligns with the United Nations SDGs, especially Goals 5 and 16, to respectively advance gender equality and build peaceful, just, and inclusive societies.

Speakers represented the following organizations, that play a major role at the United Nations - and in the world -- in peacebuilding:

The NGO Committee on Disarmament, Peace and Security concentrates on reducing global armaments and fostering security.

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The NGO Committee on Financing for Development tackles economic aspects of global development.

Act Church of Sweden is known for its humanitarian and advocacy work rooted in faith-based principles.

The NGO Committee on Education, Learning, and Literacy champions educational initiatives and lifelong learning.

The Women's Refugee Commission works tirelessly to improve the lives and protect the rights of women, children, and youth displaced by conflict and crisis.

The NGO Committee on Sustainable Development NY promotes sustainable development practices to implement the SDGs.

WILPF, the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom is a long-standing movement dedicated to peacebuilding and gender equality.

The NGO Committee on Migration addresses issues related to global migration and the well-being of migrants.

CoNGO, the Conference of NGOs in Consultative Relationship with the United Nations, facilitates NGO participation in UN decision-making and programs.

The NGO Committee on Mental Health advocates for the integration of mental health policies into broader health and social welfare policies.



A sign handed out by NGO CSW/NY, with the message, "Joyful Disruption" intended for peaceful yet powerful advocacy (source: Rachel Pham)

Speakers at the rally

The rally was led by the two co-chairs of the NGO CSW/NY, Ivy Koek, Co-Chair of Soka Gakkai International, a leader in a global Buddhist network promoting peace, culture, and education, and Pamela Morgan, co-Chair of Zonta International, an organization dedicated to empowering women through service and advocacy.

At the microphone, Koek shared the story behind the inception of the gathering, connecting it to the goals of the Commission on the Status of Women and the Security Council debate on Women, Peace, and Security. She explained the intent to bring these themes into the broader discussion during the Security Council's lunch break that day, fostering unity and continuity between significant UN dialogues. Koek credited the original concept of the Rally to a discussion with peace activist Sylvie Jacqueline Ndongmo who founded the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF) Cameroon and was elected as the organization's President, who would soon speak.

"We really do want to thank Silvia for this inspiration," Koek affirmed, "and we hope that this will continue, making it bigger and better every year."

Co-chair Morgan echoed her agreement mentioning that while there would be a few speakers, "It's going to be really about spirit. And about us coming together with joy and singing and chanting."

Next to take the microphone was Ndongmo, President of WILPF, an NGO with offices in Geneva and New York, founded on feminist ideals of equality, freedom, and non-violence, whose mission is to end war, ensure women's representation at all levels of the peacebuilding process, and defend women's human rights.

"We are here to raise awareness on the importance of this resolution on the global peace agenda," she said. "No matter how small it is, it is truly valuable."

Her call to action urged states and political leaders to prioritize peace and gender equality in their agendas, and to "move the money from war to peace."

Reverend Dr. Liberato ("Levi") Bautista was next to speak.

Levi, as he is fondly called, is President of Congo, the Congress of NGOS with consultative Status at the UN – a post to which he has unprecedentedly been appointed for three terms, and the Main Representative of Church and

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Society of the United Methodist Church with ECOSOC consultative status.

"Every act of peace in a time of war is an expression of political courage...What we do for peace and for justice are not only about the healing of warring nations but the healing of the body politic," he said.

Emphasizing the necessity of intertwining peace with justice and human dignity, he called for a shared commitment to fostering an environment where peace and justice thrive alongside respect for human dignity and rights.



A selfie capturing solidarity amongst rally members (source: Rachel Pharn)

Following Levi, Anita Thomas, the chair of the NGO Committee on Financing for Development, stressed the vital role of collective action in driving change. Her call for collaboration beyond traditional boundaries serves as a rallying cry for those committed to advocacy within the UN framework. She shed light on the coalition's endeavors, particularly in advocating for the ratification of ILO Convention 190, aimed at eliminating workplace violence and harassment.

"It is imperative that we understand the issues that bind our advocacy efforts," she remarked, "as we strive for economic justice, climate justice, and the peace and betterment of humanity across all sectors."

The next speaker, Lisa Burton, representing Zonta International – an organization committed to empowering women worldwide through service and advocacy – issued a stirring call to action. She advocated for transformative shifts in societal structures to fully empower women. Her statement encapsulated the sentiment of the day, declaring:

"The only way women can succeed in our world is by a radical change in the way things are done, because we need peace in order to flourish. Join us to make this radical change in order to have the world we deserve."

Burton's words were a powerful reminder of the necessity of peace as a foundation for women's progress and the crucial role that bold reforms play in shaping a just and equitable society.

The next speaker, Rosa Lizarde, Vice-Chair of NGO CSW/NY, marked the culmination of the Rally for Peace with a compelling message. She urged,

"As we stand here at the foot of the UN, we have to keep demanding for peace, for women's inclusion, for a space in all of these UN processes: whether it's about finance or sustainable development or equality, we have to stand together and demand peace. We have to stand for a peaceful disruption."

Her words underscored the vital need for continued advocacy and unity in demanding inclusivity and peace, emphasizing the importance of women's voices in all aspects of United Nations processes.

The rally echoed the United Nations' broader objectives of multilateral peace and aspirations for respect for the rights of all peoples, reflected by the tapestry of diverse narratives and calls for action.

It also underscored the urgency of the WPS agenda about the pivotal roles of women in peace and security.

Celebratory phase

Following the insightful speeches, the Rally for Peace shifted to a more interactive and spirited phase, focusing on the embodiment of peace rather than just discussing it. Participants engaged in singing, chanting, and collectively repeating the phrase "Give peace a chance." This part of the rally was dedicated to truly experiencing and manifesting the spirit of peace. It emphasized the importance of not just talking about peace, but actively being in a state of peace, allowing attendees to connect with each other and the cause on a deeper, more emotional level. This transition from words to action reinforced the rally's core message of unity and the transformative power of peaceful collaboration.

Conclusion of the event

The Rally for Peace, having filled Dag Hammarskjöld Plaza with inspirational statement as well as songs and chants

embodying the collective desire for global harmony, concluded on a powerful note. The participants spent the final moments deeply engaged in promoting the spirit of peace, and then dispersed with a renewed sense of commitment and hope. Each individual left with the echoes of the refrain "Give peace a chance" resonating in their hearts, carrying forward the rally's message into their communities and daily lives. The event not only marked a significant moment of unity and advocacy but also set the stage for continued collaboration and action in the pursuit of peace, women's inclusion, and a more equitable world. This rally, rich in voices and passion, served as a reminder that the journey for peace and justice is ongoing, and it's the collective efforts and spirit of communities that drive meaningful change.

Personal Reflections

My decision to attend the Rally for Peace was inherently tied to convictions and principles that fuel my work at Seeds of Asha, an emerging organization that focuses on cultivating peace, harmony, abundance, resilience, and non-judgement on the planet through spiritual psychology.

This event was not merely a gathering; it showcased the coming together of dozens of powerful female leaders, each demonstrating a profound commitment to supporting one another and the wider world through the lens of peace. In these challenging times, marked by global crises and high-profile conflicts, this assembly served as a beacon of hope, illuminating the potential for a future where leadership is guided by empathy, collaboration, and a steadfast dedication to peaceful resolution. Witnessing these influential women unite in their resolve was a poignant reminder of the strength found in solidarity and the significant impact of female leadership in steering our planet towards a more harmonious future.

On a personal level, this rally served as an immense source of inspiration. Being amidst a collective of passionate individuals reinforced my belief in the transformative power of unity in advocating for a harmonized global society and fortified my commitment to embracing and promoting values of peace, equality, and justice in both personal and community spheres.

On a professional level, the rally presented a profound reminder of the essential role mental health plays in cultivating inner peace and societal well-being. The intersection of psychology and peacebuilding was palpable, even in the absence of direct references to mental health by

speakers. This underscored the vital role of mental health professionals in fostering resilience and empowerment within communities, particularly in times of conflict and unrest. As a psychology student and mental health advocate, I found that the rally highlighted a significant gap in the public understanding of the relationship between mental health and societal peace. The connection between internal well-being and external harmony is often overlooked in mainstream discourse. This realization has strengthened my resolve to advocate more vigorously for mental health awareness. It's become increasingly clear that psychologists have a crucial role in not only addressing individual mental health concerns but also in contributing to the broader pursuit of global peace and stability. The rally was a potent reminder that promoting mental health is integral to creating a more peaceful and just society. This understanding will continue to inform and inspire my work in mental health advocacy, emphasizing the need for a holistic approach that recognizes the interplay between individual well-being and societal harmony.

Participating in the Rally for Peace has been a profoundly enriching experience, one that has deepened my understanding and commitment to the vital causes of peace and justice. This event, pioneering in its advocacy for peace, brought together 70 powerful women leaders, symbolizing a remarkable start in a movement that urgently needs to gain momentum. Yet, in the grand scheme, these numbers are modest when compared to the vast crowds mobilized by other causes, many of which, paradoxically, seem to perpetuate conflict rather than advocate for peace. In my time in New York City, I have observed a striking disparity. While small groups of peace advocates gather, their voices often seem overshadowed by the louder, more popular narratives that favor conflict. This observation is not just limited to street rallies but extends to numerous events I've attended, including those orchestrated by the UN. The contrast is stark and unsettling – peace advocacy, despite its crucial importance, appears to be a less appealing cause to the general public. This is consistent with research that shows that people get more riled up when they are angry than when they are happy. This should not be the case, especially in these present times.

This realization only fuels my determination to persist in my advocacy for peace. As I continue my studies and professional development, I am committed to amplifying the message of peace through various channels. Whether it's through writing, speaking engagements, developing training programs, or engaging in one-on-one conversations, my goal is to elevate the discourse around peace.

The Rally for Peace cont.

I envision a future where conversations about peace are not just a niche interest but a dominant, visible force, supported by millions and ultimately billions globally. It is a lofty aspiration, but one that I believe is essential for the betterment of our world. My journey in peace advocacy is just beginning, and I am more motivated than ever to contribute to a global shift towards a more peaceful, just, and harmonious society.

Event Summary

Title: Rally for Peace by NGO CSW/NY

Date: Wednesday, 25 October 2023

Time: 1 – 2pm EDT

Location: Start at the Church Center for the UN (777 United Nations Plaza) and march to Dag Hammarskjöld Plaza

Objective: Promote global peace & security, bring attention to the Women, Peace, & Security agenda and commemorate Security Council Resolution 1325 at the UN.

Organizer Description: NGO CSW/NY supports the work of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women and advocates for gender equality and the promotion of women's rights.

Lead Organizers: Ivy Koek, Co-Chair, Soka Gakkai International, a leader in a global Buddhist network promoting peace, culture, and education & Pamela Morgan, Co-Chair, Zonta International, an organization dedicated to empowering women through service and advocacy

For further information about NGO CSW/NY:

- Official Website: <https://ngocsw.org/>
- Telephone: +1 (646) 922-8800
- Email: info@ngocsw.org

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Innovations in Implementing the Women, Peace, and Security Agenda:

Experts offer suggestions at the International Peace Institute

Josefina Streeter Walker¹ and Judy Kuriansky²

Introduction

The important role of women in peace and security as well as preventing crisis and conflict has been widely recognized at the United Nations (UN Chronicle, 2017), for example, in the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development Goal 5 about gender equality; in UN Resolutions assuring women's rights and participation at all levels of peace; and by UN Women, the major United Nations agency ensuring gender equality and women's rights (UN Women, n.d.). Additionally, the United Nations Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs (DPPA) actively backs diverse initiatives aimed at enhancing women's participation in peace and security, incorporating gender equality, and formulating strategies aligned with the concerns of women's rights advocates (DPPA, n.d., 2023; United Nations Political and Peacekeeping Affairs (n.d.). Similar attention is paid by innumerable think tanks and peace institutes (Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace and Security, n.d.; International Peace Institute, n.d.) and academic research (Basu, et al, 2023; Davies, et al, 2018; Kirby, et al, 2016; Otto, 2015).

Yet, despite this support and concerted efforts, such involvement of women is underutilized, their value minimized, and their level of participation limited. Experts and advocates concur that women continue to encounter formidable challenges and barriers in

realizing and maintaining their rights and positions within the realm of peace and security. Nonetheless, efforts persist in the face of these restrictions.

Background: The Women, Peace, and Security Agenda

The most significant document about women's role in peace and security is the Women, Peace, and Security Agenda (WPS) launched in 2000 through the historic adoption of the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace, and Security (Office of the Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women, n.d.; UN, n.d.), which has become commonly referred to as "1325". This policy asserts that women must be critical actors in all efforts to achieve sustainable international peace and security through full, equal, and meaningful participation of women in peacemaking, conflict prevention and peacebuilding. 1325 itself recalled various resolutions on this topic since 1999, along with commitments outlined in the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (UN, n.d.-a; United States Institute of Peace, 2023) which maintains a gendered perspective that women must equally participate (as men), and be fully involved in, all efforts to build peace and achieve sustainable international peace and security. Importantly, it further asserts that rape must not be used as a weapon of war.

1 Josefina Streeter, MA earned her master's degree program in the Department of Clinical Psychology at Columbia University Teachers College where she was a student in Professor Judy Kuriansky's class on "Psychology and the United Nations". In addition to her scholastic work, she has experience coordinating women and gender programs and policies and had worked with victims of gender and sexual violence in Latin America and Africa. She is committed to creating safe spaces for women and girls around the globe while incorporating mental health into the conversation.

2 Dr. Judy Kuriansky, Professor of Psychology and Education at Columbia University Teachers College, teaches a unique course on "Psychology and the United Nations". She is also a representative of the International Association of Applied Psychology in consultative status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council, Advisor for the Mission of the Republic of Sierra Leone to the United Nations, and Policy Advisor to Ambassador Sidiq Wai, Chief of Mission of the Embassy of the Republic of Sierra Leone in Washington DC. The author of many books on international issues, including disaster recovery, Ebola, grassroots peacebuilding in the Middle East ("Beyond Bullets and Bombs"), as well as on the Intersection of Psychology and Environmental Protection, about on Women Around the World. She has advocated for, has organized innumerable events and conferences and spoken at the UN and worldwide about the intersection of SDG 16 (peace) and SDG 3 (health) with SDG4 (Education), SDG 5 (Equality of Women), SDG10 (Equality), SDG 13 (Climate Action), and SDG 17 (Partnerships). She co-developed a Girls Empowerment Camp in Africa, supported the #HandsOffOurGirls" initiative of the First Lady of Sierra Leone Fatima Maada Bio, co-founded the Stand Up for Peace Band, and conducted innumerable workshops during conflicts, disaster and peacetime, on resilience, peacebuilding and conflict resolutions.

The Resolution is structured around four main pillars (UN, n.d.). These are:

1. The role of women in conflict prevention
2. Women's participation in peacebuilding
3. The protection of the rights of women and girls during and after conflict
4. Women's specific needs during repatriation, resettlement and for rehabilitation, reintegration, and post-conflict reconstruction

Subsequent to the adoption of 1325, the WPS framework expanded with addition resolutions, categorized into two groups. The first group addresses the imperative for active and effective involvement of women in peacemaking and peacebuilding efforts, including subsequent Security Council Resolutions SCR 1889 (2009), SCR 2122 (2013), SCR 2242 (2015), and SCR 2493 (2019). The second category concentrates on the prevention and mitigation of conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV) whereby the inaugural resolution, SCR 1820 (2008), recognizes the significant exacerbation of conflict and the threat to international peace and security posed using sexual violence as a wartime tactic. Since 2008, four additional resolutions, namely SCR 1888 (2009), SCR 1960 (2010), SCR 2106 (2013), and SCR 2467 (2019), have been endorsed.

Presently, 23 years after that pivotal meeting and the adoption of 1325, the question arises: How can the Security Council, civil society, and the global community innovate to bolster the participation of women in this domain? In other words, what has been the deliverables and assessment of the achievements of 1325? The event in this report addresses that question.

The event on “Innovations in Implementing the Women, Peace, and Security Agenda”

Many events are held that are hosted by various organizers and in different formats to address the topic of women, peace, and security. The event reported in this paper was entitled “Innovations in Implementing the Women, Peace, and Security Agenda”, held on

20 September 2023, by the International Peace Institute (IPI) in New York City at their offices in a building across the street from New York United Nations headquarters. The event was held in hybrid format, both in-person and online.

The International Peace Institute is a non-profit organization promoting inclusive multilateralism for a peaceful and sustainable world. Through research and strategic advice, IPI provides innovative recommendations to the United Nations, member states, and other stakeholders. With a diverse team and offices in New York and Manama, IPI works towards a more harmonious planet (IPI, n.d.).



Invitation for the symposium on Innovations in Implementing the Women, Peace, and Security Agenda (International Peace Institute, 2023)

The aim of the meeting was to determine the challenges that still exist -- and how they can be overcome -- in order to integrate the Women, Peace, and Security Agenda across all aspects of the work of the Security Council and other bodies. This is aligned with the mission of the United Nations Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs (DPPA, n.d.), a department of the Secretariat of the UN that monitors and assesses global political developments and assists the UN Secretary-General and staff in the prevention and resolution of worldwide conflicts.

IPI collaborated with the Permanent Mission of Ireland to the United Nations and the Sasakawa Peace Foundation for this event, with participation of the Permanent Missions of Japan, Mexico, Slovenia, and Switzerland to the United Nations.

The event commenced with an opening address delivered by the moderator Dr. Adam Lupel, Vice President and Chief Operating Officer (COO) of IPI. Following this, opening remarks were presented by Irish politician His Excellency Mr. Micheál Martin, serving as deputy head of the Irish government (Tánaiste), and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Defense of Ireland, since December 2022.

H.E. Martin presented the symposium as a valuable opportunity to:

- Deliberate on the significance of the Women, Peace, and Security Agenda
- Formulate strategies to propel the Agenda's advancement and fortification
- Build upon the efforts initiated by the governments of Ireland, Kenya, and Mexico, comprising the presidency trio of the WPS
- Explore how to consistently integrate the WPS agenda into all facets of the Security Council's endeavors, by recognizing the efforts of women peace builders and human rights defenders in conflict prevention peace building and sustaining peace

The proceedings continued with insights from a multi-stakeholder group of distinguished experts and UN Ambassadors. Representatives from Government included: H.E. Ms. Tanja Fajon, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign and European Affairs from Slovenia; H.E. Ms. Pascale Baeriswyl, Permanent Representative of Switzerland to the United Nations; from a UN agency; and H.E. Dr. Nadine Gasman, President of the National Institute of Women in Mexico. Representatives from the UN system included: Ms. Ilze Brands Kehris, Assistant Secretary-General for Human Rights at the United Nations Human Rights Office, and Ms. Sarah Hendriks, Deputy Executive Director a.i. for Policy, Programs, Civil Society & Intergovernmental Support at UN Women. Representing civil society was Ms. Kaavya Asoka, Executive Director of the NGO Working Group on Women, Peace, and Security.



Speakers (left to right): Ms. Kaavya Asoka, the NGO Working Group on Women, Peace and Security; H.E. Micheál Martin, deputy head of the Irish government; Ms. Sarah Hendriks, UN Women; Ms. Dia Rao Gupta, Office of Global Women Issues at the US. Department of State; Dr. Nadine Gasman, National Institute of Women, Mexico; Moderator Dr. Adam Lupel, IPI Vice President and COO

Closing remarks were delivered by H.E. Ms. Kamikawa Yōko, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Japan, and the conclusion of the event was led by Ms. Dia Rao Gupta, Ambassador-at-large in the Office of Global Women's Issues at the U.S. Department of State in Washington, DC.

Opening Address: “Despite the impact of the work done so far, the challenges remain”

The moderator, IPI's Dr. Adam Lupel began the discussion by underscoring this unique opportunity to delve into the paramount importance of the Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) Agenda. He framed the discussion by saying that the event revolves around exploring strategies and innovations aimed at advancing and reinforcing this vital agenda and serves as an invaluable space to dissect the challenges, successes, and groundbreaking initiatives surrounding the WPS agenda. The intention is to foster a richer understanding of the agenda's significance and avenues for its continued enhancement.

Opening remarks were then delivered by H.E. Mr. Micheál Martin. He underscored the critical importance

of fully integrating the Women, Peace, and Security Agenda into all aspects of the Security Council's work, which is vital to support and recognize the invaluable contributions of women peace builders and human rights defenders in conflict prevention and sustaining peace.

"It's a simple and clear fact that women must be involved in making the policies that shape our lives and livelihoods," he said, adding that "Decision-making processes, including peace processes, must be representative of the societies they affect."

He noted that this topic is a high priority for his country of Ireland and the collaborative attention of the Presidency Trio for Women, Peace, and Security (WPS President Trio Statement, 2021), namely, Kenya, Mexico, and Ireland. The three countries, from different world regions, are working together to innovate and more effectively mainstream considerations about women, peace, and security throughout the Security Council's work. These efforts reflect the high priority accorded to this Agenda by the respective presidencies of these countries.

A more in-depth and comprehensive understanding of the Presidency Trio for Women, Peace and Security follows.

Presidency Trio for Women, Peace and Security (WPS President Trio Statement, 2021)

Ireland, Kenya, and Mexico joined forces as the "Presidency Trio for Women, Peace, and Security" with a commitment to prioritize and advance the WPS agenda during their respective presidencies in September, October, and November 2021 at the UN Security Council. They aimed to bridge the gap between rhetoric and action in realizing the full potential of the WPS agenda, emphasizing the importance of women's meaningful participation in peace and security matters and their protection from gender-based violence. This collaborative effort sought to fully integrate the WPS agenda into the Council's

discussions and deliberations throughout their presidencies.

Their efforts committed to:

- Gender balance, striving towards gender parity, among those we invite to brief the Security Council.
- Strong representation of diverse women civil society briefers in Security Council meetings.
- Make WPS an explicit focus of at least one mandated geographic meeting of the Council over the three months.
- Request the inclusion of gender analysis in briefings by the UN to the Council.
- Heighten the visibility of our discussions on WPS by holding WPS press 'stakeouts'.
- Ensure that Security Council products we draft integrate strong WPS language.
- Ensure that signature events we host include substantive gender perspectives.
- Prepare a handover and summary at the conclusion of our presidencies with best practice recommendations on WPS, including from civil society, for future Security Council presidencies.
- Mark the opening and closing months of the Trio with PR level meetings on WPS hosted by the IEG co-chairs, Ireland and Mexico, to complement the annual debate hosted by Kenya.
- Highlight the positive impact of the IEG on WPS five years after its creation and the need to strengthen synergies with other mechanisms aimed at advancing the WPS Agenda.
- Reflect WPS highlights and recommendations in our end-of-presidency wrap sessions.
- Advance the objective of the Arria-formula meeting of 8 March 2021 calling for the UN to lead by

example in ensuring the full, equal and meaningful participation of women in peace processes it leads or co-leads.

H.E. Martin described that the three countries (Kenya, Mexico and Ireland) invited 35 women from civil society to engage with the Security Council, enabling a deeper understanding of the conflicts under discussion. Appreciating the advances these civil society groups have made, H.E. Martin acknowledged the risks that they, and other civil society groups, still face, including the risk of reprisal -- which demands more support.

Also, these efforts have been adopted by eight more countries on the Security Council (Albania, Brazil, France, Gabon, Niger, Norway, the United Arab Emirates and the United Kingdom) who between December 2021 and September 2022 signed a Statement of Shared Commitments on WPS.

Ireland, he said, is making progress on this issue. Currently, Ireland is implementing its third national action plan on women, peace, and security, which focuses on both domestic and foreign policy. Increased emphasis is being placed on grassroots engagement with women peacebuilders, with the goal of augmenting investments in peacebuilding, conflict prevention, and mediation. This commitment underscores Ireland's respect for its women rights' activists and steadfast dedication to advancing the Women, Peace, and Security Agenda as a cornerstone of its foreign policy.

First Intervention: “Lead by example: join our voice and send a message out”

The next speaker, H.E. Ms. Tanja Fajon, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign and European Affairs from Slovenia, began her speech by commenting on the priority in Slovenia over the last 30 years to address the issue of women in the security agenda, due to the fact that women rights has been a key topic

in their foreign policy, for instance, in “our independence”. An example she gave is the launching of the feminist foreign policy.

As the first women to take leadership of a Ministry in her country, H.E. Fajon commented on the importance of leading by example. She described that despite ongoing efforts, promoting gender equality in all spheres remains challenging.

“Human rights are in many, many parts of the world seriously in danger, including the women rights, the rights of the girls”, she said, making this a difficult time for the Security Council.

She elaborated that this challenge underscores the significance of raising awareness and empowering girls and women in the contexts of conflict, violence, and climate change. To address this, she has introduced a technological innovation that established a digital network platform of women in ministries worldwide. This network operates in regions where human rights, including women's and girls' rights, are under serious threat in many parts of the world.

Such an innovation of an accessible network responds to the needs and the call to increase women's role in mediation, making it more possible that women can play a crucial role as negotiators worldwide, she asserted. “Strengthening the participation of women at all level of national diplomacies is extremely important to the implementation of women, peace, security agenda” Ms. Fajon said. She reinforced this point, adding that women must lead by example.

Yet, she said, only 4 out of 74 presidents of the UN have been women; thus, increasing the number of female Ambassadors and diplomats is extremely important in order to drive change.

Shifting the paradigm

In the next presentation, H.E. Ms. Pascale Baeriswyl, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of the Mission of Switzerland to the United Nations,

provided a historical context for Resolution 1325 and the trajectory of women rights in her country. She highlighted that this landmark resolution, driven by civil society, is one of the strongest, innovative, creative, and globally impactful resolutions. As the only resolution recognizing "the strong connection between protection and empowerment," it underscores the importance of systematic monitoring, impact assessment, a comprehensive approach, and a protection architecture. Also, its systematic accompaniment highlights its innovative system as well as a crucial indicator system to assess implementation.

Effective implementation is key, she said, emphasizing the critical need for technical tools, and also national strategies and political will.

To accomplish this, she explained that Switzerland is currently engaged on three fronts:

1. On the first, technical, front, H.E. Baeriswyl stressed the importance of integrating gender perspectives into various statements made by members of the Security Council, who must consistently bring these issues up during Council discussions as well into everyday life. She noted two caveats: (a) that while it is common to mention women and children together, sometimes that is not helpful; and (b) that we tend to put the emphasis on prevention when it should also be on empowerment, which is also referred to in SDG 5.

2. On the second front, she emphasized the relevance of linking the technical level to political action. This involves systematic work, communication, and reviews. Switzerland has set up a process of regular meetings, every four to six weeks, to review the renewal of their Mandate, where they exchange ideas with civil society, introduce a systematic look at the upcoming month in the Council, and evaluate where issues of Women, Peace and Security are particularly relevant. She highlighted the importance of innovative approaches; for example, they are now working in Colombia developing a national action plan to push the Council to visit them. Also, five female

Ambassadors are creating a roadmap for female leadership in the Council, aiming to increase female representation to 54%.

3. On the third front, a paradigm shift is needed to effectively address the Security Council agenda. Without changing the paradigm to include gender perspective and global leadership, substantial progress in business security implementation would remain elusive despite numerous commitments.

Progress and Challenges in Mexico

The next speaker was Dr. Nadine Gasman, President of the National Institute of Women in Mexico, a Government of Mexico City public administration body responsible for ensuring the protection and full enjoyment of human rights of women and girls. She began her intervention with an element of surprise in her voice, noting the irony that, despite the abundance of evidence highlighting the crucial role of women in peace and security, the world appears reluctant to fully embrace this. The world doesn't like to learn this, she said, since the absence of half the population of the world [which women constitute] from this global discourse represents a significant gap that still needs to be addressed.

Dr. Gasman underscored that while action plans have traditionally been devised for the international role of countries on the global stage, there is a parallel need for these plans to have national expression. For this reason, she has led an innovative national plan based to recognizing the role that women play in their community, for which "we are rebuilding the social factory from a women perspective". This strategy involves a network of 20,000 women actively participating to acknowledge the pivotal role of women in the realm of peace and security. The strategy, built on women's networks, has involved listening to the voices of communities to reconstruct and reshape social factors. The approach has led to considerable success, she said. Notably, the collaboration between the Ministry of Security and the community has resulted in local authorities recognizing women's

rights through dialogue, promoting communication, solidarity, and solutions.

Another major advance of her country of Mexico was the creation this year of the Iberoamerican Network of Women Mediators. This group is mandated to promote women's roles in peace and security, and to enhance the training of women operating at the community and international levels. This national initiative complements broader global efforts of regional mediators.

Dr. Gasman reaffirmed the importance of ensuring that the gender perspective is integrated into all levels of government -- national and international -- thereby bridging an existing gap. While acknowledging the challenges of maintaining dialogue among various stakeholders, she expressed hope that by utilizing both formal and informal mechanisms and creating collaborative systems, women will gain recognition and opportunities to participate in peace and security matters, and that the direction of these efforts will move beyond preventing violence to building peace.



Panelist Dr. Nadine Gasman, President of the National Institute of Women in Mexico (left) with and Josefina Streeter, graduate Psychology student, Columbia University Teachers College

Progress, challenges and recommendations according to UN Women

Subsequently, Ms. Sarah Hendriks, Deputy Executive Director a.i. for Policy, Programs, Civil Society & Intergovernmental Support at UN Women, the UN agency in charge of women's issues, started her address by providing a historical perspective on women's participation in the peace and security agenda. She noted that UN Women works on WPS in more than 70 countries around the world. She underscored the significance of the "record number of council meetings on this agenda, mainly because innovative initiatives like the one highlighted today."

As a sign of progress, she mentioned that:

1. Over the last two years, there have been 118 women from civil society speaking to the Security Council, compared to just 25 who were able to do so between the years 2003 and 2015. Prior to that, there were zero instances of women from civil society addressing the Security Council about their priorities.
2. By the first five years after resolution 1325 was adopted, only 15% of resolutions included references to gender issues. After women from civil society started participating in country-specific meetings, the number of Security Council decisions including language about women, peace and security grew from 51% in 2015 to an average of 67% in five years.
3. The language is qualitatively much stronger now, especially concerning women's participation and leadership issues, compared to a decade ago.

While the statistics in the number of women addressing the Security Council have improved, she also acknowledged a challenge. Specifically, the past five years have witnessed a significant division within the Security Council, and growing concern about recent trendlines, evident from the increasing number of abstentions and technical rollovers observed last year. This year, if that trend persists, Resolutions with provisions related to women, peace, and security are projected to account for approximately 50% of the

total, making that the lowest figure in the past seven years. This challenge, she said, underscores the need for more concerted effort to achieve unity on this issue, and to prioritize these critical provisions in Security Council discussions and decisions.

As the representative of UN Women on the panel, Ms. Hendriks conveyed three vital ways that the institution offers their support to the Council:

1. Being alert to country-specific situations that respect the WPS agenda, in order, on a positive note, to amplify the initiatives that elevates the Agenda. These initiatives should then harness the power of unity to push for specific provisions on the WPS agenda, raising its visibility.
2. The need to follow-up on previously agreed-upon decisions, with special attention to the importance of language. Ms. Hendriks recommended adopting strong and specific language when implementing new measures, emphasizing that language needs to become more robust, influential, and supportive of the objectives that need to be pursued.
3. Always rely on UN Women in the fight for ensuring the independence of civil society within the Security Council's sphere.

Importance of collective responsibility

The next speaker was Ms. Ilze Brands Kehris, Assistant Secretary-General for Human Rights at the United Nations. She emphasized the significance of organizations within the UN system in assisting Security Council members and stressed the importance of continuous learning through close coordination. She made two points:

1. Addressing women's roles in security and peace is a collective responsibility.
2. Supporting SC members in increasing women's participation is paramount.

She states that the Member States is "trying to do our part to support the UN system to help to support the

Security Council in bringing more of them (women)" to continue learning and make progress, she said. Specially, she mentioned the relevance of the civil society briefers as connectors from the headquarters and the community.

Ms. Kehris built on Ms. Hendriks' point about advances reflected in statistics of norms and reports are regularly documented in their reports, adding that since 2010, there have been a total of 90 reports that demand our attention and action. Their report for this year would be available next week, leading Ms. Kehris to request support to disseminate that information in convenings like this one in New York.

The voice of civil society

As a representative of civil society on the panel, Ms. Kaavya Asoka, Executive Director of the NGO Working Group on Women, Peace, and Security shared her insights gained from her extensive experience in this field. Her NGO is a consensus-based coalition of 18 international non-governmental organizations working to promote the Women, Peace, and Security agenda at the United Nations and around the world.

She began by paying tribute to the women human rights defenders working tirelessly in conflict zones, such as Sudan, Afghanistan, and Myanmar, highlighting their frontline contributions to their communities.

Reiterating an issue underscored by every speaker, she acknowledged that civil society plays a pivotal role in the issues of Women, Peace, and Security. She expanded this point further to affirm participation of all stakeholders in a collective approach, but that also it is essential to have government support, specifically, "political will, coordination, and commitment from Member States on the Security Council to hold the normative agenda and ensure its implementation."

Of course, women themselves must participate in all discussions, she asserted, since

"you can not resolve conflicts unless women are central part of the solution". It is further essential, she emphasized, to frame women's participation as a fundamental right, echoing the point made by H.E. Fajon regarding the role of strong institutions leading by example.

Ms. Asoka specifically called on the UN to:

1. Insist on women's participation.
2. Invest in women as political capital.
3. Support peace processes around the world.
4. Be ambitious: get 50% of quotas for women instead of 30%, to achieve parity at the UN. (Note: This parity was promised by the UN Secretary General at a CSW meeting at the UN years ago, which received thundering applause).

Concluding her remarks, Ms. Asoka emphasized that "protection does not compromise participation" in the context of reprisals of women's involvement in peace and security. To achieve this, she recommended investing resources in political capital, persistently promoting women's participation, and setting an example through action and commitment.

Enhancing partnership among all actors

Closing remarks were delivered by H.E. Ms. Kamikawa Yōko, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Japan, who told the audience how the WPS Agenda included Japan, in that basic policies on economic and fiscal management and reform 2023 are the basics of Japanese budgetary process.

She emphasized the importance of international cooperation in addressing women's participation in the Security and Peace Agenda. Again, referencing her country, she explained that in April of the current year, Japan published its National Action Plan that not only focuses on promoting the protection of women and girls in conflict areas, including combating gender-based violence and enhancing women's participation in peacebuilding, but also emphasizes

increasing women's leadership roles in natural and man-made disaster prevention and mitigation efforts.

Additionally, it promotes initiatives aimed at changing the attitudes and behaviors of men and boys, all contributing to the WPS agenda. This reference to the role of men and boys is always welcome, and relevant, in such discussions.

In outlining recommendations for global action, H.E. Yōko underscored the relevance of international cooperation especially in responding to natural disasters and effectively mobilizing resources. To this end, she proposed establishing a parliamentary league and creating a nationwide structure for the WPS agenda. (It is noted that Japan had particularly suffered from a major natural disaster in the tsunami/earthquake, and become a leader in this issue, as reflected in the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction), and further noted that the second author of this paper spent several years providing trainings and workshops for post-disaster recovery in Japan).

Also, as had been previously mentioned, she confirmed that countries must collaborate more closely with civil society to advance this Agenda effectively.

Conclusion: "Nothing about us, without us"

The concluding discussion of the symposium was led by Ms. Dia Rao Gupta, Ambassador-at-large in the Office of Global Women's Issues at the U.S. Department of State in Washington, DC. She declared the while the Women, Peace, and Security Agenda has been firmly established, "its implementation remains a challenge".

A pressing need remains, she said, for more women leaders and representatives to actively participate in decision-making processes related to security and peace. The key to progress lies in cultivating and sustaining political will among UN Member States to drive this Agenda forward. For this, one initiative that the U.S. Office of Global Women issues is implementing, is partnering on existing and future WPS Centers

of Excellence around the world, that would coordinate and highlight opportunities.

It is crucial, Ms. Gupta highlighted, to recognize that the universal benefits of placing women at the forefront of peace and security efforts extend far beyond gender equality alone, but in fact, encompass a more stable and inclusive world for all.

She strongly expressed that in actions moving forward, to heed the statement “Nothing about us, without us”, which is a popular clarion call that all actions must include the voice and participation of specific stakeholders whom it refers to and affects.

The last speaker, who closed the symposium, was a representative of the Presidency Trio For Women, Peace and Security, Mr. Frederk Iraqi, Adviser to the Cabinet Secretary on Peace and Security and Diaspora Affairs of Kenya. He read a message of his Minister, who emphasized persistence in the efforts, and collaboration to place women in the WPS Agenda to bridge the gap between rhetoric and the reality of this matter.

“WPS is not just a set of goals,” he said. “It is a vision for a world where peace is built on the principles of equity and inclusivity”.

Reflections of Dr. Kuriansky

This event is of great significance to the advancement of SDG 5, and the authors’ commitment to collaborative efforts and multistakeholder partnerships. Our efforts are currently building on the historic General Assembly Resolution on access to justice for survivors of sexual violence, led by Sierra Leone, supported by the President of Sierra Leone, H.E. Ret. Brigadier General Julius Maada Bio, and founded on the extensive work of the First Lady Fatima Maada Bio and her #HandsOffOurGirls initiative, which Professor Kuriansky has supported. The Resolution and a subsequent World Day identified on 18 November as World Day for the Prevention of and Healing from Child Sexual Exploitation, Abuse and Violence, co-sponsored by the Mission of Nigeria, with support of Japan, has

set new precedents for the rights of women and girls and achievement of SDG 5. Follow-up of these advances, with interlinkages to women’s role in peace and security, are being explored with involvement of multiple stakeholders, to include government and civil society. Further, we greatly support and appreciate the continuation of the objectives of this event, especially in considerations of the Security Council, and the implementation of the recommendations outlined by the illustrious speakers at this event.

Personal reflections of Ms. Streeter

Witnessing diverse voices and perspectives actively contributing to discussions like these about Women, Peace, and Security, (WPS) fills me with hope. As a masters’ degree student in clinical psychology, who is focused on issues of mental health and on women’s rights, I recognize the paramount importance of peace and security in fostering well-being and mental health for individuals and communities, and specifically for women. This event’s emphasis on agreements among multiple countries, and their optimistic visions for how WPS can be accomplished, signifies a commitment to collaborative action, transcending borders, and ideologies to achieve common goals that I find inspirational. Moreover, a central focus of this symposium on implementation speaks to the urgency of translating rhetoric into tangible change on the ground. All that appeals to me and my own roadmap for women’s rights. It is reassuring to me that discussions like these pave the way for a more equitable world, where the rights and well-being of women and all individuals are upheld. I appreciate that the speakers underscored the significance of collective efforts, acknowledging that real transformation is always a shared responsibility. This event further has profound relevance to Sustainable Development Goal 5 on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women and Girls, as well as to my personal goals about how I can contribute to this field. This goal, at the heart of global progress, underscores the imperative of equity and the empowerment of women. As such, it is a reminder that our collective

efforts toward a more just and harmonious world are both a responsibility and an opportunity for positive change.

Event Overview

Title: Innovations in Implementing the Women, Peace, and Security Agenda

Date/Time: September 22nd, 2023, 8:00 am – 9:30 am EDT (hybrid: in person and online)

Location: Trygve Lie Center for Peace, Security & Development, International Peace Institute, 777 United Nations Plaza, 12th Floor

Moderator: Dr. Adam Lupel, Vice President and COO of the International Peace Institute (IPI)

Speakers:

- Dr. Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein, President and CEO of the International Peace Institute (IPI)
- H.E. Mr. Micheál Martin TD, Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Defence, Ireland
- H.E. Ms. Kamikawa Yōko, Minister for Foreign Affairs, Japan
- H.E. Ms. Tanja Fajon, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign and European Affairs, Slovenia
- H.E. Ms. Pascale Baeriswyl, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Switzerland to the United Nations
- Dr. Nadine Gasman, President of the National Institute of Women, Mexico
- Ms. Sarah Hendriks, Deputy Executive Director a.i. for Policy, Programmes, Civil Society & Intergovernmental Support, UN Women
- Ms. Ilze Brands Kehris, Assistant Secretary-General for Human Rights at the United Nations

- Ms. Kaavya Asoka, Executive Director, the NGO Working Group on Women, Peace and Security
- Ms. Dia Rao Gupta, Ambassador-at-large in the Office of Global Women's Issues at the U.S. Department of State
- Mr. Frederk Iraqi, Adviser to the Cabinet Secretary on Peace and Security and Diaspora Affairs of Kenya

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The Path to Sustainable Peace: the Role of Quality Education in Shaping a Harmonious World

Tricia Borderia¹ and Judy Kuriansky

Background: Education as a priority at the United Nations and tool for peacebuilding

“Education in all its forms and dimensions, in and out of schools, shapes how we see the world and treat others” (The Recommendation on Education for Peace and Human Rights, International Understanding, Cooperation, Fundamental Freedoms, Global Citizenship and Sustainable Development, 2023).

This statement describes the importance of education in fostering a peaceful future and is a core principle of UNESCO's recent Recommendation on Education for Peace, Human Rights, and Sustainable Development, officially adopted in November 2023. Premised on 14 guiding principles, the Recommendation includes concrete areas aimed at enacting change in and through education and offers a roadmap to transform education in the pursuit of peace (The Recommendation on Education for Peace and Human Rights, International Understanding, Cooperation, Fundamental Freedoms, Global Citizenship and Sustainable Development, 2023).

Created with the goal of assisting nations in realizing a more just future through their education systems, the Recommendation is “the only global standard-setting instrument that lays out how education should be used to bring about lasting peace” (The Recommendation on Education for Peace and Human Rights, International Understanding, Cooperation, Fundamental Freedoms, Global Citizenship and Sustainable Development, 2023). The inherent link between learning and peace therefore underscores the pivotal role of education in societal advancement.

This connection between education and peace was established back in 1948, when education was assured among basic human rights in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) – the landmark

document of the United Nations adopted by the UN General Assembly three years after the foundation of the United Nations itself. Article 26 of the Declaration states that “everyone has the right to education” and specifically, education “shall promote understanding, tolerance [...] and shall further the activities of the United Nations for the maintenance of peace” (Nations, n.d.-a).

In 2015, education and peace was enshrined in the United Nations' purview with the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development by all United Nations Member States, which provides a roadmap “for peace and prosperity for people and the planet, now and into the future” (United Nations, n.d.-a). Of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), SDG 4 calls for “inclusive and equitable quality education and [the promotion of] lifelong learning opportunities for all” (United Nations, 2023-a). Target SDG 4.7 addresses a link between education and peaceful coexistence: “By 2030, ensure that all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including, among others, through education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship and appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture's contribution to sustainable development” (United Nations, 2023-a).

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and wars

The Covid-19 pandemic had a devastating impact on education worldwide. Education for up to 90% of children worldwide was severely interrupted during the pandemic, setting back their intellectual and social skills, with grave consequence for their future (United Nations, n.d.-b). As a result, the Transforming Education Summit was convened by the UN Secretary-General (SG) and took place, co-chaired by the SG with the President of Sierra Leone Julius Maada

¹ Reported by Tricia Borderia, a graduate student pursuing a masters' degree in the Department of Organization & Leadership, Columbia University Teachers College, and a student in Professor Judy Kuriansky's class on “Psychology and the United Nations.” I have 10 years of experience working in human resources and I am a Learning & Development Manager at the Boston Consulting Group (BCG) where I create and manage learning and leadership programs. I also have volunteer experience with the International Rescue Committee (IRC). I am interested in education, psychology, and human rights.

Bio, during the 77th session of the UN General Assembly over three days -- 16, 17 and 19 September 2022 -- "with a view to elevating education to the top of the global political agenda and to mobilize action, ambition, solidarity and solutions to recover pandemic-related learning losses and sow the seeds to transform education in a rapidly changing world" (United Nations, n.d.-b). A Steering Committee was set up, as well as the Informal Group of Champions for Global Education, to which, for example, Sierra Leone's President Julius Maada Bio was appointed. Wars traditionally also gravely interrupt youth education (Justino, 2010), as has been the case in modern times during the Israel-Gaza war, which has raged during the 78th General Assembly session 2023-2024, under the General Assembly Presidency of H.E. Dennis Francis. H.E. Francis has outlined his priorities for his term, emphasizing the importance of peace and security (UN Assembly President Outlines Vision for 2024 | UN News, 2024) but is also known to be dedicated to the promotion of the importance of education (personal communication, December 4, 2023), thereby forging a further connection between peace and education on the international stage.

That education is key to human prosperity is clear, and examining the crucial role of education in enabling and sustaining peace offers a rich perspective to which many disciplines contribute. This intersection between education and peace was the focus of the 2024 International Day of Education at the United Nations, under the term of H.E. Francis.



2024 International Day of Education concept note cover (UNESCO)

2024 International Day of Education: "Learning for Lasting Peace"

The International Day of Education was held on 24 January 2024 in the ECOSOC Chamber of the United Nations Headquarters in New York City. The event was co-organized by United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and by the Group of Friends for Education and Lifelong Learning, which is a key UN partner consisting of Member States, UN agencies and others who champion the priorities of education globally (The Group of Friends of Education and Lifelong Learning: Education Disrupted, Education Transformed | General Assembly of the United Nations, n.d.). Registration to the meeting was open to the wide UN community. Attendees could join in person or follow via livestream on the UN TV webcast site.

This year's theme clearly linked education and peace, being entitled "Learning for Lasting Peace". The intention was to highlight the transformative power of education in building peaceful and prosperous societies and the crucial role education and teachers play in countering hate speech (International Day of Education | UNESCO, n.d.).

On the occasion of the event, the Director General of UNESCO, Audrey Azoulay, issued a written statement underscoring the critical role of education in fostering lasting peace and highlighting the organization's initiatives towards addressing online hate and racism (Azoulay, 2024).

The event's objectives (International Day of Education: High Level Dialogue on Learning for Lasting Peace, 2024) were intended to:

- Advocate for centering education for peace, as outlined in SDG4 Target 4.7, in global education efforts aimed at peacebuilding and sustaining peace, and celebrate peacemakers' contribution in and through education towards just, inclusive and peaceful societies
- Discuss priorities and challenges for education for lasting peace and global citizenship

The Path to Sustainable Peace cont.

- Raise awareness for effective approaches in education for peace and mobilize commitment for their implementation
- Strengthen commitment to end hate speech and promote digital citizenship through education



Audience and panel at the high-level event on education and peace in the UN ECOSOC Chamber

The authors of this report attended the event in-person along with other classmates from the course on “Psychology at the United Nations” at Teachers College, Columbia University (TC) taught by Professor of Psychology and Education Dr. Judy Kuriansky, who was keen to introduce her students to this intersection of education and peace. This aligns with her roles as an Advisor to the Mission of Sierra Leone to the United Nations; service for 20+ years as a representative of the International Association of Applied Psychology, an NGO in consultative status with the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC); and work conducting many educational programs worldwide especially in conflict and post-disaster settings to facilitate resilience, empowerment and peace, topics about which she has written extensively.



(left to right) Niklas Nyblom, TC graduate student and CA for Dr. Kuriansky’s class on “Psychology and the United Nations”; Dr. Judy Kuriansky, professor of the course on “Psychology and the United Nations”; Tricia Borderia, TC graduate student of Professor Kuriansky and author of this report; Zeever Baqar, TC graduate student of Professor Kuriansky, Salome Agbaroji, US National Youth Poet Laureate; Richa Gupta, Young Leader for the SDGs; Emeline O’Hara, Communications Manager, Dangerous Speech Project; Elaine Peng, TC graduate student of Professor Kuriansky

Opening Session

Welcoming Remarks

The moderator of the event was Richa Gupta, one of the chosen 17 Young Leaders for the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), who delivered the opening address for the day’s celebrations. The 17 Young Leaders are selected by the United Nations to represent the voices of youth across the globe, correlated to each of the 17 SDGs. Ms. Gupta is from India and is the CEO and co-founder of Labhya Foundation, a nonprofit that provides over 2.4 million under-served children with the necessary skills to overcome poverty while also becoming effective learners (Richa Gupta, n.d.). Her words set the tone for the themes explored throughout the event, in emphasizing how “shaping a more peaceful, more just, healthy, and sustainable” society will be highly dependent on how we formulate our education systems.” She added, “The International Day of Education is not only a platform for us to discuss the priorities and challenges in education; it’s also a way for us to celebrate all

the progress we have made and highlight how education can support lasting peace.”

Next to speak was H.E. Dennis Francis, President of the General Assembly who had just served as Ambassador and Permanent Representative of the Mission of Trinidad and Tobago to the United Nations. In a pre-recorded video message. H.E. Francis stressed the intrinsic link between education and peace, recalling that UNESCO was established as a peace organization in the aftermath of two World Wars.

“Education is not a privilege but a fundamental human right; a right that is inherent and unconditional [...] in both times of peace and conflict,” he said, referring to the recent celebration of the milestone 75th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which affirms this right.

In contrast to this aspiration, the statistics remain concerning, with 250 million children and 763 million adults still deprived of access to education (What You Need to Know about Literacy, 2023). Progress towards inclusive and equitable quality education, a key goal of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, remains below target (United Nations, 2023-b). While appreciating some measured improvement in achieving SDG 4, H.E. Francis called for addressing the obstacles hindering full delivery of the right to education globally and reaffirmed his determination to confront these challenges.

He identified perennial underinvestment as a key issue in achieving SDG 4 and emphasized the need for better resourced education systems that integrate marginalized and underprivileged populations in all countries.

He also commended UNESCO for its continuing vision in fostering the transformative role of learners as agents of peace. “Quite simply,” he said in summary, “education is a driver of both empowerment and peace.”



President of the General Assembly H.E. Dennis Francis delivering the welcome address via pre-recorded message (Screenshot from livestream recording).

Amina J. Mohammed, Deputy Secretary General (DSG) of the United Nations, addressed the room next. She declared that “in our shared commitment to fostering inclusive, peaceful, tolerant, equitable, and quality education, we do currently confront formidable challenges that echo at the country level, at the regional level, and globally.”

These challenges are supported by new data published by UNESCO showing that 44 million teachers are still needed to reach the 2030 targets for primary and secondary education. This is particularly felt in Sub-Saharan Africa, which accounts for 1 in 3 of the current global shortfall (World Teachers’ Day: Audrey Azoulay Pleads for an Upgrade of Teachers’ Status to Reduce the Global Shortage, 2023).

DSG Mohammed highlighted that many developing countries struggle to overcome school enrollment problems “given that they face a lack of the ability to come back from COVID, from the tensions and impact of the war in Ukraine and are wrestling with servicing debt or paying for educational health.”

Her address can be categorized into three main points:

- Education as a pathway to prosperity: The exacerbation of a severe learning crisis by conflict, war, climate change and other challenges is undeniable. But education is not just a victim; it is a potent solution and a powerful tool for addressing broader questions. “It is through education,” DSG Mohammed said, “that we prepare individuals, especially our girls, to defend and actualize

lasting peace." Education is not only a fundamental human right, but a pathway to a more resilient and inclusive world, and a preventative tool against conflict and division. She noted that education also accelerates social mobility and equips young people with the skills to fully participate in all areas of life.

- The challenge of obtaining financing: The DSG lamented falling short of meeting current financing goals for education. Addressing this gap will require action from both Member States and the international community. Domestic resource mobilization will certainly be a key component, whether through tax reform, debt reduction, or by increasing budget allocations for education, but she believes the best return will be on investments made to raise revenues for funding. Another route is to seek innovative financial initiatives like the International Finance Facility for Education, a new financing engine for global education launched at the 2022 Transforming Education Summit (Nations, n.d.-b).
- Vision requires action: The unanimous adoption of the Recommendation on Education for Peace, Human Rights and Sustainable Development by all UNESCO Member States sends a resounding message of shared commitment to transform education. As encouraging as this is, collective effort is needed to ensure that the recommendations are translated into tangible action on the ground. Scaling up efforts becomes paramount in preparation for the September 2024 Summit of the Future and the 2025 World Social Summit, at which progress will surely be assessed. The plan, DSG Mohammed stated, is to continue formulating steps to accelerate transformative actions at the country level, but also in finance, technology, and through investments in teachers. The 2022 Transforming Education Summit was pivotal in crystalizing leaders' and key stakeholders' political commitment to transform their education systems and establish a new social contract for education. "The subsequent translations of these commitments into actions," she said, "has been spearheaded by the SDG 4 High-Level Steering Committee at UNESCO and is a testament to our collective efforts to take the opportunity of moving an accelerating education agenda."



(left to right) Richa Gupta SDG Young Leader and CEO of Labhya Foundation; Minister Chernor Bah, Minister of Information and Civic Education of Sierra Leone; H.E. Ambassador Martin Kimani, Permanent Representative of the Mission of Kenya to the United Nations and Co-chair of the Group of Friends for Education and Lifelong Learning; H.E. Amina Mohammed, Deputy Secretary-General of the United Nations; Eliot Minchenberg, Director of the UNESCO New York Office and UNESCO Representative to the United Nations in New York (UN Photo/Loey Felipe (2024)).

Next, **H.E. Martin Kimani**, Ambassador, Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary Permanent Representative of the Mission of Kenya to the United Nations and Co-Chair of the Group of Friends for Education and Lifelong Learning, shared the vision and perspectives of this group. Addressing global challenges of conflict, political instability, climate change, and rising intolerance, Mr. Kimani emphasized the need for tailored actions to sow the seeds of peace in the minds of people worldwide. Ongoing crises "not only disrupt the global landscape but also intensify inequalities in accessing to education," particularly as developing countries grapple with achieving the SDGs.

Peace, he said, is "not as the mere absence of war, but as the harmonious coexistence of humanity."

His Excellency Kimani added, "Learning must enable people to develop individual resilience and empathy for others, nurture the attitudes to appreciate cultural diversity, and contribute to building peaceful and sustainable societies". To this end, access to inclusive and accessible quality education must remain a priority for all policies related to education."

There is also a need, he pointed out, for increased support for developing countries in their efforts to expand access to quality education and upgrade educational facilities to ensure everyone enjoys the benefits of scientific and technological progress.

Ambassador Kimani expressed that lifelong learning is a significant contributor to sustaining peace and stability, and that education is key to ensuring employment opportunities. To fully realize education's potential, schools and universities must empower both learners and educators to address contemporary challenges. Overall, he emphasized the transformative power of education to shape societies and achieve development.

He referred to the Recommendation's framing of education as a positive, participatory, and dynamic process that matches our collective ability to value human dignity and care for ourselves and the planet we share.

In closing his message, Ambassador Kimani noted a Swahili proverb that translates to: "Peace and education are the guiding light on our path for a better tomorrow," inspiring collective efforts for a future marked by peace, understanding, and the transformative power of education.



(right to left) H.E. Martin Kimani, Ambassador of Kenya to the United Nations and Co-chair of the Group of Friends for Education and Lifelong Learning, addressing the audience, and Chernor Bah, Minister of Information and Civic Education of Sierra Leone (Screenshot from livestream recording)

The next presentation was from **Ms. Stefania Giannini**, Assistant Director General for Education at UNESCO, who joined the event virtually from UNESCO headquarters in Paris. She offered a perspective on the intersection of hate speech and conflict, with a reminder that all too often, what begins with words transforms into physical violence.

The effects of hatred and intolerance transcend mediums too. According to recent UNESCO data from 16 countries, more than two thirds of users have encountered hate online (Survey on the Impact of Online Disinformation and Hate Speech, 2023). The global stage is currently facing the consequences of several interconnected global conflicts, and in echoing the sentiments of previous speakers, Ms. Gianni reiterated how education often falls victim to these conflicts, with catastrophic implications on current and future generations.

Alluding to SDG Target 4.7 through the lens of value-transmission, she framed peace as a core value that depends on the actions of everyone. Using the word "empathy" – which we students welcome as a psychological term and which was also mentioned by Ambassador Kimani-- she said that empathy as well as critical thinking, and solidarity, are, in her view, the key ingredients for realizing this target.

Testimony

After the section of the program on opening remarks, **H.E. Chernor Bah**, Minister of Information and Civic Education of Sierra Leone, provided a Testimony speech. The Ministry partners with UNESCO to institutionalize the Recommendation on Education for Peace, Human Rights, and Sustainable Development.

In a powerful testimony (referred to later by several audience respondents in their remarks) Minister Bah shared a vivid story of his life in Sierra Leone; a childhood he described as "interrupted by the sounds of guns and scenes of chaos when civil war broke out" in 1991. The country witnessed widespread killing, forced displacement, and children dropping out of school. "I did not notice that the conflict in Sierra Leone was not as abrupt and senseless as we had been led to believe," he said, "but I now know that the war was caused by factors that are eerily similar to ones we confront today around the world", namely, rampant inequality, unemployment, rejection of science, a colonial heritage that institutionalizes corruption, and a society divided along ethnic lines.

In a nuanced link between education and psychology, Minister Bah explained how punishing dissent

and stifling critical debate gave rise to hate speech and fake propaganda of liberation. These became tools to recruit susceptible young people and give rise to extremist voices. Motivated by these threats, Mr. Bah and fellow activists sought lasting solutions, driven by the idea that inclusive education can not only address the root causes of war but build a foundation for upholding democratic values.

Sierra Leone has been acknowledged as a leader in education, with progress credited to President Julius Maada Bio's visionary leadership in allocating 22% of the national budget to education (Sierra Leone's President Julius Maada Bio Continues His Tour of the South, Emphasises the Importance of Human Capital Development to Nation Building, 2022). President Bio's "Free Quality Education" program is also exemplary in his "Human Capital Development" blueprint.

Significantly, the nation now sits as a Non-permanent Member of the United Nations Security Council, a position Minister Bah said will bring the country's experience of transformation from conflict to education-fueled development to the global stage. His account offered a shining example of the power of this solution; a simple yet persuasive plea to glean insights from Sierra Leone's story as a force for positive change.

Musical interlude

In a nod to the appreciation of education through art, attendees were then treated to a musical interlude by two violinists from The Juilliard School – Jinan Laurentia Woo and Edward Lee.

High-Level Panel: "Strengthening the foundations of peace through education"

The High-Level panel was moderated by Christopher Castle, Director of the Division for Peace and Sustainable Development at UNESCO. The panel convened experts to discuss how education can be strengthened as a conduit towards global peace and was divided into three segments:

- Segment 1: Concrete ways education serves as a prevention strategy

- Segment 2: Placing education at the center of global peacebuilding efforts

- Segment 3: Q&A with Member States and others gathered

Printed copies of two documents were shared on attendee's tables to complement the session, links to which are at the end of this report:

- The UNESCO Recommendation on Education for Peace, Human Rights and Sustainable Development: An explainer.
- Peace education in the 21st century: An essential strategy for building lasting peace.



Panelists (left to right): Mavic Cabrera Balleza, CEO and Founder, Global Network of Women Peace Workers; Charles North, Deputy CEO, Global Partnership for Education; Anthony Jenkins, Managing Director, International Institute on Peace Education; Christopher Castle, Director of the Division for Peace and Sustainable Development, UNESCO; Robert Jenkins, Director of Education and Adolescent Development, UNICEF; Julia Paulson, Dean, College of Education, University of Saskatchewan, Canada; Emeline O'Hara, Communications Manager, Dangerous Speech Project.

Segment 1: Concrete ways education serves as a prevention strategy

The moderator, Mr. Castle, addressed questions to each of the panelists.

Panelists for Segment 1 included:

- Charles North, Deputy CEO, Global Partnership for Education (GPE)

- Emeline O'Hara, Communications Manager, Dangerous Speech Project
- Mavic Cabrera Balleza, CEO and Founder, Global Network of Women Peace Workers
- Felipe Paullier, Assistant Secretary-General for Youth Affairs, United Nations

The first question was addressed to Mr. **Charles North**, Deputy CEO, Global Partnership for Education (GPE). GPE is a multi-stakeholder partnership and funding platform that aims to strengthen education systems in developing countries in order to increase the number of children who are in school and learning. Prior to joining GPE, Mr. North was a Foreign Service Officer with the US Agency for International Development (USAID) and was a senior advisor on Ukraine and Russia on secondment to the U.S. Institute of Peace.

Q. "Mr. North, you have worked for more than 17 years in countries all around the world on global strategy. And now at GPE you work to improve education outcomes for the world's most marginalized children. Our question to you is: how can we strengthen education systems to prevent conflicts?"

A. Mr. North framed his answer in the context of the current state of global conflict. He said that in the past decade, a distressing surge in violent crises has persisted, with 2022 marking the deadliest year since 1994 (Institute for Economics & Peace, 2023). And it is children who suffer the most: while they account for 30% of the world's population, they constitute 40% of all forcibly displaced people (Figures at a Glance | UNHCR US, 2022). In addition to the damage on physical and mental well-being, a devastating consequence of conflict is on children's education, profoundly impacting their hope for a better future. This is especially true for girls, who are 2.5 times more likely to be out of school in conflict-affected countries and are less likely to return (Adolescent Girls' Access to Education in Conflict-Affected Settings, n.d.)

But, he said, education can play a pivotal role in laying the foundation for peaceful societies. Strong education systems are the driving force for establishing social cohesion and political stability.

He explained that his organization – the Global Partnership for Education (GPE) – collaborates with the Institute for Economics and Peace to showcase how education and peace are mutually reinforcing. Their research shows that higher rates of primary and lower secondary school completion correlate positively with factors conducive to peaceful societies.

GPE, headquartered in Washington DC, USA, supports countries to transform their education systems by convening global and national partners, mobilizing funds, and catalyzing reforms to increase equitable access to learning. The organization also invests in the resilience of education systems, supporting their recovery from crisis and helping children stay in school during emergencies. Some of GPE's key strategies include accelerated funding within eight weeks during emergencies, support for refugees, combating violence in and around schools, and innovative financing. As an example, in the African country of Chad, Mr. North explained, GPE supports the building of classrooms, training of teachers, provision of school meals, and distribution of textbooks to create conditions for a more peaceful and integrated society.

"It is essential to direct financing where it is needed most," Mr. North said. In fact, 62% of GPE's implementation grants are allocated to partner countries affected by fragility and conflict (The Global Partnership for Education, 2024) and in 2022, GPE partners provided \$435 million in co-financing, matching grants for countries affected by fragility and conflict (Education in Conflict, Fragility and Emergencies | GPE, n.d.).

He added that as conflicts persist globally, education emerges as a critical pathway for lasting peace. Thus, he urged world leaders to prioritize it in forums like

the 2024 TSE Stocktaking and the “Summit of the Future” meeting coming up this September at the UN General Assembly.

Mr. North ended with a call for collective action to fund education systems and restore hope and dignity for the world's most vulnerable children.

The next question from the moderator was addressed to **Ms. Emeline O'Hara**, Communications Manager, Dangerous Speech Project. The Dangerous Speech Project studies speech that inspires violence between groups of people with the goal of finding ways to mitigate this while protecting freedom of expression. The organization also researches effective responses to harmful speech and advises companies on their policies. In addition to advocacy, Ms. O'Hara is also an actress and filmmaker.

Q. “Ms. O'Hara, I believe you have over 10 years of experience in social justice, organizing, and advocacy. At the Dangerous Speech Project your work is centered around educating diverse audiences about the spread hate speech that inspires violence and how to prevent it. So can you please speak to what concrete ways education can help halt the spread of hate speech and promote new, reasonable forms of global digital citizenship?”

A. Ms. O'Hara presented three tangible ways that education can help the spread of hate speech and promote responsible global digital citizenship.

- Foster “education with participation”: People need to be invited to actively engage in a way that helps them identify hate speech within their contexts and collectively reject it. “That way,” she said, “they can internalize behavior norms.” Suppressing speech is often the chosen route, offering a quick and easy alternative to education. But censorship is not conducive to internalizing anti-hate norms and it unintentionally breeds and reinforces in-groups.
- Identify the difference between two types of speech – dangerous speech and hate speech: Hate speech misses “the most powerful emotion for turning groups of people against each other, which is fear,” she warned. Ill-intentioned leaders use the

neurobiological power of fear and deceptive language to strengthen their authority. The Dangerous Speech Project has found striking linguistic similarities across various cases, spanning cultures and languages, in patterns they call hallmarks. Dangerous speech is defined by them as “rhetoric or other forms of expression that convince people to fear other people so much that they become willing to condone or commit violence against them” (Dangerous Speech: A Practical Guide, 2018). But what can be done about these findings? Ms. O'Hara explained that the best way to make dangerous speech less powerful is to educate people on how to identify it and to understand that it is a tool for manipulating them (which will make them less likely to be convinced by it).

- Educate on how to respond to both types of speech: Ms. O'Hara shared the concept of counter speech, a tactical and powerful tool for addressing hate directly, particularly in online forums. Counter speakers use a variety of tactics to educate people and turn them against hate speech. “They are stern examples of responsible global digital citizens,” she said, “and their firsthand knowledge is vital for education on how to help halt the spread of hate speech”. The technique leverages the viral nature of online trends to encourage more counter speech and provide solidarity to the original target of the hate.

She shared two memorable examples:

1. Former FC Barcelona soccer player, Dani Alves, disrupted a racist trend of throwing bananas at black soccer players in 2014. “When someone threw a banana at him and in the stands, he grabbed it, and in one graceful motion, peeled it took a bite and give a powerful corner kick,” she explained. The trend quickly spread online through photos and the hashtag #SomosTodosMacacos.
2. Mina Dennert, a Swedish woman began using the hashtag #jagarhar (meaning “I am here”) in response to growing anti-immigrant rhetoric online. Since 2016, the hashtag has grown exponentially, with the

original Swedish group now boasting 70,000 members and with several similar groups popping up in Europe and Asia.

The power of counter speech is twofold she said: it signals to others that collective help is needed, and it sends the message that hateful language is not an acceptable norm.

The next question from the moderator was directed to Ms. **Mavic Cabrera Balleza**, CEO and Founder, Global Network of Women Peace Workers (GNWP), which is a coalition of over 100 women's organizations from countries that are experiencing humanitarian crises or conflict. GNWP is a leader in the global movement for women's rights, gender equality, and sustainable peace. Ms. Cabrera pioneered the Localization of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women Peace and Security (WPS).

Q. "Ms. Cabrera, your work has taken you all around the world. You help localize national action plans on women, peace and security, and gender sensitive humanitarian action to ensure they respond to the needs of local communities and marginalized groups. So my question to you is: in your view, what is the role of the teacher-educator and peacemaker; any scalable and replicable good practices from the non-formal education sector you can share with us?"

A. Ms. Cabrera Balleza begun by providing context on the Global Network of Women Peace Workers' mission, which brings together key actors in local communities – places directly affected by violent crisis – to localize the UN Security Council Resolutions on Women, Peace and Security, and in synergy with the Youth, Peace and Security resolutions. Their workshops include a diverse range of participants: mayors, council leaders, tribal and indigenous leaders, grassroots women's rights organizations, youth groups, and educators.

Teachers (both formal and non-formal) play a crucial role in raising awareness about resolutions by translating them into practical solutions. Involving national leaders, particularly ministries of education, is critical to influencing national policies and institutionalizing support. The role of the teacher-educator

and peacemaker can be described in 3 ways, she said, with the aims to:

- Introduce knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values of peace.
- Create space for discussion of diverse perspectives; giving learners the tools to critically examine issues.
- Model and use the skills of dialogue and empathy.

To be effective as a teacher of peace, Ms. Cabrera emphasized, the media must match the message. In other words, educators must lead their lives in accordance with the values they impart.

Other important attributes she mentioned were: being intentional agents of a culture of peace, being motivated by service and mission, skilled at communication and conflict resolution, and inspiring of alternative possibilities for the future.

In terms of scalable good practices, Ms. Cabrera cited two examples:

- Literacy and numeracy classes conducted by the Young Women Leaders for Peace in Bangladesh's Rohingya refugee camp (the largest in the world). Efforts have focused not only on reading and writing, but also on infusing concepts of peace; in particular, ideas that have worked well in other parts of the world as well as gender perspectives.
- Work in villages in North-Kivu in the Democratic Republic of Congo where they teach girls and women who do not have the opportunity to go to school. Here, too, their teachings are based on gender perspectives.

Ms. Cabrera expressed her hope that initiatives like these will continue to be supported by the international community.



Mavic Cabrera Balleza, CEO and Founder, Global Network of Women Peace Workers addressing the audience (Screenshot from livestream recording)

Before continuing to the next panel, **Felipe Paullier**, UN Assistant Secretary General for Youth Affairs, shared some words in a pre-recorded video message. Mr. Paullier described this year's focus on "Learning for Lasting Peace" as a "loud and clear call to invest in and to prioritize quality education".

He referenced the 2022 Youth Declaration on Transforming Education, which he called a clear outline for "the way forward". The Declaration is a call for meaningful youth engagement in policy and decision-making so young people can engage as partners – not only beneficiaries – in decisions around education reform. He emphasized a demand for immediate action and urged the worldwide community to invest in education to secure a future free of insecurity and discrimination.

Segment 2: Placing education at the center of global peacebuilding efforts

Panelists for Segment 2 included:

- **Robert Jenkins**, Director of Education and Adolescent Development, UNICEF
- **Julia Paulson**, Dean, College of Education, University of Saskatchewan, Canada
- **Anthony Jenkins**, Managing Director, International Institute on Peace Education

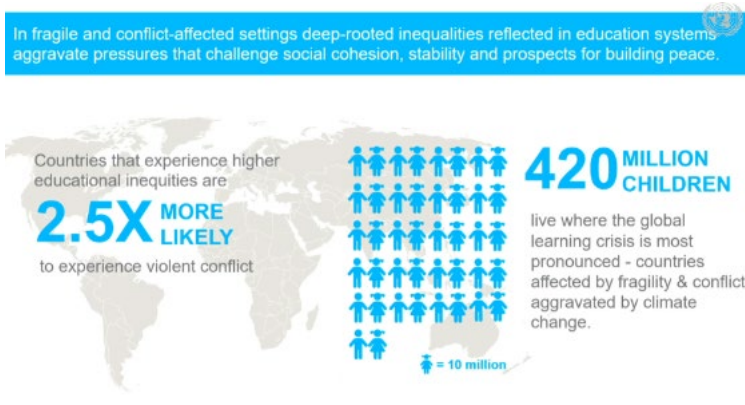
Continuing in his role as moderator, UNESCO's Director of the Division for Peace and Sustainable Development Christopher Castle, addressed the first question to Robert Jenkins, Director of Education and Adolescent Development, UNICEF. UNICEF is an agency of the United Nations responsible for providing humanitarian and developmental aid to children worldwide. Mr. Jenkins joined UNICEF in 1995 and has experience in international development and humanitarian programming in Africa, Asia and the Middle East.

Q. "Mr. Robert Jenkins, your career spans over 30 years of experience in international development and humanitarian programs, and you're currently the Director of Education (at UNICEF). Would you please tell us why it is important to leave no one behind in the process, and why girls' education in particular is important to peacebuilding?"

A. Mr. Robert Jenkins began with a refreshingly direct angle. "I'm thinking there isn't anyone in this room who is not convinced of the importance of education; the importance of the link between education and peace building," he said. "So, I really appreciate us getting concrete." While language is necessary to move policy forward, he noted, there needs to be emphasis on tangible action.

He shared the sentiment of prior panelists in saying that the world is "nowhere near where we thought we would be at this point" and highlighted this point by stating that over two thirds of 10-year-olds in low- and middle- income countries are unable to read and comprehend simple stories (Global Annual Results Report 2022 Goal Area 2, n.d.). Mr. Jenkins used his speech to present practical ideas for advocacy.

To describe the link between inequity and conflict, he shared the following slide:



Slide shown by Mr. Robert Jenkins about the number of children living in regions where the global learning crisis is most pronounced (Screenshot from livestream recording)

In line with the theme of this event, he said that “education can be a great tool and influence for peace.”

However, Mr. Jenkins cautioned that when education is provided inequitably or inadequately, it may encourage or escalate further conflict, resulting in the opposite effect. It is therefore imperative that inequities be addressed and that learning opportunities are provided in a way that promotes peace.

Mr. Jenkins made five key points:

- “Globally we are failing; all of us at the global level”: He reiterated the bleak state of worldwide education but acknowledged some “amazing bright lights”; those examples of bold decision-making that have resulted in measurable change, as in the case of Sierra Leone.
- UNICEF’s comparative advantage lies in large operational capacity at the country level: Nearly 90% of staff is in the field across 124 country offices (Work for UNICEF | UNICEF, n.d.), which allows for a niche approach in engaging with communities on the ground.
- Education has the potential to address the underlying causes of conflict, and “there are some very real reasons why that’s the case” including: a focus on life skills (transferrable skills that enable one to

negotiate, communicate, and achieve a sense of safety). These skills correlate with more peaceful and successful communities.

- The importance of supporting children in humanitarian situations prevails as a pressing need: “It continues to be a struggle for us to convince the broader humanitarian community that indeed investing in learning in crisis is absolutely critical.” Mr. Jenkins shared. While a sense of safety is an abstract concept, Mr. Jenkins alluded to measurements and incidents of conflict as critical.

• Lastly, he shared a pitch for Safe to Learn: a multi-organization coalition with a mandate to make learning safe, and he made a plea to bring others into the conversation so that another International Day of Education doesn’t happen under the same circumstances.



Slide shown by Mr. Jenkins about how UNICEF supports children in humanitarian situations (Screenshot from livestream recording)

The next question was directed by the moderator to Ms. **Julia Paulson**, Dean of the College of Education in the University of Saskatchewan, Canada. Concurrently a tenured professor in the College’s Department of Educational Foundations, Ms. Paulson’s research explores the relationships between peace, conflict and education, with a focus on teaching about injustice and violence, memory studies and transitional justice.

Q. “I’d like to turn now to Julia Paulson, who is the Dean in the College of Education at the University of Saskatchewan (Canada), where you lead the education,

justice, and memory network (EdJAM). So, Julia, my question to you is: how does education help heal from trauma and shocks linked to violent pasts?

A. Ms. Paulson said that reparative education offers hope for healing and transformation. Through her work at the Education, Justice and Memory Network (EdJAM) – a network spanning 24 countries for the development of creative approaches to teaching about violent pasts – Ms. Paulson describes the approach to peace education as one that is grounded in the idea of reparative pedagogy. This method acknowledges past injustices, seeks to restore relationships, and actively involves learners in confronting the perpetuation of inequalities and injustices from historical legacies.

She described the three characteristics of reparative pedagogies:

- They are dignifying and ensure representation on one's own terms. In other words, "they humanize and give historical agency to individuals and groups whose historical narratives have been excluded from dominant histories or recounted solely through lenses of victimhood and suffering," she stated.
- They are truth-telling and inclusive of multiple perspectives. They seek to understand and address historical injustices and their present-day legacies. In Ms. Paulson's view, acknowledging the right to truth is pivotal to the connection between peace education and transitional justice processes.
- They are creative and learn from artistic responses to conflict. Artistic co-creation provides a basis for dialogue and is a catalyst for mutual understanding. In this way, commitment to creativity captures the essence of pedagogy as based in relationships and constructive engagement – an aspect sometimes overlooked by outcome-centric educational approaches.

Ms. Paulson referred to an upcoming UNESCO policy guide on addressing violent pasts through education that will be published later this year. It details some practical suggestions for teaching history in a way that is grounded in truth while still acknowledging

diversity of experiences and interpretations and encouraging dialogue.

The next question posed by the moderator was directed to **Anthony Jenkins**, Managing Director, International Institute on Peace Education (IIPE), which facilitates exchanges of theory and practical experiences in teaching peace education and operates as an applied peace education laboratory. Mr. Jenkins has experience directing and designing peacebuilding and educational programs and is currently a Lecturer in the Program on Justice and Peace Studies at Georgetown University.

Q. "Mr. Tony Jenkins, you're an expert in peace education. So Tony, what are some of the persistent challenges in peace education and how best can we address them?"

A. Mr. Tony Jenkins emphasized the significance of this event's theme that goes beyond education as the provision of knowledge, to being a channel for sustainable peace. He brought the audience's attention to a flyer on their tables, which contained a link to a UNESCO publication to which he recently contributed: "Peace education in the 21st century: an essential strategy for building lasting peace" which draws on the current understandings, threats, and opportunities of peace education, and can be found in the Resources section at the end of this report (UNESCO, 2024).

He then spoke about a campaign launched during his role as coordinator for the Global Campaign for Peace Education. This effort shared stories of educational interventions that were operating behind the scenes of peace processes. While diplomatic discussion is essential to establishing peace treaties, "these outcomes would not likely be possible without the years of sustained efforts of both formal and non-formal citizens and educators working to capacitate learners with the knowledge, and the skills, and the capacities, and the attitudes, and the values necessary to both prevent violence, transform conflict, and also to envision and create the conditions conducive to peace", he remarked.

The persistent challenges peace educators face fall into three categories, Mr. Jenkins explained:

- **Political:** In some contexts, peace education may present a threat to status quo and political agendas. “Throughout history”, he said, “education has been utilized to foster xenophobic attitudes towards perceived others, and in conflict it often imbues values of militarism, which is seen as necessary to maintaining efforts to support for war”. A major hurdle is therefore the normalization of violence resulting from educational agendas premised on these values. While there is no simple fix to political problems, Mr. Jenkins quipped that “we might actually be better off approaching the task of transforming institutions as teachers, and not as politicians” by engaging in politics in a learning mode. He compared institutional learning to human learning – a process that is more successful when elicited from within – and shared an anecdote about an experience in Colombia, where facilitators invited Ministry of Education officials to engage in creative learning activities, like contemplative coloring and a trust walk. This experience, he says, was the most transformative political meeting of his life.

- **Psychological:** Trauma presents great challenges to learning and can lead to persistent cycles of victim-aggressor yet remains inadequately addressed in peace education. Mr. Jenkins stressed the need for research and investment in trauma-informed learning. He also acknowledged the realities of a world experiencing converging crises whose complexity breeds apathy and anxiety. Further, he underscored the need to contend with these challenges by finding ways to foster skills of the imagination and capacity for future thinking.

- **Financial:** Perhaps the most obvious hurdle is the underfunding of peace education, but this is one Mr. Jenkins believes we have the most chance to overcome. The 2023 Global Peace Index found that expenditures on peacebuilding and peacekeeping total just \$34.1 billion in 2022, which is about 0.4% of global military spending (A Measure of Peace: Key Findings from the 2023 Global Peace Index, 2023). The Call to Action, he said, is to now find ways to

increase investment and take a long-term view. He added that the recent adoption of the Recommendation on Education for Peace, Human Rights, and Sustainable Development may provide a source of hope that investments soon will come.



Anthony Jenkins, Managing Director, International Institute on Peace Education addressing the audience (Screenshot from livestream recording)

Segment 3: “Q&A with Member States”

Following the two panels, the floor was opened to the audience for comments which led to an extensive hour-long Q&A session.

Christopher Castle, Director of the Division for Peace and Sustainable Development at UNESCO, continued as moderator. He opened the Q and A, as traditionally is done at such UN events, soliciting questions for the panelists first from representatives of Member States.

The Ambassador from the Netherlands to ECOSOC, Ms. Katja Lasseur, addressed a question to all the members of the panel and prefaced it with a statement on behalf of her country. She said:

Q. *“The Kingdom of the Netherlands acknowledges that SDG 4 is key for the success of The 2030 Agenda in its entirety. Qualitative and accessible education for all enables poverty reduction, fairer work, reduced inequalities, improved health, and a more sustainable and peaceful world. We believe that education is a fundamental right and a major catalyst for social and economic development. Through vocational and higher education, and connecting education and work*

students, are offered the necessary skills that help them up obtain decent work and career that fits their education. Moreover, without education and involving our youth in global citizenship and fundamental values, a peaceful future will not be possible. For the Netherlands, fundamental values such as human rights, freedom of expression, gender equality, and the rights of LGBT persons should be central in education, which is why the Netherlands fully supports the UNESCO 1974 Recommendation concerning education for international understanding, cooperation, and peace and education relating to human rights and fundamental freedoms. Implementation of this Recommendation will support member states in educating their youth towards critical and socially committed citizens. We should aim to integrate this in our follow up actions to the Transforming Education Summit; working together to watch the Summit of the Future and the World Social Summit in which education should be central. I would like to ask panelists if they could share from their experience how gender transformative education can make a meaningful contribution to lasting world peace."

A. Mr. Castle thanked Ambassador Lasseur for her statement about the importance of LGBTQ learners. Panelist Ms. Mavic Cabrera Balleza then provided her perspective on the question. She referenced the Women, Peace and Security resolutions, noting that "all ten of them highlight women's participation in decision making and leadership on international peace and security" and this is "central to the success of all our efforts, here in the UN, at the regional level, and at the national and local levels, in addressing issues of conflicts and crisis". She also explained that 107 Member States (55%) have adopted National Action Plans (NAP) on Women, Peace and Security. More specifically, in 2004 the United Nations Security Council "encouraged national-level implementation of UNSCR 1325, the landmark resolution of the Women, Peace and Security Agenda, including through National Action Plans (NAP) to implement the four pillars of the resolution." (1325 National Action Plans – an Initiative of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, n.d.).

Panelist Ms. Mavic then weighed in, saying that "there's no shortage in policies, [rather,] the shortage

is in the implementation," emphasizing the gap between policy formulation and actual execution. She emphasized that while resolutions are transformative in theory, "they will remain commitment on paper until implementation on the ground actually happens." She also lamented the absence of women's voices in formal peace decision-making processes, highlighting the potential for greater success if peace negotiations "equally and meaningfully involved women."

The next question to the panel was posed by a man who identified himself as from University College, London, whose research focuses on promoting global citizenship within higher education. He referred to the UNESCO Recommendation on Education for Peace, Human Rights and Sustainable Development], saying that:

Q. My research concern is about how to implement [it] at the school level, because teachers from different disciplines (for example, English, or Language, or Mathematics) [...] maybe see [the Recommendation] as their particular subject's aim [...]. So, he asked, "Was this particular Recommendation aimed for teachers or for the specific disciplines to implement?"

Mr. Castle began his answer to this question by acknowledging the relative recency of the "global citizenship education" concept. He explained that the idea took shape under The Global Education First Initiative (GEFI), launched in 2012 under previous UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon. As a result, "It's taking a little bit of time for Member States and ministries of education, in particular, to sort of understand what does that mean; to move beyond our traditional civics education classes and have a dimension that goes beyond building good national citizens, to citizens who are equipped to consider how we can tackle the challenges of the 21st century, which very often transcend borders."

He noted that developing global citizenship education requires service teacher training to better equip educators to take on this responsibility. He also stated that while the original 1974 Recommendation "was very progressive", the revision incorporates a number

of new “notions, approaches, and concepts”, calling it “an amazing achievement”. Some examples he listed were the acknowledgement of gender equality and gender transformative education, education for sustainable development, and comprehensive sexuality education, noting the particular importance of this last one being agreed upon without objection by all Member States. He concluded by saying schools must set the example for peaceful, safe learning environments as well.

Mr. **Robert Jenkins** then offered UNICEF’s perspective on excellent global citizenship education from an on-the-ground programmatic standpoint. He listed five key criteria. In his view, the initiative must be:

- **Dynamic:** it provides an array of ways for children to learn and engage.
- **Context specific:** it is relevant to the learner’s challenges and reality.
- **Inclusive:** it proactively addresses marginalization.
- **Comprehensive:** it involves a child’s many needs; including a sense of safety.
- **Action-oriented:** (perhaps most importantly, he said) it provides motivation to act and make a difference in one’s community.

Panelist Ms. **Cabrera** noted gender equality and education as a key highlight of the revised Recommendation and called on her fellow civil society actors to monitor how these recommendations are implemented by Member States, particularly at the national and local levels, offering her partnership and support in working with all stakeholders, including the private sector.

Mr. Castle concluded the answers by emphasizing the need for action to ensure the implementation of the Recommendation. He highlighted the importance of accountability and welcomed contributions to an Implementation Guide currently in the works.

The next question to the panel was posed by a woman who identified herself as the Secretary of the

United Nations Association (UNA-USA) of the Northern New Jersey chapter and a professor at William Patterson University.

Q. *“I hear a common topic where we hear there are a lot of programs; that there’s just a lack of implementation. How can we engage our community and our local leaders, as well as our students to help the initiatives of UNESCO?”*

Mr. **Castle** acknowledged that the “different types of education” (citing reparative education, education for sustainable development, global citizenship education, and health education as examples) has, at times, been overwhelming for the Member States, noting that the revised Recommendation has been successful in connecting the various types of education and “bring[ing] things together in a way that doesn’t overwhelm”.

He reiterated the importance of participation, and of viewing children and young people “not just as beneficiaries, but also active participants in the education that they demand”. He concluded by acknowledging the challenges of delivering quality education but emphasized the importance of mainlining focus, passion, and commitment so that every child can realize their right to education and lifelong learning.

Panelist Ms. **Julia Paulson** weighed in, expressing the value of connecting teachers and civil society organizations through networks and platforms to share their work and enable learning from each other’s deep expertise and pedagogical methods. She also emphasized the need for further funding and support, particularly in dangerous contexts.

The next question to the panel was asked by an SDG Youth and Student Network Member. He shared his experience of fleeing Afghanistan in 2021.

Q. *“I’m an SDG youth and student network member. I also run a nonprofit organization. I fled Afghanistan after the collapse, to Canada [...] While we celebrate the progress of education all over the world, there are still millions of girls and women in Afghanistan who are denied education [...] and day by day the restrictions and limitations have increased. How can we ensure that the*

international community effectively supports the inclusion of education for young women and girls in Afghanistan? And how can we improve access and quality of education for Afghan women, despite all the challenges that are happening on the ground?"

Mr. **Charles North** shared his concern for the situation in Afghanistan and acknowledged the difficulty in taking action on the ground. "Nonetheless," he said, "the Global Partnership for Education is working with our partners on the ground, including UNICEF, the Aga Khan Foundation, Save the Children and others," stating that "\$130 million in programming has been approved and is being implemented in Afghanistan." The challenge ahead, he said, is strategizing how to move forward, particularly for children at the secondary school level. "The challenge with the Taliban's policies and the increasing restrictions on what can be done is something we are continually facing," he stated. The approach is to find innovative ways to reach learners, but the key to enacting progress, he said, is advocating for a change in policy.

Mr. Robert Jenkins agreed that "It's very much a strong partnership, engaging at all levels". He explained that UNICEF has 13 offices and 400 staff members working across Afghanistan, taking advantage of opportunities available to enable children to continue to learn "in such a challenging environment," while engaging globally at all levels to advocate for policy change.

Ms. Cabrera added that the Taliban have adopted more than 80 decrees "that strip women's human rights, including stopping all projects on mental health and mental health support" since their 2021 takeover, essentially establishing a "gender apartheid" as the system of governance. Ms. Cabrera highlighted the problematic proposition of engaging with the Taliban without accountability, as suggested in an independent assessment report following the UN Security Council report 2679 on the renewal of the UN Special Political Mission in Afghanistan (Security Council Extends Mandate of Special Political Mission in Afghanistan, Requests Independent Assessment of In-Country Efforts, Adopting Two Texts | UN Press, n.d.). She emphasized the importance of

adherence to international human rights laws, particularly regarding women's and girls' rights to education. Ms. Cabrera called for universal support in demanding that engagement with the Taliban be contingent upon their full commitment to respecting these rights and all other international human rights laws.

The next question to the panel was asked by Dr. Judy Kuriansky, who is a Professor of Psychology and Education at Teachers College, Columbia University adjunct faculty, Advisor to the Mission of Sierra Leone to the United Nations, and representative of the International Association of Applied Psychology, an NGO in consultative status with the UN ECOSOC. Dr. Kuriansky framed her question in three parts corresponding to three speakers, reflecting three of her roles.

Dr. Kuriansky's first question was addressed to Ms. Emeline O'Hara, in her role as a journalist.

Q. *"The example that you, Miss O'Hara, gave about the bananas was very captivating. I'm also a journalist. So, how are you going to get that message out to a lot of people? Because kids listen to kinds of stories and from role models like that."*

Ms. O'Hara shared that this question goes to the heart of her passion on this topic and that she welcomed the question because she really wanted to elaborate about this point. She then explained that she is an actor and filmmaker outside of working for the Dangerous Speech Project (DSP). "I love stories," she said, "they really are a source of liberation for a lot of people". She emphasized the importance of sharing stories, highlighting the abundance of narratives within people, and stressed the significance of children seeing themselves represented in stories and empowered through education. Additionally, she encouraged following the DSP on social media for more information.

Dr. Kuriansky then addressed her second question to Minister Chernor Bah, in her role as Advisor to the Mission of Sierra Leone to the UN, as well as her knowing Mr. Bah for many years, and her knowing that he is serving in the administration of Sierra

Leone President Julius Maada Bio that is dedicated to education – evident in the President’s appointment by the Secretary General to the Education Summit, advances he has accomplished for education in Sierra Leone, and that education – as well as health – are part of the President’s impressive development plan for the country.

Q. “Minister Bah, you gave a very captivating story about your own experience as a child growing up in a country in conflict, that led to your understanding of the importance of education. So, I ask you, how are you going to get that same message to our younger children in Sierra Leone, in West Africa, and around the world?”

Minister Bah reiterated Sierra Leone’s focus in “doubling down on education; not just education, but the type of education” that is imparted. He noted that one of the Ministry of Civic Education’s main priorities is “to cultivate a true sense of national identity in Sierra Leone”, a difficult task when “everything we’ve been taught is from a distinctly colonial narrative where we are not the center of the story”, he added. Minister Bah emphasized the importance of strengthening national cohesion in building identity.

He concluded this answer by emphasizing the crucial role of action in addressing issues like climate change, digital literacy, and other development challenges. He also praised Sierra Leone’s President Bio’s clear vision and the establishment of a new Ministry for Civic Education to drive these efforts, expressing enthusiasm for collaboration with UNESCO.

Her question to Minister Bah led others in the session to also show appreciation for and interest in Minister Bah’s story and comments.

Dr. Kuriansky’s third question was addressed to UNICEF’s Mr. Robert Jenkins.

Q. My third question comes from my academic and advocacy hat about mental health, as a professor of Psychology and Education at Columbia University, Teachers College – my students are here, spread around the room, from my course on “Psychology and the United Nations” which looks at mental health in the nexus of the SDGs -- and as an advocate about mental health

and wellbeing for 20+ years at the UN here as a representative of the International Association of Applied Psychology. So, my third and last question is to Robert Jenkins, whom I was so glad to see showed, on one of his slides, the words “mental health and psychosocial support” (MHPSS) – that we know UNICEF considers an incredibly important issue for youth. So, I ask you: Can you elaborate, please, on this issue of how mental health and psychosocial support is going to get this agenda forward today?”

A. Mr. Robert Jenkins appreciated the question and its importance to UNICEF, and commended the significant development made in recent years regarding the increased recognition of mental health and psychosocial support. He credited this progress to the impact of COVID-19 on the role of education in children’s wellbeing. The world increasingly appreciates the link between learning and mental health, he said, noting there are examples at scale of its successful implementation at the classroom level.

The next question came from Tom Pugh, professional musician and co-founder of Plugged In Band, a non-profit organization that engages musicians of all skill levels through music education, performance, and community and charitable involvement. One of Plugged In Band’s projects, Peace Tracks, is a cross-cultural collaborative music effort for high-school aged children (Meet the Team, n.d.). He asked:

Q. “A general question to all: where does arts education fit in with the initiative? We are a nonprofit music program, which has now had international engagement, thanks to COVID. [We have] now received a grant from the State Department until 2025 to do a partner program with schools in the United States and schools in the MENA region. We currently have about 180 students. And when we talk about the education in conflict regions, a week before the difficulty in Israel and the Palestinian territories – one of our schools is in Ramallah – and a week before we started our term, well, what do you know, we’re right in the middle of that now. But it just seems to me that arts can be a way of engagement and partnership across international lines that really is unmatched. The individual initiatives are incredibly important, literacy and all the fundamental parts of

education. However, nothing can engage people across these border lines like arts. And I just wondered if anybody had opinions on that.”

A. Ms. Paulson enthusiastically agreed and praised the innovative use of arts by teachers and civil society organizations within the EdJAM network. She highlighted various artistic forms they have used, including muralism, embroidery, music, song, and filmmaking, emphasizing the sharing of methodologies across the network. She deemed the integration of arts essential to creating positive outcomes for the future, stating, “The arts enable this crucial space for processing difficult histories, for responding, for doing something with the emotional weight of that learning, and creating something productive [...] that transcends the verbal.”

Mr. Castle contributed to the answer by providing an update on UNESCO’s latest work in the arts and culture space. The Framework for Culture and Arts Education “is meant to bolster a global consensus around the nexus between culture and education, fostering integrated policies and actions for the inclusive and holistic development of individuals and societies” (A Framework for Culture and Arts Education, 2024). The Framework, the draft for which can be found on UNESCO’s website, is expected to be endorsed by Member States at the World Conference on Culture and Arts Education, a ministerial conference that will take place 2024 in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates (A Framework for Culture and Arts Education, 2024).

David Pedrosa, representing the Permanent Mission of Peru to the United Nations, addressed the next question to Ms. Emeline O’Hara.

Q. “I would like to refer to what has been said about the importance of fighting against hate speech and the role of education in that purpose, and the example of #SomosTodosMacacos which is very well known, if you like soccer, like me. Regarding my country, we are a multicultural nation with over 55 indigenous peoples [...] And because of that, we have implemented intercultural and multilingual education. We believe this approach can help embrace linguistic and cultural diversity, leading to greater unity and social harmony, and therefore

it could undermine the foundation of hate speech by replacing ignorance, which is the basis for this with understanding. So, how can we apply this approach, and intercultural and multilingual education programs, to effectively contribute to combating hate speech on a global scale as a tool to reduce hate and foster lasting peace, which is the ultimate goal here.”

A. Ms. O’Hara expressed that while it might sound counterintuitive, implementing education globally must start within an individual’s personal and communal context. “That’s another reason why participatory education is so important,” she said. She stressed the necessity for everyone in the community to be involved, as excluding voices leads to unheard perspectives, and added that it is good practice for a message “from the person who needs to say it the most”.

Mr. Castle added that in 2023, UNESCO released a publication titled “Addressing hate speech through education: A guide for policy makers”. Designed as a practical reference for addressing hate speech through education, the document offers concrete recommendations and best practices on how to create safe learning environments and help counter harmful, discriminatory, and violent narratives (UNESCO, 2023).

The next question was asked by Julia, a member of the SDG4 Youth and Student Network, an inclusive and representative platform of youth and student groups designed to ensure their meaningful participation in shaping global education policies (A Framework for Culture and Arts Education, 2024).

Q. My name is Julia and I have a nonprofit surrounding autism and neurodiversity advocacy and I am also on the autism spectrum. I’m also a member of the SDG4 Youth and Student Network with UNESCO. And my question is: with autism currently at rates of 1 in 36 children in the United States and growing worldwide, how are you all and the UNESCO Recommendation addressing the growing need for neurodiversity initiatives within education, to ensure that every child has an accessible and peaceful education worldwide?

A. Mr. Castle referenced the revised Recommendation on Education for Peace, Human Rights and Sustainable Development, which he described as grounded in UNESCO's guidelines on inclusion in education. He stressed that pedagogies and assessments should be supportive, adaptive, and attentive to the needs of each learner.

Next, attendee Jonathan Weisner, Executive Director of the Helping Africa Foundation and former Chair of the International Rescue Committee (IRC) addressed two questions to Minister Bah and to the broader panel, respectively.

Q. My first question really is to the honorable Minister because of my somewhat parochial interest in the fact that I work in neighboring Ghana and Liberia. Technology is at the core of 21st century education and given the fact that you've committed vast resources, 22% of your country's budget education, how are you addressing the technology gap in terms of providing access to rural areas (specifically that don't have access to internet)?

The second question is more broadly to the entire panel and speaks to the theme of this particular meeting. And given the fact that climate change is at the core of many of the disruptions that are occurring today and given the fact that most of those countries really can't do much in terms of mitigation, how is education addressing adaptation to climate change (because adaptation is at the core of how we're going to bring peace to education)?

A. Minister Bah answered by emphasizing the importance of radical inclusion, particularly its role in removing barriers to digital access. He highlighted recent initiatives taking place in Sierra Leone, such as the appointment of a new Minister for Communications, Technology and Innovation, 32-year-old Minister Salima Monorma Bah. He said her agenda focuses on the effective use of technology and on ensuring rural communities are included in the digital revolution. Minister Bah also added that Sierra Leone's government has significantly increased female representation, with close to 40% of cabinet positions now held by women (AYV News, 2023).

Mr. North reiterated the impact of climate change on education, stating "every year, 40 million children miss out on school because of climate related events" (Wood, 2023). Education, he said, plays a role in influencing public awareness of climate change and can empower communities to become more resilient to it. In addition to gaining adaptive skills, society can also prepare for the challenges posed by climate change through proactive measures. He referenced the Climate Smart Education Initiative, a collaboration between the Global Partnership for Education (GPE), UNESCO, and Save the Children that seeks to enhance countries' capacities to mainstream environmental sustainability into education sector strategies, with 22 countries accessing support over the next 2 years (Technical Assistance Initiatives | Global Partnership for Education, n.d.). Another partnership, he stated, is with the Green Climate Fund on pilot programs that co-invest in countries supportive of the transition to climate-smart education. Ending on an optimistic note, he expressed a vision for further expansion and engagement, stating, "We expect that these highlights are just the beginning. We're planning to roll this out to many more countries, with many more partners engaged in this process."

Mr. Robert Jenkins offered a perspective that the education sector is "waking up way too late" to the issue of climate change adaptation. He made reference to the 2023 United Nations Conference on Climate Change (COP28), which provided a platform for securing commitments and actions from countries regarding climate change education (Climate Change Education at COP28, 2023), noting four criteria found to be successful in leveraging education systems to promote adaptation:

- Curriculum change: enabling teachers to convey the importance of climate change to their students.
- Action: providing platforms for children to engage further on their learnings.
- Expenditure: investing in infrastructure to protect schools against the effects of climate related events.
- Advocacy: learning how to demand policy change from decision-makers and school systems reaching a critical mass point of demand for change.

Mr. Castle highlighted the Greening Education Partnership, a global initiative that seeks to “prepare learners with the knowledge, skills, values, and attitudes to tackle climate change and promote sustainable development”, and involves governments, inter-governmental organizations, civil society, youth, academia, and the private sector (Greening Education Partnership, 2022). He emphasized the program’s four pillars – greening schools, curriculum, teacher training, and communities – and encouraged the audience to explore the partnership’s website for more information on how to get involved in supporting efforts for greener education.

Attendee Lily Liu, who identified herself as Head of Partnership at UNESCO International Institute of Higher Education, addressed the next question to the panel.

Q. *“For peace education – as one of the many skills that are equally important for students – how should we move from just ‘transforming learning for peace’ to ‘delivering teacher education’? [...] What will be some effective strategies to make sure that peace can stand in a way that’s not competing with other skills, but rather be contributive. And [how can we make sure] teachers [can] lead by example?”*

Mr. Tony Jenkins began his answer by acknowledging the “tremendous burden” placed on educators to be frontline peacebuilders and agents of change. “One thing we obviously know,” he said, “is that sustainable curricular change is not possible without accompanying it with the mandates for teacher training and preparation.” In his view, this involves not only training in content knowledge but also embracing various transformative pedagogies. Addressing the point about competing priorities, he encouraged applying the notion of peace through a broad lens through which educators identify intersections with traditional subjects, as a motivating purpose that drives the way they approach the work.

Attendee Nayon Kim, who said she is a student at Ewha Womans University, South Korea, addressed the last question to the panel.

Q. *“I also share a keen interest in human rights and peacebuilding. I would like to pose a general question regarding peace and human rights and education. International organizations like UNESCO and the UN set goals such as the SDGs to address crucial issues faced by our society, such as economic inequality or educational inequality. However, I believe that to resolve these issues, there needs to be a change in the awareness and actions of individuals. So, I’m curious about what efforts UNESCO considers the most crucial in influencing individuals’ awareness, and also, what they find the most essential in exerting influence on people to drive this change.”*

Mr. Castle replied that in his view, critical thinking skills enable learners to meet the world’s toughest challenges and are the most essential ingredient for influencing change. Ms. O’Hara strongly agreed and added critical literacy as a crucial skill in identifying hate speech, understanding how violence operates, and articulating one’s lived experience.

In a broad statement applicable to several of the questions asked, Mr. Tony Jenkins mentioned the issue of policy implementation by stressing the importance of forming increased partnerships with the non-formal sector. Mitigating the challenge of imparting peace education, he noted, “is really difficult to implement from the top up”. By contrast, the role of civil society in enabling ambitious agendas is “much more agile” and “responsive to the needs and lived realities of learners,” he said.

He stated his opinion that civil society can challenge normative cultural aspects in a way that government cannot. He expressed that building communal acceptance of the values peace education aims to nurture is more effectively achieved “from the bottom up,” citing the concept of “Massively Parallel Peacebuilding” (MPP) as a framework towards collective action. “We understand the problems of peace are complex and dynamic and interdependent,” he said, “and so we recognize the importance of all different actors working together in different dimensions, accessibility, inclusion, climate change, gender justice, and so forth, and working towards that bigger picture together.”

Closing

Ms. Salome Agbaroji, 2023/2024 US National Youth Poet Laureate recognized for her talent and civic engagement, performed her original poem about Ngozi, a fictional character inspired by her aunt's experiences growing up in Nigeria under the devastating impact of war. The poem offered a vivid account of Ngozi's longing for her lost school. Through moving lines like "walls that were once primary colored are now primarily covered in dust and debris," Ms. Agbaroji evoked the profound loss experienced by children in conflict zones.

The poem also reflected on broader themes of learning for lasting peace, with lines such as "Her society had mastered the skill of long division, with ignorance always being the common denominator, but it was the addition, the unifying, the cooperation of different things that was always hardest to learn." Through her poetry, Ms. Agbaroji emphasized the importance of nurturing environments where children can properly develop, stating that "It is not enough to give a child a book, they also need a palm oil tree to sit under; clear skies through which their kites can fly." Through her powerful performance, Ms. Agbaroji highlighted the aspiration for a better future amidst adversity.

After this poem, Ms. Richa Gupta offered a brief closing statement. She thanked Ms. Agbaroji, the panelists, and all those in attendance for joining the day's "fruitful discussions and celebration of the International Day of Education." Attendees were then invited to join the panelists at the front of the room in conversation, photo-taking, and networking.

EVENT OVERVIEW

TITLE: 2024 International Day of Education: "Learning for Lasting Peace"

Date/Time: Wednesday, 24 January 2024, 10:00am – 1:00pm EST

Location: ECOSOC Chamber, UNHQ, New York, USA

Moderators:

- Richa Gupta, Young Leader for the Sustainable Development Goals, UNESCO
- Christopher Castle, Director of the Division for Peace and Sustainable Development, UNESCO

Panelists:

- H.E. Dennis Francis, President of the General Assembly and Permanent Representative of Trinidad and Tobago to the United Nations
- Amina J. Mohammed, Deputy Secretary General, United Nations
- H.E. Martin Kimani, Ambassador, Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary, Permanent Representative of the Mission of Kenya to the United Nations and Chair of the Group of Friends for Education and Lifelong Learning
- H.E. Chernor Bah, Minister of Information and Civic Education of the Republic of Sierra Leone
- Charles North, Deputy CEO, Global Partnership for Education (GPE)
- Emeline O'Hara, Communications Manager, Dangerous Speech Project
- Mavic Cabrera Balleza, CEO and Founder, Global Network of Women Peace Workers
- Felipe Paullier, Assistant Secretary-General for Youth Affairs, United Nations
- Robert Jenkins, Director of Education and Adolescent Development, UNICEF
- Julia Paulson, Dean, College of Education, University of Saskatchewan, Canada
- Anthony Jenkins, Managing Director, International Institute on Peace Education

Resources shared at the event:

- Concept Paper: <https://www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/education-day-2024-cn-en.pdf>
- Recommendation on Education for Peace, Human Rights and Sustainable Development: An explainer: <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000388330>
- Peace education in the 21st century: an essential strategy for building lasting peace: <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000388385>

Personal Reflections

The choice to cover the International Day of Education in my semester report for Professor Kuriansky's class on "Psychology and the United Nations" is deeply rooted in my passion for education and learning. I wanted to write about an event focused on SDG 4 and this day presented a perfect opportunity.

My interests lie at the intersection of human psychology, sociology, philosophy, and education. I'm particularly curious about the cyclical impact inadequate education has on societal prosperity, a subject that the event's discussions shed much light on. I began this class eager to know how psychologists help the UN progress towards the SDGs, and many panelists shared psychology-informed initiatives.

My role managing learning and leadership programs at the Boston Consulting Group (BCG) aligns with my academic studies at Teachers College, where I am pursuing a master's degree in Adult Learning & Leadership. The themes explored on International Day of Education resonate closely with what adult learning entails, emphasizing the importance of continuous, lifelong, and transformative education. Both my professional and educational background center on the theme of education, but so do my natural interests, having always loved and prioritized school. My journey as a student is a strong part of my identity. I believe knowledge and critical thinking skills to be sources of empowerment, and this event highlighted the ways this sentiment can be broadly extended in pursuit of a better world.

Volunteering with the International Rescue Committee (IRC) provided me with firsthand experience assisting refugees, notably an Afghan woman who was non-literate in her native language of Farsi. As a female student, the focus on girls' education at key points during the event was especially meaningful.

A major point made clear to me during this event was that without implementation, policies remain words on paper. I was inspired to hear of the concrete steps being made towards progress.

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Healing a community and the land through peaceful connection

Emily McGill¹



Music with Ronald Braman, Lay Minister and Director of Music at Good Shepherd Episcopal Church, Shoshone-Bannock Indian Reservation, Fort Hall, Idaho (screenshot, Emily McGill)

Sacred community. Those two words represent a concept that conjures up intense feelings – of belonging, care, nurturing, and support. I first encountered language for this concept as a new masters student of the Spirituality Mind Body Institute (SMBI) at Columbia University Teachers College, and was immediately taken with it. Much of my life I have held community as sacred, though I didn't have language to express how gathering was as vital to me as air. The concept was named for me by Professor Linda Lantieri at the summer intensive that introduced new students to the SMBI program and to each other. She told us that we were collectively stepping into sacred community, and that it was meaningful to her as reflective of the sentiments of Martin Luther King, Jr. and his theory of "beloved community" (The King Center, n.d.).

Dr. King's Beloved Community is a global vision, in which all people can share in the wealth of the earth. In the Beloved Community, poverty, hunger and homelessness will not be tolerated because international standards of human decency will not allow it. Racism and all forms

1 Reported by Emily McGill, a member of the International Association of Applied Psychology, Division of Students and Early Career Professionals, the American Psychological Association, the Academy for the Advancement of Postmaterialist Sciences, and the Scientific and Medical Network, who is pursuing a masters' degree at the Spirituality Mind Body Institute of the Department of Clinical Psychology at Columbia University Teachers College, and a student in Professor Judy Kuriansky's class on "Psychology and the United Nations." In addition to her scholastic work, she is a multidisciplinary artist and spiritualist.

Edited by Dr. Judy Kuriansky, Professor of Psychology and Education, Department of Clinical Psychology at Columbia University Teachers College adjunct faculty, teaching course on "Psychology and the United Nations"; advisor to the Mission of Sierra Leone to the United Nations, and senior representation for 20+ years of the International Association of Applied Psychology in consultative status with the UN Economic and Social Council.

of discrimination, bigotry and prejudice will be replaced by an all-inclusive spirit of [sibling]hood]. In the Beloved Community, international disputes will be resolved by peaceful conflict-resolution and reconciliation of adversaries, instead of military power. Love and trust will triumph over fear and hatred. Peace with justice will prevail over war and military conflict. (The King Center, n.d.)

This report explores the positive mental health effects of sacred community in relation to indigenous land, and how it invokes both inner peace and peace in relationships on all levels; additionally, as it calls for restorative justice for indigenous lands that have been mistreated, this report supports the urgency for an intentionally healthy relationship with the land.

This information and report is based on an event on October 24, 2023, which I attended virtually, featuring a panel with an indigenous leader who discussed indigenous lands and practices in occupied locales, specifically Juristac, an Ohlone sacred site near Gilroy, California. It isn't my experience, but it is my witness of those sharing their experiences. The guest of honor was the Chair of the Amah Mutsun Land Trust and Tribal Band, Mr. Valentin Lopez, who is "a Native American Advisor to the University of California, Office of the President on issues related to repatriation. He is also a Native American Advisor to the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) and the Phoebe Hearst Museum of Anthropology"

(Amah Mutsun Tribal Band, n.d.). I have quoted him throughout this report.

During the event, Chair Lopez made impassioned statements that the desecration and destruction that results from extracting resources from the earth directly impacts the health and mental health of

indigenous communities, which is a continuation of the genocide and cultural erasure they have faced for generations. As colonizers and imperialists stole land from those whose spiritual and cultural beliefs required their stewardship, and systematically dismantled the familial and cultural ties of tribes, he declared, mental health issues among native people metastasized. The loss of connection to tribal lands, cultures, and beliefs have caused mental health challenges to proliferate and indigenous community leaders to call for reconnection to their lands.

The two hosts of the event were Bishop Marc Andrus who is the Eighth Bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of California, and Dr. Paloma Pavel who is the President of Earth House Center, an organization which conducts “local, national and international projects in a variety of print and visual media” (Earth House, n.d.) and co-founder of the Breakthrough Communities Project in Oakland, California, “a project of Earth House Center to build multiracial leadership for sustainable communities in California and the nation” (Naropa University, n.d.).

The event was sponsored by three organizations: The Episcopal Diocese of California; Breakthrough Communities Project at Earth House Center; and the Center for Climate Justice and Faith at Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary, which is a graduate school of California Lutheran University and a member of the Graduate Theological Union, University of California in Berkeley, California.

This online-only conversation was brought to my attention by my professor, Dr. Judy Kuriansky whose class I took, on the topic of “Psychology and the United Nations”, in my Master’s degree program at Columbia University, Teachers College. In Dr. Kuriansky’s class, students are introduced to the 17 United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) outlined in the United Nations Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development, an international framework and “plan of action for people, planet and prosperity” (United Nations, n.d.) to eliminate poverty and create “a sustainable and resilient path” for the world (United Nations, n.d.). Two of these SDGs featured prominently in the October 24, 2023 event: SDG 15,

protecting life on land, and SDG 13, conserving life under water (United Nations, n.d.). This piqued my interest in the event, though once the event began it became clear that several more of the Sustainable Development Goals are relevant to the conversation, as described below.

Chair Lopez leads a tribal band of the Amah Mutsun people located in Northern California “from Año Nuevo in the north, along the ridge-lines and west slope of the Santa Cruz Mountains to the Pacific Ocean and Monterey Bay, south to the Salinas River and inland to include the Pajaro and San Benito watersheds” (Amah Mutsun Land Trust, n.d.), that has not been recognized by the United States Federal Government. Therefore, he shared that his people have been greatly impacted by colonization and occupation through the centuries, first by the Spanish missions in California, then by the Mexican government, and finally by the government of California and the United States. Without federal recognition, tribal members cannot receive assistance from the Bureau of Indian Affairs, a Federal agency whose “mission is to enhance the quality of life, to promote economic opportunity, and to carry out the responsibility to protect and improve the trust assets of American Indians, Indian tribes and Alaska Natives” (Bureau of Indian Affairs, n.d.); nor can they protect their ancestral burial sites or participate in programs to help their people rise out of poverty (Amah Mutsun exhibit, n.d.).

The conversation was actually highly relevant to 10 of the 17 United Nations SDGs from the UN Agenda 2030. Beyond my initial interest in the event’s conversation around protecting and conserving life on land and underwater, the evening prominently featured the SDG 16 focus on peace (United Nations, n.d.), since the entire discussion related to finding both inner peace, and peace between the people and the land. Another SDG with which the event - and this report - aligns is SDG 3, ensuring good health and well-being for all, specifically how a relationship with indigenous lands can support SDG target 3.4 in this goal, namely, to “promote mental health and well-being” (UN SDG section 3, 2015).

Healing a community and the land through peaceful connection cont.

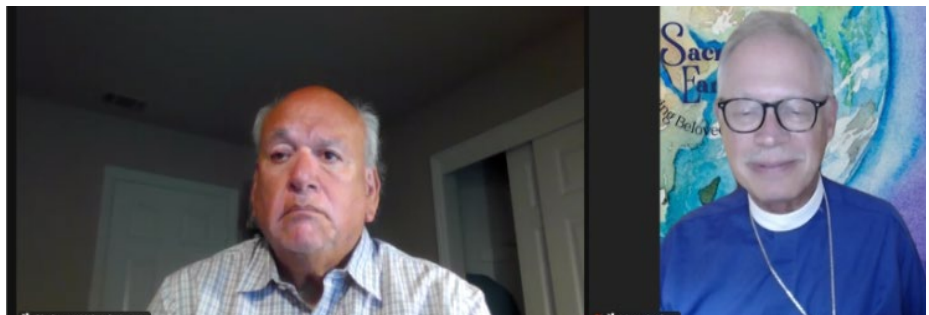
The other related SDGs include: SDG 1, to eradicate poverty, SDG 4, quality education for all, SDG 8, economic growth, SDG 10, reduced inequalities, and SDG 12, to ensure responsible production and consumption (United Nations, n.d.). Also, SDG 17 calls for partnership (United Nations, n.d.), which is underscored in this discussion, namely that many stakeholders need to come together to achieve restorative justice for the land and health and well-being for the people.

Throughout the event, several important concepts are discussed. One of these is restorative justice. Restorative Justice (RJ) is “a way of addressing conflict and crime that enables the person who caused the harm, people who were affected by the harm, and the community to create a meaningful solution” (Community Justice Initiatives Waterloo Region, 2015). The definition has been subjective according to Jon Wilson, who argues that until there is more precision in the language of restorative justice, best practices are difficult to pinpoint (2005). He suggests reconfiguring the phrase to read “victim-centered restorative justice” (2005). This event related to this definition and its qualification, as it centered the Amah Mutsun tribe as the victims in the conversation of restorative justice in regards to land stewardship.

This virtual gathering began with acknowledgement of the original land stewards from each of the main participants' locations. Musical interludes were featured throughout, provided by Ronald Braman, Lay Minister and Director of Music at Good Shepherd Episcopal Church on the Shoshone-Bannock Indian Reservation in Fort Hall, Idaho, who is also an indigenous NGO representative of his church to the United Nations. Before singing his first song of the evening – a sacred Bigfoot song about the mountain near Good Shepherd Episcopal Church – he lit a smudge offering, which is a stick of burning herbs intended to purify energy. It was impossible not to be moved when Mr. Braman, with closed eyes, began singing beautifully while accompanying himself on a small

hand drum. While the language was unfamiliar to me, the intention was clear: connecting with The Creator and entering a spiritual state of being. I was so moved that my body and soul naturally swayed in time to his music.

The conversation began with Bishop Andrus reminding attendees that “All of us are related to the land where we live, but we do not own it”. He acknowledged how often global conflicts are related to the land, including what is currently happening in the Middle East, where controversy has persisted between Palestinians and Israelis about who owns the land.



Chair Valentin Lopez of the Amah Mutsun Land Trust and Tribal Band, and Bishop Marc Andrus, Eighth Bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of California (screenshot, Emily McGill)

Chair Lopez told the story of Mount Uminum, which refers to the home, or resting place, of the hummingbird, which is vital to the Amah Mutsun creation story. Specifically, he elaborated, the Creator selected the people and their territory intentionally, so the Amah Mutsun belonged to their specific terrain and cared for Mother Earth and all living beings in that area – what is now known as Northern California. Referring to his people’s “sacred obligation from Creator” which “gives [them] the moral authority to speak for [their] lands” as the Amah Mutsun understand they are responsible for all living things”, he said:

The rivers, oceans, plants, wildlife, birds, fish, our ancestors recognized that all things here are our relatives. Father Sky/Creator, Mother Earth - [we share the] same mother and same father, the birds, fish, wildlife, are our relatives and we take care of them with love, patience, respect. Sing to them. Pray to them. Listen to them.

Fire was recognized as [an] important tool, [which] provided warmth, light, [the ability to] cook foods, and [is] important for prayer to burn sage or a smudge stick. As the fire goes up, it carries the prayers and words to Creator, but also what's in our heart, minds, and bodies, so the Creator can understand our words and needs and prayers very effectively.

In a passionate appeal, Chair Lopez noted that the commonly accepted narrative of indigenous ancestors as hunters and gatherers is false and insulting. In contrast, he explained, indigenous peoples are "sophisticated and successful land managers, [who] learned how to care for the plant resources to make sure there were adequate foods for the deer, elk, bear, mouse, coyotes, wolves." Acknowledging that "all plants are a sacred gift given to us; [they] are responsible for the fungi, insects, birds, the four-legged, and people," Chair Lopez continued that the Amah Mutsun recognize the perfection of the world thanks to the Creator and ask why humans feel the need to change it. When the Creator places the flower specifically, he said, and "We have the obligation to take care of the flower where it exist[s]."

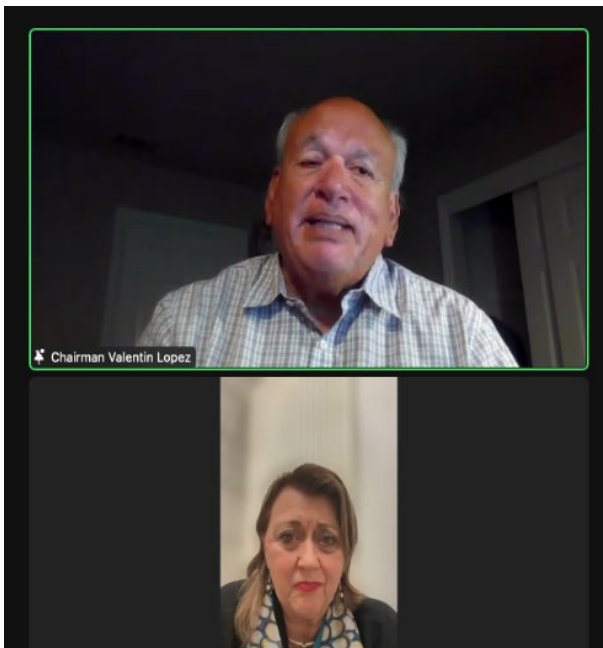
Bishop Andrus thanked Chair Lopez for making this distinction, and noted that the Amah Mutsun "roots are vital, sophisticated, [and] deep," and "protecting that heritage is something that takes courage, perseverance, and community."

In response, Chair Lopez then shared a devastating statistic of what he called genocide by the Spanish, Mexican, and American colonizers against the Amah Mutsun, which he admitted could not be verified, since records have been unreliable over the centuries. He suggested that periods of colonization reduced the population by 98% or more over 100 years, and the tribe is still working towards recovery. Rehabilitation efforts include holding wellness workshops and meetings with cross-generational attendance. These gatherings foster commitment to "sacred community" and focus on restoring tribal connections to spirituality, increased self-esteem, and exploring members' responsibility in the current local and global climate.

A major specific example of the challenges facing the tribe that the Chair offered was that young Amah Mutsun were struggling with romantic relationships and finding a life partner. At a community gathering, grandparents, parents, and youth each had differing perspectives on what was important to solve this problem. The takeaway for most of the young people, Chair Lopez said, was that "healthy relationships take two healthy people." This revelation leads young tribal members to explore how to prepare for a healthy relationship, and to recognize when another person is healthy – referring to mental, emotional, and spiritual health. I note that this holistic concept of health is consistent with the Constitution of the World Health Organization (2005) definition of health as "a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity", although I note that definition does not include the dimensions of spiritual well-being that the Amah Mutsun emphasize.

The results of these wellness meetings and their focus on rebuilding the Amah Mutsun's relationship to their ancestral beliefs and their connection to the land have been positive, Chair Lopez reported. This includes an increase in high school graduation rates, college attendance, marital success, two parent homes, and decrease in teen parents. Dr. Pavel remarked that this mention of the intergenerational aspect was a favorite point of hers. On a personal note, I heartily agree. Everyone in my family from my grandparents' generation have passed away and there are so many questions about their parents and grandparents that I would love to ask. So much information is lost to us as the younger generation because we are not ready to receive it until it is too late.

The Amah Mutsun's reconnection to their ancestry through land deepened my resolve to visit my own ancestral lands in Lithuania, Ireland, Italy, and Germany.



Chair Valentin Lopez and Dr. Paloma Pavel, President of Earth House Center and co-founder of the Breakthrough Communities Project (screenshot, Emily McGill)

The conversation pivoted to refer to the sacred site at Juristac, in a city in Northern California's Santa Clara County that is now known as Gilroy, California, where a sand and gravel pit is proposed "result[ing] in four sacred hills being reduced to an open pit in the ground" (Chair Valentin Lopez at United Nations, 2018). Chair Lopez said that this desecration of the Amah Mutsun's sacred lands is reflective of modern Western society's disregard for indigenous beliefs, traditions, and wisdom; it directly impacts the earth in a negative way by stripping its resources and in turn helps to fuel the climate devastation we are seeing globally. He elaborated that the blatant dismissal of indigenous wisdom regarding land management and conservation adds to the crisis of climate change, in that the continued warming of the planet as raw materials are mined and transported.

Chair Lopez and the Amah Mutsun tribe have been facing threats of Juristac's desecration since the gravel pit announcement in 2015 (Raymond, 2019) and they realized that they needed to share their story. On April 17, 2018 at the annual United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, Chair Lopez made a speech calling for the protection of the sacred

Ohlone site at Juristac, which means "place of the big head" (Raymond, 2019), since for over 10,000 years the Amah Mutsun have held ceremonies there; the location also hosts four village sites and is the home of their spiritual leader, Kuksui (Facebook, 2018).

During the October 24 conversation in this report, the Chair specified that acquiring land is not the Amah Mutsun Land Trust's goal. He echoed Bishop Andrus' comments at the beginning of the evening session that humans do not own the land they live on; instead, "It belongs to Creator. Creator gave us the responsibility to steward and care for it and ensure it provides resources for all living things." According to the Chair, the Amah Mutsun mostly reside in the Central California Valley as they cannot afford the cost of living in their indigenous territories. Thankfully, a group of elders approached the Tribal Council in 2006 and reinvigorated the tribe's creation story. Since then, the tribe began working with the national parks, as well as the national Bureau of Land Management and State Parks, resulting in the successful outcome that they now have "access to over 140,000 acres of [their] territory."

Despite this success, the site at Juristac is fraught with difficulties, since Santa Clara County regulations permit mining – an activity that destroys the land – so, Chair Lopez said, "the only thing that will stop [mining] is overwhelming public support."

To help this situation, the tribe began reaching out to a variety of organizations, including conservationists, religious communities, academics, "to support the tribe and recognize Native American spiritually on par with all of the other world religions."

The point was reiterated throughout the discussion that the importance of this connection to the land for the Amah Mutsun is relational. The tribe's goal is "to restore that relationship - sing to the lands, talk to the lands, hold ceremonies on the lands."

During the event, Chair Lopez discussed an upcoming ceremony calling the salmon home to spawn. It would take place five days after this October 24, 2023 conversation. This ceremony is part of the Amah Mutsun restoration efforts to bring "sacredness to the land healing to [their] people."

Northern Californian attendees at the October 24 event expressed an interest in attending and witnessing tribal events, including the aforementioned salmon ceremony, but Chair Lopez noted that most tribal events are for tribal members only; thus, he suggested the interested attendees research members of their own communities who were already doing reparative work and speak with and learn from them. An example was shared by attendee to the event, Molly Arthur, who included information in the chat about her blog *Waking Up To Our Own Christian History* which explores “the history that legitimized the cultural and physical genocide of the Indigenous Peoples of North America and the establishment and growth of US white supremacy with its continuing effects today” (wakinguptoourownchristianhistory.blogspot.com). Arthur’s writings on Christianity’s role in the colonization and imperialism inherent in the Western world were one educational option mentioned for Christians to learn about the devastation inflicted in the name of their religion.

Mr. Braman reminded the event attendees that many indigenous “ceremonies were illegal until the 1970s, so outsiders were not usually welcome” by tribal members due to safety concerns. Chairman Lopez added to that by also reminding event attendees that the historical genocide of indigenous people in the Americas due to occupation from the Spanish, Mexican, and American governments, and their systematic and intentional cultural extermination, have rightfully left indigenous communities wary of outsiders. Practicing religious, spiritual, and cultural rituals openly was dangerous, and possibly deadly, conduct.

In my opinion, educating oneself on the atrocities faced by indigenous people is an excellent first step towards restorative justice, as it allows those whose ancestors were responsible for the initial harm, and who may still be perpetuating harm, to learn about what indigenous communities have faced, and continue to face, from occupation and colonization.

Delving further into the issue of how the land has the potential to be restorative, meaning that connection to the land and safeguarding the terrain are hugely

healing experiences for the Amah Mutsun, a story was shared by Chair Lopez about a tribal member whose life has turned around. This man was suffering from addiction, and interested in stewarding the land; he successfully detoxed while tending to the tribal lands, returned home, went to rehab, and is now a squad boss working for the Land Trust who is deeply knowledgeable in the Amah Mutsun customs, history, and ceremonies.

Chair Lopez commented, “That’s the healing that [a] relationship with Mother Earth can bring to people all around the world. Restoring that relationship will bring you peace and comfort”.

This tribe member’s story is a clear example of land-based restorative justice, in my view, which again recalls the UN 2030 Agenda, and honors SDG 3.5 to “strengthen the prevention and treatment of substance abuse, including narcotic drug abuse and harmful use of alcohol” exemplified in this man’s journey to fight the global affliction of addiction.

Inspired by such redemption stories, Bishop Andrus asked Chair Lopez what he sees for the future of the Amah Mutsun. The Chair noted success, giving many examples. Young people are showing much deeper interest in the ancestral ceremonies, songs, and understanding of the issues their people have faced. Concurrently, they are experiencing decreased reports of drug and alcohol abuse, and increased reports of pursuing further education and becoming postgraduate students. Additionally, he said that tribal members’ quality of life has expanded exponentially, and many seek a return to the ways of their ancestors and “fulfill [their] sacred obligation to Creator.” Not all tribal members are participating, but each year more people become involved.

At this point in the evening’s event, musician Mr. Braman performed a short piano reflection which segued into the Taizé song with the words, “Jesus your spirit in us is a wellspring of life everlasting,” that he sang in both English and Shoshoni.

Subsequently, Dr. Pavel asked Chair Lopez about “spiritual exercises across the seven generations perspective.” The Chair clarified that in order to

understand why and how indigenous people work in seven generations, there must be an understanding of how they “love, hate, fear, solve difficult problems, deal with difficult situations, [and] experience joy.” These practices and beliefs are passed down from generation to generation and reach seven generations back – although he did not specify the reason behind the number of generations. However, I share the belief that knowing one’s ancestors is vital, meaning that I agree with Chair Lopez when he declares that there are critical lessons to be learned about how our forebearers took care of Mother Earth, as well as their attitudes, understanding, and likes and dislikes; and how they honored relationships of all kinds, with their partners, siblings, children, and community. This exploration can be especially challenging for indigenous communities due to “miscegenation, ... child abduction, religious conversion, resocialization in total institutions such as missions or boarding schools, and a whole range of cognate biocultural assimilations” (Wolfe, 2006). When individuals unearth how their ancestors lived, says Chair Lopez, it allows for healing.

As the conversation shifted towards healing, Chair Lopez noted the importance of recognizing that indigenous people have a lot of healing to do from their years of being colonized. But then, he asked the question, “Who has to do more healing? The perpetrators or the native people?” He answered his own question, saying that the perpetrators have to heal.

This idea circled back to the earlier topic of healthy relationships and the requirement for a relationship to have two healthy people. He spoke about the fact that truth is required in a relationship and if perpetrators can’t tell the historic truth, how can there be a relationship with indigenous people? Despite efforts, the Chair said he has “put out a call for healing many times and that call has yet to be heard.”

Then, he redirected his comments back to hope and looking to future generations to be the healing force. He relayed a story about a class of 4th graders. After telling them about the Spanish mission history of California, one child asked what they could do to help. This question threw the Chair off balance

because he didn’t expect it. Recouping, he asked this child if she liked butterflies. When she replied in the affirmative, he suggested that the children visit the local library and research butterflies native to the area. He further instructed them to learn about the plants that the butterflies like, and to plant those in their yards. He declared, “The butterflies will visit you and you can talk to them and sing to them and have a relationship with them and they’ll be your friends”. This thrilled the young students and reinforced the Chair’s belief that “the best way in is with love and interest and car[e]”.

In the next section of this event, questions were solicited from the online audience. An attendee, William Myers, asked about illuminating the need for healing among perpetrators, to which Chair Lopez responded that one of the most impactful ways to make change is “to start with the youth”. Bishop Andrus agreed that it is important to “start with those who are in a more open position”.

Another attendee, Christopher Fullerton, asked for recommendations to create a relationship to the land for urban dwellers. He wondered how, in his opinion, “urban-dwellers, many of whom are itinerant and disconnected from their extended families and their ancestral lands, [can] find ways to acknowledge and celebrate the land where they currently find themselves, and cultivat[e] respect for particular indigenous groups tied to those locations.”

Chair Lopez responded to this comment and question by first sharing that urban-dwellers are not seen as perpetrators; then, he asked attendees to “look at how much [non-indigenous people] benefit from the results of those [historical] crimes,” specifically that location “names were changed to erase the people that were here before.” This name erasure is a direct harm perpetuated by the American government to continue the cultural genocide of indigenous people. Reconciliation, he said, can include assisting tribal people to “restore their cultures, their traditions, get back to their lands.”

Additional ways to help, he explained, include involvement with tribal nonprofits and to “[insist] the

Healing a community and the land through peaceful connection cont.

school districts tell the true history, don't allow the coverup to continue". He specifically noted the horrific history of California paying a bounty for indigenous scalps, to which Bishop Andrus replied "it's genocide, not war." This devastating truth is one that must be addressed as the generational trauma and mental health repercussions have rippled through indigenous families in tribes such as the Amah Mutsun. The existence of such trauma is the reason that the wellness sessions and communal healing opportunities resonate today. Generational healing can be obtained through a return to the land and ancestral practices.

Chair Lopez noted humanity's "responsibility to care for her" and asked attendees to consider a specific, small way they have met Mother Earth in a way that they felt blessed, and express gratitude for the divine gift that was shared with them. I thought about land in Sullivan County, New York where I have had some beautiful experiences with nature. This point, in my view, illuminated the concept of the sacredness of Mother Earth, reinforcing the ultimate "sacred community" – that everything on this planet is connected.

The event concluded with another song from Mr. Braman, "Amazing Grace," a hymn written in 1992 by H. Leslie Adams that is not the traditional "Amazing Grace" familiar to many liturgical rituals. This song "is the composer's personal response to the more widely known version of the song, and expresses optimism for a bright future" (American Composers Alliance, 1992). Mr. Braman noted that in his view the words in this version ask where to go from here and explore the feeling of confusion in moving forward. Mr. Braman said he "never know[s] what to say, but relationship is the number one important thing."

Personal Reflections

This event focused heavily on the peace that can come from victim-centered restorative justice, in this case, for indigenous peoples, and utilizing connection with the land along with community to make progress in the restoration of generational mental health, issues which are very close to my heart. In my

view, the mental health toll on humanity, due to millennia of colonization, occupation, and genocide, is culminating in a world today that seems to be falling apart. And yet, as humans we can recognize the importance of moving forward with healing and hope, at the same time as we look backward to be assured, comforted, and inspired by the rituals of our ancestors. From my perspective, when we aim to make a difference, the most important thing we can do is find our "co-conspirators", meaning people whose dedication to healing aligns with our own, who help us advance our efforts and causes for communal peace amongst indigenous and non-indigenous peoples. In essence this is a "sacred community". Such collaboration is the way forward.

EVENT OVERVIEW:

TITLE: Sacred Earth: Growing Beloved Community by Honoring Native Lifeways with Valentin Lopez, October webcast

Date/Time: Tuesday, October 24, 2023, 9:00-10:30 pm ET

Location: On Zoom, attended by the author of this report from New York City

Featuring: Bishop Marc Andrus, Eighth Bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of California; Dr. Paloma Pavel, President of Earth House Center and Co-founder of the Breakthrough Communities Project; with Valentin Lopez, Chair of the Amah Mutsun Land Trust

Links

[Amah Mutsun Tribal Council](#)

[The Episcopal Diocese of California](#)

[Breakthrough Communities Project at Earth House Center in Oakland, CA](#)

[Center for Climate Justice and Faith at Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary, a graduate school of California Lutheran University and member of the Graduate Theological Union, UC Berkeley, CA](#)

[Waking Up To Our Own Christian History](#)

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Salam-Shalom: Exhibit, Reception & Panel on Peace, Love, Hope & Unity in Children's Art

Melanie Schneider¹ and Judy Kuriansky²



Child's drawing of a lion and lamb in peace art exhibit

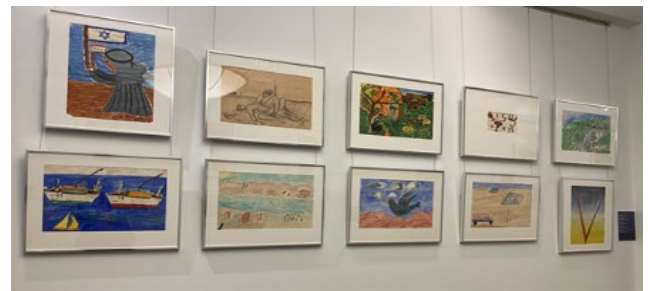
Introduction

Children's drawings of a lion with a lamb, a black dove flying in the clouds, an Israeli soldier offering bread to an Arab woman, provided the setting for a moving event on the third floor Offit Gallery of the Gottesman Library at Teachers College, Columbia University, on November 3, 2022. Students sang, danced, tossed multi-colored balls of yarn, but also listened to important speeches on the topics of peace, love, hope and unity -- the four themes of artwork of Arab and Jewish children in a special exhibit.

The drawings and watercolors on display were created by both Arab and Jewish Israeli children aged 9-15 who were prompted to draw "what peace looks like." The drawings were made in a school program sponsored by the International Cultural Center for Youth in Jerusalem, shortly after the 1967 Six-Day War, an armed conflict between Israel and a coalition of Arab states, which claimed thousands of lives.

The total collection of 53 pieces comprises The Passow Collection of Israeli Children's Peace Art, donated to Teachers College by social psychologist Dr. A. Harry Passow, Jacob H. Schiff Professor Emeritus in the 1990s, who was one of the world's leading experts on education of both disadvantaged and also gifted children. Dr. Passow served as President of the World Council on Gifted and Talented Children.

Part 1 consisted of 30 pieces; the rest were shown in Part 2, a year later.



Arab and Israeli children's art

The idea for the exhibit was conceived by Ms. Jennifer Govan, Library Director and Senior Librarian at Teachers College, Columbia University, who leads the Gottesman Libraries' Education Program, which informs students, faculty and staff about the latest thinking in education, engaging the community with a broad range of educational topics and experts.

Govan enlisted TC art student Yiming (Emily) Sang ('24) to co-curate it, in her role as Library Associate for Art and Design, in the Gottesman Libraries, Teachers College, Columbia University. Yiming serves as President of the Sino-American Youth Foundation (a non-profit foundation promoting international communication via art and culture) and as the Youth Goodwill Ambassador to the Fashion 4 Development for the United Nations SDGs Goals. Significantly, she

was honored with the Maurice R. Greenberg Outstanding Youth Award for promoting international cultural communication in 2019. Greenberg, currently Chairman and CEO of C.V. Starr global insurance and investment organization, is very involved in U.S.-China relations.

To launch the exhibit, Govan contacted TC Professor of Psychology and Education Dr. Judy Kuriansky to give a speech, as she was a perfect match for several reasons. Her two books on the region, which address the same themes as the exhibit, are in the library collection. "Terror in the Holy Land: Inside the Anguish of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict" presents issues, including about women, children, families showing the common ground of needs and dreams. The other tome, entitled "Beyond Bullets & Bombs: Grassroots Peacebuilding between Israelis and Palestinians" gives encyclopedic examples of "people-to-people" programs where adults and children come together in activities – cooking, camping, learning technology, trekking, playing sports and even cleaning the beach – proving the validity of psychological principles such as the Contact Hypothesis that people working together on a common goal drop prejudices and in-group/out-group hostility and instead appreciate and enjoy each other on a humane basis.

Also, Kuriansky had previously been to the region conducting workshops bringing the two cultures together. Further, she teaches a graduate course at the college on "Psychology and the United Nations" which poses mental health and wellbeing in the center of the global goals of the United Nations Agenda for Sustainable Development which includes a goal to ensure health and wellbeing for all and a goal to promote peaceful and inclusive societies. Additionally, Ms. Sang was a member of her class.

With the exhibit perfectly aligned to her course about international relations focusing on psychological themes, as well as teaching about interventions for children, Kuriansky mobilized students in her class to co-create an event with many elements that were academic and educational as well as entertaining.

The team was enthusiastic to participate given their commitment to the themes in their field of study and in their lives.

The elements included a tour by Ms. Sang about the exhibit, Dr. Kuriansky's speech, high-level presentations by government representatives, a brief research survey about visitor reactions, a guided meditation, and a cultural performance by a former TC music student, Russell Daisey, a partner in Professor Kuriansky's interventions worldwide and assistant in her class. With a strong intent to focus on the obvious rapport between the Arab and Jewish children shown in the four positive themes reflected in their drawings rather than political issues, nonetheless it was decided to have two guest speakers from the United Nations: one from the Mission of Israel and another from the Observer Mission of Palestine.

The drawings hung on the walls of the gallery hall between meeting rooms and the large classroom where the speeches took place. The drawings were interspersed with panels whereby the selected children's artwork was overlaid with inspirational sayings from famous peace advocates. Educator Maria Montessori is quoted as saying, "Establishing lasting peace is the work of education; all politics can do is keep us out of war." The refrain of former Beatle and peace activist John Lennon in his peace anthem "Imagine" are quoted, "Imagine all the people living life in peace. You may say I'm a dreamer, but I'm not the only one. I hope someday you'll join us and the world will be as one."



Famous peace messages posted on the walls interspersed with the children's drawings



Participants at exhibition event (left to right): Jacob Davidick (videographer), Russell Daisey (musician), Yiming (Emily) Sang (Art curator), Jennifer Govan (Library Director and Senior Librarian at Teachers College, Columbia University), Yoram Morad (Israel Special Envoy on International Water Affairs), Dr. Judy Kuriansky (Columbia University Professor, author, and UN Human Rights Advocate), student Nida Ahmed, Melanie Schneider, Chantel Hover (Dr. Kuriansky's class assistant)

Background

Much research has shown the value of artistic expression to counter conflict and instead create friendship, peace and shared humanity. This is the basis of many workshops Dr. Kuriansky has conducted in the Middle East region and worldwide, particularly engaging children in expressive arts of drawing, singing, and dancing, for resilience as well as recovery from disasters after emergencies in China, Japan, Iran, Sri Lanka, Haiti, the Caribbean islands, and numerous countries in Africa.

About the Collection

Harry Passow (November 9, 1920 - March 28, 1996), Jacob H. Schiff Professor Emeritus at Teachers College, Columbia University, was one of the first educators to study the needs of intellectually gifted children. He wrote extensive books, chapters, and articles on education, including the co-authored "Learning Together: Israeli Innovations in Education That Could Benefit Americans." An advisor to the Government of Israel on creating that country's first school for gifted adolescents, he also served as President of the World Council on Gifted and Talented Children. His collection of these children's drawings were part of his

commitment to peace and a vehicle to teach about education for peace and love.



Flyers for the two aspects of the event: the exhibit and special guest talk

The Event



Event team outside the gallery hall (left to right): Chantel Hover, Russell Daisey, Dr. Judy Kuriansky (holding her two books on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict), Senior librarian Jennifer Govan, students: curator Yiming (Emily) Sang, Melanie Schneider

The planning, logistics, program and media committees was led by Melanie (Meli) Schneider, TC student in Clinical Psychology in Education ('23) in the Spirituality Mind Body Institute which is totally aligned with the exhibit themes. The core team included Camille Khallouf and Tiffany Johnson, graduate students in Psychology and Education, also with a concentration in Spirituality, Mind, and Body, as well as Tanya Sharma, graduate student in Clinical Psychology. All the students have very diverse international heritages and experiences, including Meli having studied at the Arava Institute for Environmental Peacemaking.

Salam-Shalom cont.

The press release was posted on the Gottesman Library website and the TC announcement board, and physical copies were posted on boards around the Columbia University campus. A flyer, designed by Yiming, incorporated an art piece from the exhibit into an original interpretation, also published on the front page of the Gottesman Library web page. Flyers and announcements were sent in personalized emails and text messages to invite student groups, university departments, and university professors.



Event flyer (design by Yiming Sang)

Event Overview

A diverse group of guests attended the event, including Columbia University students, academic professors and staff. The gathering started in the classroom, with a Middle Eastern lunch provided. As attendees wandered into the gallery hall to view the art, students asked them what the art pieces evoked in them and what questions they might ask the panelists. Then, everyone was invited to gather in the exhibit hall for introductions and a formal exhibit tour.



Student visitors enjoying the art and refreshments

Senior librarian Govan welcomed everyone, stating emphatically that, “We are here”, referring to the Alicia Keys song by the same name, which spreads messages of peace around the world. She recounted the background of the vision for the exhibit and event, as well as the historical significance of having the exhibit at Teachers College, a center of learning and education, as well as peace. Govan commended curator Yiming Sang and the organizing team, saying that she has observed their “love” in putting together the exhibit as a testament to “Let Us Put Out the Fire of War.”



Attendees listening to the presentations in the exhibit hall



Dr. Judy Kuriansky (in blue) commenting on the exhibit, with Yiming Sang

Then, Yiming Sang guided the attendees to various art pieces and spoke about the symbolic significance of the four themes underlying the artwork at the time of their creation decades ago, and offering her interpretation of the art for contemporary times.

She quoted former President Barack Obama at the United Nations General Assembly on September 24, 2014, saying:

"We choose hope over fear. We see the future not as something out of our control, but as something we can shape for the better through concerted and collective effort. We reject fatalism or cynicism when it comes to human affairs; we choose to work for the world as it should be, as our children deserve it to be."

In keeping with her being in Dr. Kuriansky's class about the United Nations, Sang also quoted the United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres stating: "Humanitarian aid is vital. But it is not a solution. It is simply treating the worst impacts of the conflict. The only true solution is peace."

Sang described how she was deeply touched when she first saw the art of the children.

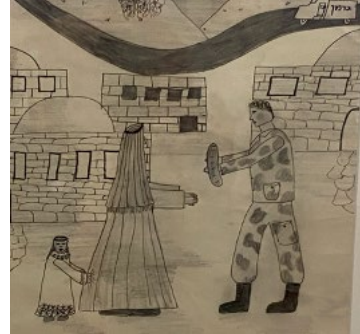
The pieces are specifically arranged according to the four chosen themes that she noted seemed to be inspired by the work themselves.

The first wall is dedicated to the theme of unity, which the artworks themselves display. A lion and a lamb face each other – her favorite – speaks to the Messianic age of peace, she explained.



Curator student Yiming Sang describing a child's artwork of a lion and a lamb

Another piece she pointed out depicts an Israeli soldier handing a Palestinian woman a piece of bread (with a child behind her). Sharing food, she noted, is a sign of love, support and generosity of spirit.



Child's artwork: Israeli soldier offering bread to an Arab woman

The area of drawings dedicated to the theme of peace includes a representation of a child who saw the sun when UNESCO (the United Nations Education Science Culture Organization) came to Palestine. Both this piece and the Lion and the Lamb, she said, highlight the ability of children to use metaphor to make an impactful message in their art.

Another drawing shows a dove—the bird of peace -- in flight, and in another, an Arab child holds two flags.



Child's drawing of peace bird

Salam-Shalom cont.



Child's artwork with two flags

Upon conclusion of the gallery tour, Professor Kuriansky congratulated Yiming and invited everyone to the whiteboards at the rear of the exhibit to contribute written messages to represent a collective artistic dedication to the themes of the exhibit.



Dr. Kuriansky's student Melissa Pierre contributing to the collective art, while student Jacob Davidick films

After signing their messages, everyone posed for a group photo taken by photographer Henry Lu.



Event teams, panelists and participants making peace signs after the gallery tour

Everyone moved into the classroom and the program started, moderated by Chantal Hover (Columbia University alumna in Political Science), who introduced the first element, a guided meditation by Meli Schneider. The meditation set the mindframe for participants to listen to the panel, view the art, and interact with each other by focusing on the themes of the event.



Meli Schneider guiding a meditation

Panel

The panel was purposefully meant to represent the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 16 in the 2030 Agenda which calls for peace, and also to represent the multi-stakeholder model, in bringing together representatives of government, civil society and academia.

In her presentation, Dr. Kuriansky highlighted the four themes of peace, love, hope and unity, about which she has done workshops around the world, including in the Middle East region with Palestinians and Israeli children and adults, as well as in countries worldwide.



Dr. Judy Kuriansky presenting; on the table: her two books on psychological approaches to achieving peace between Israelis and Palestinians

“Peace is an ecological system,” she described, “whereby, like a ripple in the water, it starts from internal peace and extends to relationships and then outwards to the world” reflective of Ecological Systems Theory.

“Children have pure hearts in meeting others with no prejudice or bias, so we all need to get back to that inner childlike space,” Dr. Kuriansky reminded participants.

Placing the exhibit in an academic context, she explained how conflict is created by the Social Identity theory as a need to define oneself as belonging to a group (social class, tribe, football team) which creates separation of “us” and “them”. The solution is the Contact Hypothesis (popularized in the 1950s by famous social psychologist Gordon Allport) whereby Intergroup prejudice diminishes when groups are brought into contact with one another through “People-to-People” projects.

In the Middle East region, these “People-to-People” projects have included Israeli and Palestinian children and adults joining in activities together, learning martial arts, marching for peace, cleaning beaches, playing sports, cooking and camping. These grassroots projects are featured in Dr. Kuriansky’s book, “Beyond Bullets and Bombs: Grassroots Peacebuilding between Palestinians and Israelis.”

“The answer for peace and harmony is also to find common ground, called “cross-stitching,” she explained, calling on audience members to answer

the question: “What do all children want?” Audience members offered suggestions: “love”, “joy”, “safety”, “play” “a peaceful life.”

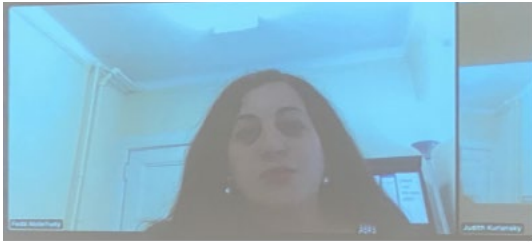


Professor Kuriansky’s books on psychological issues in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and grassroots peacebuilding

The United Nations speakers

Following Professor Kuriansky were presentations from representatives of government high-level delegations at the United Nations: from the Permanent Observer Mission of Palestine and from the Mission of Israel.

Speaking first was H.E. Feda Abdelhady-Nasser, Deputy Permanent Observer in the Permanent Observer Mission of Palestine to the UN, who has served in this role since 2013. She had served previously in the Observer Mission (1992-2005) as First Secretary and First Counselor, and in between those years, held the position of Special Political Adviser to the Minister in the Palestine Ministry of Foreign Affairs. She earned an M.A. in Educational Leadership and Administration from Rutgers University and a B.A. in Political Science/International Relations from New York University. Ambassador Nasser spoke on the cause of peace and justice for Palestine and called for international peace and justice on the basis of respect for international law and human rights, particularly with regard to women. She also highlighted the importance of education for all children.



H.E. Ambassador Feda Abdelhady-Nasser via Zoom

Due to her scheduling and to technical issues, the Ambassador joined virtually via Zoom and was unable to stay for the remainder of the event or to hear the speaker from the Israeli Mission. Many students expressed their wish to ask questions of H.E. Abdelhady-Nasser, and also expressed gratitude for her attendance despite the short time and for her advocacy for high quality education.

The next speaker, Mr. Yoram Morad, is the Israeli Special Envoy for International Water Affairs and a representative of Israel's Agency for International Development Cooperation (MASHAV) which focuses on enhancing cooperation between Israel and developing countries around the globe.

Prior to his current position in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA), Mr. Morad served in Israeli embassies/missions in Panama, Rome, and New York City. During his 30 years in the MFA, he has specialized in public diplomacy, cultural diplomacy, and international organizations. He also served as Israel's Cultural Attaché, making this art exhibit especially meaningful to him. He and Dr. Kuriansky had met over 20 years ago in the region



Attendees listening to Mr. Yoram Morad speaking on behalf of the Mission of Israel to the UN



Mr. Morad delivering remarks from the Deputy Permanent Representative of Israel to the UN

Mr. Morad read remarks from the Deputy Permanent Representative of the Mission of Israel to the United Nations:

"Good afternoon, everyone,

The word 'education' comes from the Latin word 'educere'. e- meaning "out of" and -ducere, "to draw". Yet, of course, the reference to drawing does not only refer to the beautiful drawings exhibited here today, but to the ability to imagine and "paint" a better, more peaceful world.

We are gathered here this afternoon to celebrate a shared vision of peace, seen through the hope and unity always present in children's eyes, hearts, and arts. I'd like to take the opportunity to thank the Gottesman Libraries and the Myers Foundation for displaying this unique exhibit, and of course, Emily Sang and Jennifer Govan for designing and curating it.

Although these art pieces were made decades ago, tragically, the theme is still relevant today. This special collection of artworks, made by young children, transcends boundaries. The children's message is critical – it encourages friendship, understanding, and mutual respect. Peace has always been the Israeli people's most fervent wish. Our prophets offered their vision of world peace, we acknowledge one another with wishes of peace – shalom in Hebrew means both hello and peace – and our prayers are brought to a close with the word peace.

Yet the most uplifting part of this exhibit, is that this vision of peace that has driven Israel and is so richly

depicted in the pieces of art before us, were not merely imaginative fantasies, but a prediction of the future. Twelve years after these paintings were made, Israel and Egypt signed a peace treaty. Fourteen years later, Israel and Jordan signed a peace treaty. And just over two years ago, Israel normalized relations with four other Arab countries! The vision of peace portrayed in these pieces has begun to actualize and it's truly inspiring to see.

Although there is still much more to accomplish and far further to go, the Middle East is transforming into a region of coexistence, tolerance and cooperation. As an Israeli, I truly hope to see a day when all people in the region – Jews, Muslims, Christians, and all the rest – can live together in peace and harmony. Just like the artwork we see here today.

In the words of the famous author, Lois Lowry, "Kids deserve the right to think that they can change the world." The artwork exhibited here is an example of these words coming to fruition. Perhaps the art pieces themselves did not change the world. But they did represent a burning hope – a hope that over time came to be.

The artwork shown highlights all of our long-lasting hope for peace. We want all of our children to live in a world where their sense of security isn't compromised. Our hope is that our children will have a better future and see their dreams come to fruition. With the participation and motivation of our region and beyond, peace is attainable. It is not impossible!

It is vital that our youth have the opportunity for a better world to live in and this is the goal that we are all striving towards. In Jerusalem 2,700 years ago, the prophet Isaiah declared: "Nations shall not lift up sword against nation, and they shall learn war no more." This exhibit recognizes that no matter our origins or beliefs, if we work together to combat these obstacles, we will know a peaceful world.

Thank you."

Since Mr. Morad is a specialist about water, his words stimulated a great deal of interest among the students about the literal and metaphoric significance of water in the region and worldwide. He described

how Israel is providing water to many regions of the world, which is remarkable considering that more than half of Israel's total area is desert. He also explained that the development of pure (desalinated) water came out of necessity, being that Israel is a country with much dry (desert) land.

Much discussion centered around this issue of water.

"I never thought about the issue of water being so important," said Tanya Sharma, a clinical psychology graduate student in Dr. Kuriansky's class, adding that she had not known about Israel helping the world with essential pure water, when dirty water carries so much disease worldwide causing health diseases.

Librarian Govan observed that, "Water may separate us, but it also connects all of us."

TC Ph.D. student Sara Ingraham, majoring in international education, shared about a poem by Emily Dickinson, "Water is taught by thirst," as a metaphor to appreciate what you have in life.

Kuriansky's clinical psychology student Antonio Javar Hairston paraphrased poet W.H. Auden, "Thousands have lived without love but none without water", to which Mr. Morad replied that he could not live without love or water. The participants laughed.

In a surprise demonstration by Dr. Kuriansky, event participants then engaged in an interactive activity that Dr. Kuriansky has used in innumerable international peacebuilding workshops. Asking everyone to form a circle, she distributed balls of colored yarn. Everyone then held on to a piece of a colored yarn ball and tossed their ball to another member of the group. They repeated this process, which in the end created an interconnected and colorful web. Dr. Kuriansky asked participants to call out the significance to them of the resulting design created by the intertwining of the multicolored yarns. Answers included: "connection", "different paths can all lead to the same peaceful place", "it's even more beautiful because of our diversity".

Music

As a musical demonstration of the event themes, Meli introduced Russell Daisey -- international singer-songwriter, composer, former student of Dr. Kuriansky and now her music producing partner -- to perform. In joyful expression, Daisey sang their original anthem, "Stand Up For Peace". Everyone chimed in on the chorus refrain: "Stand up for peace on earth, We're gonna start today, Stand up for peace on earth, And we're gonna find the way." This brought everyone to their feet, singing and snapping their fingers.



Russell Daisey singing original anthems of peace

A representative of the International Association of Applied Psychology with consultative status at the United Nations Economic and Social Council, Daisey has communicated powerful messages of peace through the universal language of music, in concerts on world stages with his co-lyricist Kuriansky. The "Stand Up for Peace" anthem was performed at the Japan Hiroshima First International Peace Festival for thousands of people as well as on stage with Nobel Peace laureates, the Dalai Lama, Archbishop Reverend Desmond Tutu, and peace activist Betty Williams.

When the group gathered again in the exhibit hall for the closing, Daisey jumped on a bench for the closing song, "Hope is Alive" - another original anthem composed with Dr. Kuriansky and sung around the world to inspire children, especially those facing crises. The assembled group sang along to the lyrics "We gotta dance together, laugh together, sing together" as they danced, sang and laughed together.

Daisey then presented Mr. Morad with a stuffed plush globe showing countries of the world meant

as an educational toy to inspire peace and love for the world and preservation of the planet, as a gift of peace, love, hope and unity (which he would have also presented to the Palestinian Ambassador had she been in person). The Hugg-A-Planet is created by peace activist Robert Forenza.



Musician Russell Daisey (right) presenting Mr. Morad with the Hugg-A-Planet of Peace, with Professor Kuriansky

Survey Responses

Attendees were interviewed about their experience of the exhibit and the panel. Responses to the surveys showed that participants gained a better understanding of peace, hope and unity in the region, especially through the eyes of the children. They also noted being inspired by how art, nature, music, and even water, are vehicles of peace, and appreciated hearing about the psychosocial hypotheses about peace presented by Dr. Kuriansky, the perspectives of the two government speakers, and the emphasis on the importance of education.

On the survey, student Tanya Sharma wrote, "For me it's interesting that it really takes looking at the perspective of the child at how damaging politics can be and how beautiful kids can view things. It's humbling to look at for anyone in politics."

Student Juliette Lezak wrote that the exhibit was an "interesting way of showing relations between places."

Zach wrote, "I'm impressed at the maturity but saddened thinking about this art coming from children... If the same thing were done today, art by both Israeli and Palestinian children, it would be different."

Michael had a similar reaction, "It was moving but sad to see children's responses to conflict, which were intertwined in their artwork. The one holding a dying infant stood out to me. Amazing linework and gestures. Sad but so inspiring."

Sarah Ingraham shared that the artwork was "profound and impactful since I've never been to those places."

Additional Questions

With regard to questions they would have liked to ask the panelists, examples are:

"How do we learn from the voices of the Israeli and Palestinian children?" - Tiffany Johnson, graduate student in Clinical Psychology with a concentration in Spirituality, Mind, Body

"Can you talk more about children and what they think is children's role in helping with themes such as peace, unity, love, and harmony? What is Teacher's College's role as well and what's the significance of this gallery?" - Laura Jiang, undergraduate student in History and Dance at Columbia College, and Arts and Entertainment Writer at the Columbia Spectator, who wrote an article about the event.

"As a music education major, I wanted to understand how countries use the arts to bring about peace, unity, and understanding amongst different cultures (specifically how does Israel and Palestine do it)? How does it vary from country to country?" - Elaine

"Could you talk more about the brief history of the political tension between both countries and what can be done moving forward?" - Melissa Pierre, graduate student in Psychology in Education with concentrations in Neuropsychology and Global Mental Health and Trauma

Reactions to the Art

Standing in front of her favorite drawing of a Palestinian and an Israeli standing on separate roads meeting together, Dr. Kuriansky reflected on the meaning of coming together. When asked about the purpose of art in conflict, she said, "Creating art together

encourages friendship and mutual understanding which is easier for children but is critical for adults, especially in our conflict-compromised world today."

Mr. Morad admired the exhibit's message and said his country is dedicated to circulating the four messages of peace, love, unity and hope.

When reflecting on the importance of the exhibit, curator Yiming shared, "the countries have borderlines, but art, education, and love have no borderlines or nationalities. We are all living together."

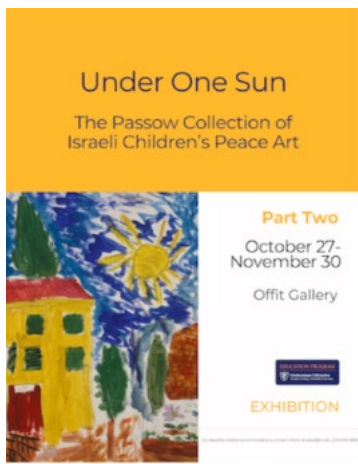
Meli's favorite drawing depicted an Israeli man and a Palestinian man smiling at each other. "This painting really captures the spirit of the exhibit for me," she said. "It shows their brotherhood and commitment to partnership with one another in spite of their different challenges."

Summary

Clearly, the exhibit achieved its aim to stimulate thoughts and emotions associated with the four themes of love, peace, hope and unity that represent what is needed not only in the region but throughout the world.

Part Two

The follow-up Part Two of this exhibit, held in the same Offit library gallery, took place October 27-November 30, 2023, as planned to be a year after the first exhibit described above in 2022. This exhibit showed the remaining 23 works from the Passow Collection of Israeli Children's Peace Art.



Flyer of Part Two children's art exhibit

War had broken out in the Middle East, but the event was intended, as the year before for Part 1, not as political but to highlight the transcendent and universal hopes and dreams of children for a world filled with the four themes of love, hope, peace and unity.

The exhibit title, "Under One Sun" accurately reflects those themes and the representations in the drawings.

The exhibit was possible thanks to the generous support of the Myers Foundations, established in 1997 by Colonel Eugene Myers, M.A. and his wife Florence as a trust to support art in higher education. The support was given to four institutions he attended, Northwestern University, the University of North Dakota, and the University of West Virginia and Teachers College, which is the only wholly graduate institution committed to pedagogy in art, dating back to the philosophy and practice of Arthur Wesley Dow, Professor of Fine Arts at TC from 1904-1922, a pioneer in the field of art education.

Progress Towards Achieving Universal Health Coverage and the Case of Denmark

Caroline M. Burke¹

Introduction

Universal Health Coverage (UHC) refers to the right for all people and communities to have access to the quality health services they require without financial hardship. This includes the full range of essential health services comprised of health promotion, prevention, treatment, rehabilitation, and palliative care across the life course (World Health Organization, 2023). In the context of UHC, access is critical, defined by financial feasibility, physical location, and willingness to seek services. Overall, UHC has been referred to as needing to meet 4 A's and 1 S, namely being: accessible, affordable, available, appropriate and sustainable. Achieving UHC is also a matter of reducing health inequities, so that all individuals have equal opportunity to receive necessary interventions and care.

UHC is a political topic due to its inevitable effect on policy and laws, with the result that UHC can be a polarizing agenda item in some countries. An example of the divisive political split is the failed attempt at healthcare reform in Finland about five years ago when the Prime Minister Juha Sipilä resigned after his goal to reduce inequalities and the cost of the

healthcare system through centralization was not going to be approved by all political parties (Schaart et al., 2019). The finer details of healthcare reform in many countries is a heavily debated topic amongst political parties. This is in great extent due to the immense resources, funding, and effort required to implement healthcare on a large scale for the population of a country. Policies for health coverage would need to be adopted and enforced, and the government would need to agree on the terms and funding mechanisms for this endeavor. Additionally, physical infrastructure, like hospitals and clinics, as well as intangible infrastructure, like forming channels to distribute healthcare workers, equipment, and medicine, would need to be built and maintained equally across the nation. Considerable investment of funds and government time would need to be reallocated for this costly and strenuous mission to be implemented and sustained.

Under-resourced and rural areas have historically disadvantaged and fragile healthcare systems, given that health clinics and hospitals are scarce in the community, and fewer healthcare professionals are available, resulting in a downward spiral of decreased accessibility and quality of care. Furthermore, given

1 Reported by Caroline Burke, member of the Student Division of the International Association of Applied Psychology pursuing a master's degree in the Department of Clinical Psychology, Columbia University Teachers College (TC), and a student in Professor Judy Kuriansky's class on "Psychology and the United Nations." In addition to my scholastic work, I have 5 years of experience working in health care and cancer care with the ultimate goal to improve the lives of cancer patients globally and am currently working as a Clinical Research Supervisor at Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center (MSKCC) in New York City. Recently, as part of my work with Dr. Kuriansky's TC Lab on Global Advocacy and Applied Psychology, I participated in a project with senior psychologists in America and Ukraine to conduct resilience workshops for Ukrainian clients of The Rehabilitation Center in Kyiv, with one sub-population of this project being female cancer patients. This project showed very positive results, which were heartening, especially in the context of war in the region. The results have been covered in the press and presented at a professional psychology conference. I am extremely interested in the field of health psychology and advocating for universal health care.

Edited by Dr. Judy Kuriansky, Professor of Psychology and Education, Columbia University Teachers College, teaching the course on "Psychology and the United Nations". She is also an Advisor to the Mission of Sierra Leone to the United Nations, and representative of the International Association of Applied Psychology in consultative status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council. The author of innumerable articles and books on international issues, including disaster recovery, women around the world, Ebola, the psychological issues in migration, the Intersection of Psychology and Environmental Protection, and "Resilient Health: Leveraging Technology and Social Innovations to Transform Healthcare for COVID-19 Recovery and Beyond," she is an award-winning journalist who has written columns for print media worldwide and a former television reporter and radio talk-show host. A long-time advocate for health, mental health and wellbeing, having participated in (successfully) securing inclusion of mental health and well-being in international agreements including the UN 20230 Agenda and the Political Declaration for Universal Health Coverage, she is also a first responder in worldwide disasters, head of the Global Advocacy and Applied Psychology Lab, and lead of many workshops, trainings and campaigns, including the Ukraine Cancer Care Project of which Caroline Burke was an important part.

fewer healthcare outlets, there is a decreased supply chain for medicine and medical tools, thus, clinics are not as well equipped compared to well-resourced community clinics and hospitals (World Health Organization and International Bank for Reconstruction and Development / The World Bank, 2023). As a result, in order to achieve UHC, large improvements and extensive commitments from the government are required to address these inadequate health services. Further adding to the challenges, due to the required reallocation of government funding to cover these efforts, some tax-payers do not support distribution of finances for this cause, leading to national debate and political fractions surrounding the UHC issue.

Despite the political component, healthcare is affirmed as a human right in many international documents, and the motivation for achieving UHC displays this humanistic point of view. In 2015, all United Nation Member States adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (2015), with one of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) central to the agenda (SDG3) recognizing health and well-being as a fundamental right for all at all ages. Specifically, the commitment to achieve universal healthcare is reflected in target 3.8, which states, "Achieve universal health coverage, including financial risk protection, access to quality essential health-care services and access to safe, effective, quality and affordable essential medicines and vaccines for all" (United Nations General Assembly, 2015, p.16). By agreeing to this Agenda, all government members of the UN committed to achieve this goal by the year 2030 (Ezoe, 2024).

Further, the UN re-committed to achieving UHC in the Political Declaration at the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF), under the auspices of the General Assembly at an important and highly anticipated High-Level Meeting in September, 2023 during a UN General Assembly day-long session. Within this declaration, the UN Member States established their shared commitment, progress, remaining gaps, challenges, and call to action. Specifically, General Assembly resolution 70/299 (2023) states:

We reaffirm our resolve to realize our vision of a world with access to inclusive and equitable quality education, universal health coverage including access to quality essential health-care services, social protection, food security and improved nutrition, safe drinking water, sanitation and hygiene, affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy, sustainable industrialization and quality, resilient, reliable and sustainable infrastructure for all. (p.4)

The Political Declaration also acknowledges that the cascading global crises have highlighted and exacerbated existing inequalities.

In the Call to Action of the Agenda, countries committed to combat inequalities and pursue policies that stem the tide of rising inequality and to ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all. The goal is to achieve this through Universal Health Coverage, and strengthening health systems and all other health-related targets, in the overall pursuit to "leave no-one behind" (General Assembly resolution 70/299, 2023).

Universal healthcare is a well-discussed and important goal for all countries to achieve. As the year 2030 approaches, it is extremely important to review current progress towards Universal Health Coverage and to evaluate the criteria used in assessing achievements by the Member States. Further, it is essential to review successful implementations of universal healthcare systems.

This present report aims to assess the status of Universal Health Coverage, specifically, to:

1) Explore the current grading system and criteria used by the UN when reviewing a country's progress towards SDG Target 3.8, "Achieve universal health coverage, including financial risk protection, access to quality essential health-care services and access to safe, effective, quality and affordable essential medicines and vaccines for all."

2) Assess the progress of countries in achieving SDG target 3.8

3) Specifically examine the country of Denmark's healthcare system as an example of a high-ranking nation's progress to achieving target 3.8

Universal Health Coverage Grading System

SDG Target 3.8 is assessed through two indicators: indicator 3.8.1 for health service coverage and indicator 3.8.2 focused on health expenditures in relation to a household's budget to identify financial hardship caused by health care costs (United Nations General Assembly, 2015). These two indicators are monitored jointly to capture the service coverage and financial protection dimensions of healthcare but are calculated separately.

Measuring SDG 3.8.1

Progress for indicator 3.8.1 is assessed by the UHC Service Coverage Index (SCI). The index is on a 0 to 100 unitless scale and is computed by averaging the following 14 tracer indicators of health service coverage broken into the assessment of four broader categories (World Health Organization, 2023), each with subcategories which are listed in order:

I. Reproductive, maternal, newborn and child health. This consists of measuring four areas:

1. Family planning: the percentage of women of reproductive age (15–49 years) who are married or in union who have their need for family planning satisfied with modern methods.

2. Pregnancy care: the percentage of women aged 15–49 years with a live birth in a given time period who received antenatal care four or more times.

3. Child immunization: the percentage of infants receiving three doses of diphtheria-tetanus-pertussis containing vaccine.

4. Child treatment: the percentage of children younger than 5 years with symptoms of acute respiratory infection (cough and fast or difficult breathing due to a problem in the chest and not due to a blocked nose only) in the 2 weeks preceding the survey for whom advice or treatment was sought from a health facility or provider.

II. Infectious disease, also assessed in four areas:

5. Tuberculosis: the percentage of incident TB cases that are detected and treated.

6. HIV/AIDS: the percentage of adults and children living with HIV currently receiving antiretroviral therapy.

7. Malaria: the percentage of population in malaria-endemic areas who slept under an insecticide-treated net the previous night [only for countries with high malaria burden].

8. Water, sanitation and hygiene: the percentage of the population using at least basic sanitation services.

III. Noncommunicable diseases, measured in three areas:

9. Hypertension: the prevalence of treatment (taking medicine) for hypertension among adults aged 30–79 years with hypertension (age-standardized estimate).

10. Diabetes: the age-standardized mean fasting plasma glucose (mmol/L) for adults aged 18 years and older.

11. Tobacco: the age-standardized prevalence of adults ≥ 15 years currently using any tobacco product (smoked and/or smokeless tobacco) on a daily or non-daily basis.

IV. Service capacity and access, measured in three areas:

12. Hospital access: Hospital beds density, relative to a maximum threshold of 18 per 10,000 population.

13. Health workforce: The number of health professionals (physicians, psychiatrists, and surgeons) per capita, relative to maximum thresholds for each cadre.

14. Health security: based on the International Health Regulations (IHR) core capacity index, which is the average percentage of attributes of 13 core capacities that have been attained. (p.2)

The UHC Service Coverage Index first requires standardization of the 14 tracer indicators to combine them into the index. They are placed on the same scale with 0 being the lowest value and 100 being the optimal value. For the majority of the indicators, the 0 to 100 scale is the default scale of measurement, but there are a few indicators that require conversion and/or rescaling (World Health Organization, 2023). For example, the prevalence of tobacco use is converted to prevalence of non-use to ensure the higher score reflects a higher health score to coincide with the health index. It is also rescaled based on a non-zero minimum, specifically a minimum value of 30%. There is also a need to rescale for continuous measures. Plasma glucose level is one example of a continuous measurement assessed in the SCI that is given an upper and lower risk limit to be converted to the 0 to 100 scale. Lastly, some indicators require a maximum threshold. Hospital bed density and health workforce density are both capped at a maximum and any value above this is held constant at 100 (World Health Organization, 2023).

Once all tracer indicator values are standardized on a unitless scale of 0 to 100, geometric means are calculated within each of the four health service areas. Then a geometric mean is taken of those four values. If the value of a tracer indicator happens to be zero or beyond 100, it is set to 1 or 100 respectively before computing the geometric mean (World Health Organization, 2023).

Indicator values are gathered from relevant programs across the World Health Organization (WHO), United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), and United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA). For any missing data, consultations with technical experts at the respective agencies are conducted to inform the inclusion of any additional data points (World Health Organization and International Bank for Reconstruction and Development / The World Bank, 2023). The data is collected via household surveys, administrative

data, facility data, facility surveys, and sentinel surveillance systems (World Health Organization, 2023).

Measuring SDG 3.8.2

Calculating indicator 3.8.2 is based on a ratio exceeding a threshold: the numerator of the ratio is household expenditure on health and the denominator of the ratio is total household consumption expenditure. When the total household consumption expenditure is unavailable, income is used as the denominator (World Health Organization, 2023). Two thresholds are used to define a large health expenditure: 1) greater than 10% and 2) greater than 25% of total household expenditure or income (World Health Organization, 2023).

Per the WHO (2023), household expenditure on health is defined as, "any expenditure incurred at the time of service use to get any type of care" (p.2). This includes all medicines, vaccines, and other pharmaceutical preparations, as well as all health products from any provider for any member of the household. These are titled Out-Of-Pocket (OOP) payments in the International Classification for Health Accounts (OECD, 2011).

Household consumption expenditure and household income are monetary welfare measures. Household consumption is a function of permanent income and consumption is generally considered the total of monetary values of all items consumed by the household on a domestic account during a common period. Income is typically measured as disposable income, which is total income less direct taxes, compulsory fees and fines (World Health Organization, 2023). Income is more difficult to measure accurately due to its greater variability while consumption is less variable and easier to measure. Therefore, it is recommended that household consumption be used instead of income, when possible (World Health Organization, 2023).

The data is mostly collected through household surveys. Household budget surveys (HBS) and household income and expenditure surveys (HIES) usually collect these data points. The World Health Organization (WHO) and the World Bank contact Ministries of

Health and/or National statistical offices to either request access to the household survey data or request estimates produced by the country itself (World Health Organization, 2023).

Current Progress on Achieving Universal Health Coverage

As of the year 2023, the UN Member States are not on track to meet the 2030 SDGs (United Nations, 2023). As mentioned, Target 3.8 is divided into two indicators: 3.8.1, reflecting the coverage of essential services, and 3.8.2, indicating the proportion of population with large household expenditures on health as a share of total household expenditure or income (United Nations General Assembly, 2015). Both indicators were assessed between 2000 and 2021 by the World Health Organization and the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development / The World Bank and although 3.8.1 has improved by 23 SCI points, neither indicator is on track to meet the goals of achieving UHC and reducing financial hardship from essential health costs by 2030.

Coverage of Essential Services: SDG 3.8.1

Per the Tracking Universal Health Coverage 2023 Global Monitoring Report, the UHC SCI score increased from 45 to 68 out of 100 between 2000 and 2021; however, the pace of improvement has slowed since 2015. There was a global increase of only three index points since 2015, with few countries seeing a comparable level of coverage expansion as in the years before 2015. This indicates that in 2021, approximately four and a half billion people were not completely covered by essential health services. At a country level, this means roughly 14–87% of the population did not have healthcare coverage (World Health Organization and International Bank for Reconstruction and Development / The World Bank, 2023).

Despite current projections forecasting that the UN will not meet their SDG goal for Universal Health Coverage, there have still been improvements worth highlighting since the 2015 goals were adopted. Per the Tracking Universal Health Coverage 2023 Global Monitoring Report, the Member States were divided

into 4 categories of SCI scores: 1) below 20 2) 20–39 3) 40–59 4) 60–79 and 5) 80 or more. In 2015, there were 0 countries scoring below 20, 25 countries scoring between 20–39, 49 countries scoring between 40–59, 86 countries scoring between 60–79, and 34 scoring 80 or more. In 2021, there are still 0 countries scoring below 20, 14 countries scoring between 20–39, 57 countries scoring between 40–59, 81 countries scoring between 60–79, and 42 scoring 80 or more (World Health Organization and International Bank for Reconstruction and Development / The World Bank, 2023). Comparing the 2021 SCI scores to the SCI scores six years prior demonstrates the overall improvement in achieving UHC. Even if the progress is not at the rate required to meet the UN's goal, UHC is trending in the upwards direction. However, the stagnation in success over the past few years also raises important considerations regarding barriers the globe is facing that may be inhibiting UHC.

Barriers Countries are Facing. Despite the many challenges that countries may face independently in implementing and achieving Universal Health Coverage, there are also common shared challenges which have negatively impacted the progress of SDG Target 3.8. The major barriers include, but are not limited to, the healthcare worker shortage and financing and infrastructure issues.

- **Healthcare Worker Shortage.** Inadequate quantity and quality of healthcare workers is a main challenge in achieving Universal Health Coverage. The World Health Organization and The Global Strategy on Human Resources for Health: Workforce 2030 projected a health workforce shortage of 18 million health workers by 2030 (2016). Since 2016, projections have been updated and Boniol et al (2022) estimate a health workforce shortage of 10 million health workers by 2030, a reduction in the previously predicted shortage. Despite this slight improvement, there is still concern, especially since some research shows healthcare worker related issues are credited with as high as 60% of the resource challenges countries face (Darrudi et al, 2022). The lack of healthcare workers and the lack of workers with proper skills are hindering progress towards UHC

for developing and developed countries. This health worker shortage is due to many factors, including: maldistribution and migration of the workforce, inappropriate training, poor supervision, unregulated dual practice, imbalances in skill-mix composition, and reduced productivity and performance which all negatively affect the labor market. High-income countries are also witnessing severe shortages due to budget cuts in the sector or due to economic downturn (Sousa et al, 2013). In addition to those issues, the population throughout the world is aging, which places more demand on the healthcare system in all countries. Without ample professionals, proper training, and worker retention, UHC will be severely impacted on a country and global level. Currently, this shortage is especially creating healthcare inequalities in low income areas. For example, Cameroon's capital city has 4.5 times as many health workers per inhabitant as the country's most impoverished region (Ngah-Ngah et al, 2013). This results in decreased health access and quality of care for the individuals in the lower-income regions of Cameroon compared to their capital city. Boniol et al (2022) also highlight the increasing healthcare inequities, as the 47 countries on the WHO support and safeguard list are predicted to experience two-thirds of the global health worker shortage. Since numerous factors contribute to the shortage of health workers, including those mentioned above, the solution will need to comprehensively address these issues in order to produce meaningful and sustainable change in healthcare (Sousa et al, 2013). Improvements required in order to scale health ecosystems are extensive and will take time for all countries to implement; however, recognition is growing about the importance of the health workforce. This is demonstrated by the fact that The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals defined a specific target in SDG 3 to increase the health workforce, with emphasis to do so in the least developed countries and States that would face the most challenges. The importance of a plentiful, skilled, and sustainable health workforce is essential to achieving Universal Health Coverage globally (Sousa et al, 2013).

- **Financing and Infrastructure.** Additionally, coverage of essential services for a given population undeniably requires government funded commitments and policy changes. For higher income countries, this typically means a new framework, and funding needs to be created or enhanced to support the endeavor. For lower income countries, this may require support from other nations and/or organizations as well as new framework and funding. The intangible framework and funding is massively important in achieving UHC, but access is also crucial. Universal Health Coverage cannot be attained without health accessibility, and ensuring accessibility also requires financing. Accessibility can be on various levels. One level is the ability to physically obtain essential health services. Such access requires that hospitals, clinics, equipment, and technology be built and available globally. On another level, the quality of hospital equipment should be uniform across all locations to ensure individuals are able to receive adequate care in an accessible location (Evans et al, 2013). Constructing healthcare buildings, supplying medicine, distributing equipment, and maintaining this infrastructure is a costly implementation that many countries may struggle to attain, but is necessary in order for all individuals to obtain essential health services. Thus, financing and infrastructure is a major barrier that may be preventing member states from achieving UHC.

Financial Hardship Resulting from the Cost of Essential Health Services: SDG 3.8.2

Additionally, indicator 3.8.2 has continuously worsened over the past few years, and the proportion of the population that faces tragic levels of out-of-pocket health spending has perpetually increased since 2000. In other words, health expenditure is driving populations into poverty, with an estimated 2 billion people experiencing financial hardship and 344 million people going deeper into extreme poverty due to health costs (World Health Organization and International Bank for Reconstruction and Development / The World Bank, 2023). Per the report, this pattern

is consistent across all regions and the majority of countries. Specifically, out of the 138 countries with data points from 2000 through 2021, 64 countries have worsening (>0.1 change) and 32 have little change in (-0.1 – 0.1) OOP catastrophic health spending (World Health Organization and International Bank for Reconstruction and Development / The World Bank, 2023).

The cost of health services is not just driving people into poverty, but driving them into extreme poverty. The percentage of people living in households spending more than 10% of their finances on OOP health expenses has continuously increased from 9.6% in 2000 to 13.5% in 2019, and the estimated number of people incurring large OOP health spending increased by 76% from 588 million people in 2000 to 1.04 billion in 2019 (World Health Organization and International Bank for Reconstruction and Development / The World Bank, 2023).

Financial hardship from health costs exacerbates healthcare inequity. Fear of financial burden from seeking health services can make individuals less likely to utilize services, which leads to worsening health conditions that could have been alleviated with earlier intervention. For example, prescription medication can be life saving for individuals but due to the high costs of some medication many individuals underuse their medication due to the financial burden (Heisler et al, 2010). A self-report survey of 29 low-income-countries and low-middle-income-countries prior to the COVID-19 pandemic revealed that 19% of the individuals forgoing essential care did so because of financial barriers (World Health Organization and International Bank for Reconstruction and Development / The World Bank, 2023). Additionally, in low-income and rural regions, there are fewer healthcare workers, clinics, medicines, and equipment, which forces individuals to travel to seek essential services (World Health Organization and International Bank for Reconstruction and Development / The World Bank, 2023). Such travel can be expensive, exacerbating financial hardship. Moreover, catastrophic OOP health spending negatively impacts households' ability to buy other essential goods and services like food, shelter, clothing or education. (World Health

Organization and International Bank for Reconstruction and Development / The World Bank, 2023). Improving coverage and access, as the SDGs aim to do, can alleviate the experience of financial burden and health service inequity.

Case study: Overview of Denmark's Healthcare System

Denmark is a Nordic country with a population of approximately 5.8 million people. Over the recent years, Denmark has proven their healthcare system is well-structured and accessible yielding consistently high SCI ratings, with a 2021 SCI score of 82 (World Health Organization and International Bank for Reconstruction and Development / The World Bank, 2023). This paper examines the healthcare system in Denmark as an example of a successful structure and approach to achieving the UN goals for Universal Health Coverage.

Denmark has a welfare state model with a tax funded universal healthcare system. As of 2019, roughly 85% of all health care services including free access to general practitioners, hospitals, outpatient hospital specialist clinics, and partial reimbursement of prescribed medications were covered through taxes. About 15% of expenses consist of patient copayments that primarily cover cost-sharing for medications, physiotherapy, and/or dental care (Laugesen et al, 2021).

The Danish healthcare system is organized on three administrative levels: the national level (state), regional level (5 regions), and local level (98 Municipalities). The government is responsible for defining the Danish healthcare system framework, under the Ministry of Health which passes health legislation, issues national guidelines, protects patients' rights, conducts audits, and monitors healthcare professionals, hospitals and pharmacies. The regions oversee primary and secondary healthcare services provided by general practitioners, hospitals, and specialists in private practice and administer the drug reimbursement plan. Municipalities are responsible for social and community care including but not limited to welfare allowances, home care, elderly care, housing

for the mentally disabled and homeless, care for mentally or physically disabled persons, as well as substance abuse and addiction treatment. Denmark also has a small private health care sector separate from the government. The private hospitals account for less than 1% of the hospital beds in Denmark and provide access to faster diagnostic procedures and treatments not covered by public health insurance like some cosmetic procedures (Schmidt et al, 2019).

Every Danish resident must choose between what is referred to as Group 1 or Group 2 public health insurance. Over 99% of the population are in Group 1, which means that they are registered with a specific General Practitioner (GP) for free primary care and referrals to secondary care. By comparison, Group 2 members may choose their GP, dentist, chiropractors, and all private specialists without referral and are subject to copayment. Hospital treatments require referrals and are free of charge for both groups (Schmidt et al, 2019).

Medicine prices are set by pharmaceutical companies; however, members of the Danish Association of the Pharmaceutical Industry are subject to a price-cap agreement between the Association, the Ministry of Health, and the Danish Regions. Copayments are required for prescriptions at community pharmacies, and a reimbursement committee decides whether or not medicine costs are partially reimbursable to the patients. All medicines under the general reimbursement scheme have an OOP cap of about 600 US dollars (Schmidt et al, 2019).

Denmark has approximately 4.2 doctors per 1,000 inhabitants, which is much greater than the global density of 1.8 from 2018, and 2.6 hospital beds per 1,000 inhabitants (Laugesen et al., 2021). It is also estimated that about 90% of the population has contact with the primary healthcare system annually (Schmidt et al, 2019). The high physician density, hospital bed per inhabitant, and rate of contact with the health system all demonstrate the accessibility of Denmark's healthcare infrastructure.

The tax funded healthcare system, public health insurance, 3-tier administrative approach, and

physically accessible infrastructure has proven to provide adequate UHC without catastrophic OOP spending for the population. The high SCI scores and statistics prove this on a global stage; however, Denmark's success does not mean this exact strategy can be applied to all nations. On the other hand, the country acts as one example of a solid implementation option that can be reviewed and adjusted to fit other countries' and member states' needs to achieve UHC.

Conclusion

SDG Target 3.8 in the United Nations Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development is currently not on track to meet the achievements agreed upon by governments in the year 2015. Although there has been significant progress since 2000 in achieving Universal Health Coverage, the pace of improvement has greatly slowed since 2015. Specifically, indicator 3.8.1 has traction in the correct direction despite the deceleration in pace, but indicator 3.8.2 has continuously worsened in the past years.

Notably, in assessing the progress of Target 3.8 the deleterious impacts of COVID-19 must be acknowledged. The COVID-19 pandemic seriously disrupted economies and healthcare systems globally. The debt overhang and inflation resulting from the pandemic has placed, and will continue to place, considerable pressure on government and household budgets. In many countries, economic activity and government expenditure per capita will not recover to pre-COVID levels for several years, resulting in concerns about the sustainability of increased public spending on health (World Health Organization and International Bank for Reconstruction and Development / The World Bank, 2023).

As one positive outcome of this, the COVID-19 pandemic shed light on global health disparities and the importance for achieving Universal Health Coverage. The increasing burden of noncommunicable diseases, aging populations, and cost of living in general all point to a need for action to expand healthcare coverage and provide protection against the financial hardship OOP spending can cause. Given these

glaring facts and recent lived experiences, governments and communities may more clearly see the benefit in ensuring target 3.8 is met by 2030.

The COVID-19 pandemic also accelerated the implementation of telehealth and other technological advancements that could prove beneficial in increasing UHC and accessibility globally. E-health platforms and telehealth visits have the potential to improve the sharing of medical knowledge, increase accessibility to care, and decrease inequities across nations and the world (Hussein, 2015). Although telehealth is still a new and growing area of healthcare, the COVID-19 pandemic introduced and expanded this platform for the globe to utilize in enhancing healthcare.

In spite of many of these factors, a major challenge is that other global crises will inevitably emerge which may inhibit progress towards achieving UHC. Also, the threat of "Disease X" has become recognized, with the World Health Organization convening scientists in November 2022 to identify unknown pathogens that could cause major outbreaks (World Health Organization, 2022). In this precarious situation, it is extremely important to move forward efficiently and effectively. The health areas of least improvement over the past few years should be honed in on to create a positive impact. While the inequality gap between nations has decreased over the past 20 years, there is still more work to be done. Higher income countries and regions and well-funded non-governmental organizations must assist with funding and implementing health structures in low-income countries and regions. Although the world has not met expectations thus far, Target 3.8 can still be achieved, and is still a priority of the UN 2030 Agenda.

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