

Building Forward Together: Ending Persistent Poverty, Respecting all People and Our Planet



UN Image for International Day for the Eradication of Poverty 2021

Introduction

One of the devastating effects of the COVID-19 pandemic is that up to 163 million people have been pushed into poverty, joining 1.3 billion people already living in persistent poverty (United Nations, 2021c).

The eradication of poverty has long been a goal of the United Nations, for example, as the first goal in the Millennium Development Goals, and now, similarly, as Goal 1 in the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. But the recent COVID-19 pandemic has spotlighted the extreme necessity of continued action on this front, given that the pandemic scourge has exacerbated poverty throughout the world (United Nations, 2021c). To this end, the 2021 International Day for the Eradication of Poverty (IDEP) was commemorated by a virtual event (via zoom) on October 15 to focus attention on the status of this crisis by people living in poverty sharing their direct experiences, as well as high-level officials speaking on what is currently being done.

The image for this International Day, as shown in the spotlight figure in this article, illustrates the key issues, with hands and a plant symbol indicating the need to work together, as well as people making announcements and releasing birds to carry the message widely in a forward motion (United Nations, 2021b).

This report gives an overview of this commemoration event to highlight the history of IDEP, and to contextualize it within the framework of the UN Sustainable Development Goals, particularly Goal 1.

History of the International Day for the Eradication of Poverty

The first observance of an International Day for the Eradication of Poverty took place 34 years ago, on 17 October 1987, when over 100,000 people assembled in France to memorialize the

victims of extreme poverty (United Nations, 2021a). This event was coordinated by Joseph Wresinski, founder of ATD Fourth World, a nonprofit organization which created an international movement to eradicate chronic poverty through a human-rights based approach. whereby ATD stands for “All Together in Dignity” Wresinski proclaimed, “Wherever men and women are condemned to live in extreme poverty, human rights are violated. To come together to ensure that these rights be respected is our solemn duty” (ATD Fourth World, 2021a).

Following the lead of Wresinski and ATD Fourth World, people from all backgrounds continued to gather annually on this date in solidarity with those living in poverty (ATD Fourth World, 2021b).

In 1992, the UN General Assembly adopted a resolution declaring 17 October as the International Day for the Eradication of Poverty, “Welcoming the fact that certain non-governmental organizations, on the initiative of one non-governmental organization, have in recent years in many States observed 17 October as World Day for Overcoming Extreme Poverty,” (General Assembly resolution 47/196). Since then, the Day has been celebrated annually, bringing people together to advocate for advancement on issues of poverty and allowing people living in poverty to share their voices. Every year, a specific theme is chosen to best align to what those living in poverty are asking for.

International Day for the Eradication of Poverty 2021

The theme chosen for this year was “Building Forward Together: Ending Persistent Poverty, Respecting all People and Our Planet”. In the face of the exacerbation of poverty as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, the UN has re-committed to its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) including SDG 1 about ending poverty, evident in the campaign headlined by the phrase “*building back better*” (United Nations, 2021c).

In the context of poverty, however, those living in scarcity and inequality do not want to **go back** to how things were before the pandemic; instead, they want to move forward towards a more equitable future (United Nations, 2021c). Thus, the 2021 theme focuses on **building forward** in a way that promotes dignity, cooperation, and respect for the planet.

In response to this, the theme of this year was purposefully selected to be “Building Forward Together: Ending Persistent Poverty, Respecting all People and Our Planet”.

In his message to this year’s UN General Assembly, United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres mentioned the importance of the 2021 IDEP, and highlighted a three-pronged approach to facing poverty (Guterres, 2021), The recovery must be:

- (1) transformative, since strong entities are needed to progress forward in an equitable and growth-minded way
- (2) inclusive, to apply to all persons, since uneven recovery leads to further inequities, especially among women
- (3) sustainable, since the health of the world is essential to lasting change

Because the COVID-19 pandemic has prohibited in-person gatherings, the IDEP commemoration was held virtually this year. This commemoration was advertised as a forum

where high-level officials, member states, and individuals living in poverty would discuss the effects of poverty and solutions for moving forward.

Event Overview: 2021 Commemoration of the International Day for the Eradication of Poverty

The commemoration, held this year on 15 October via zoom, took place at 10:00am EST, with more than 400 people in virtual attendance. Seven panelists participated in live dialogue with the moderator, with several short video messages shown, which were produced by activists living in poverty, pre-recorded specifically for this event.



UN Flyer for International Day for the Eradication of Poverty

As shown by the logos on the flyer above, several organizations co-sponsored this event (United Nations, 2021b). These included the United Nation’s Development Programme (the UN development agency), the United Nation’s Department of Economic and Social Affairs (the UN agency for sustainable development), ATD Fourth World, the Permanent Mission of France to the UN, the Permanent Mission of Burkina Faso to the UN, and Agence Française de Développement (AFD) (an NGO working towards a fairer and more sustainable world).



Moderator Dr. Antonia Joy Kategekwa

The event moderator, Dr. Antonia Joy Kategekwa, Strategic Advisor to the Assistant Administrator and Director of the United Nations Development Programme’s Regional Bureau for Africa in New York, welcomed all participants to the event by calling for solidarity and hope as we move towards the goal of eradicating poverty.

Dr. Kategekwa showed a powerful video created specifically for the event (viewable at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MDpWbIRUfUk>). The video began with Donald Lee, current President of ATD Fourth World and co-organizer for the annual UN International Day for the Eradication of Poverty commemoration event since 2000, speaking about how he helped to organize the day 27 years ago to bring together people from all walks of life to speak on poverty. The video included brief statements from people on the ground who are activists and people living in poverty, as well as government voices, including the Permanent Representative of France to the UN (2014-2019), the Director of UNESCO Bangkok, and the Director of the UN Information Service (Geneva), commenting about what this day means to them and highlighting the importance of action. In this way, the video represented voices of multiple stakeholders, especially including those with “lived experience” (of poverty), which is a goal of United Nations events.

Also in the video, UN Secretary-General António Guterres emphasized the role of everyone in ending persistent poverty by listening to those with lived experience, saying, “We must do more to listen to them, address the indignities they face, and tackle the power structures that prevent their inclusion in society.”

After the video showing, the moderator re-emphasized the importance of listening to people with lived experience, who are living in poverty, and respecting the rights of all people. In addition, she explained the theme of IDEP this year, of “*Building Forward Together: Ending Persistent Poverty, Respecting all People and Our Planet*”. She warmly introduced the first panelist and posed the guiding question: “How exactly we can build forward together and meet the spirit of this theme?”



Panelist UNDP Administrator Mr. Achim Steiner

The speaker, Mr. Achim Steiner, Administrator of the United Nations Development Programme and Vice-Chair of the UN Sustainable Development Group, began his presentation by noting that although the UN has created special days throughout the year to celebrate certain issues, this

does not mean that they are not being attended to on the other 364 days of the year. In my view, this was a good point to start the event, setting the tone that extreme poverty must still be at the forefront of people's minds once this event ended.

Mr. Steiner, an eminent leader in the UN system for years, also gave a face to poverty, stating that "Poverty is not a statistic; it is something very real; it is something very personal." Poverty is intersectional, he noted, as it usually goes hand-in-hand with inequality.

In addition, he pointed out that women are hit particularly hard by poverty.

Steiner then elaborated on the detrimental effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on those living in poverty, which is exacerbating inequality and access to resources. The climate crisis is also having a deleterious effect, since over 70% of those living in poverty rely directly on natural resources for their livelihoods. Additionally, the diminishing biodiversity threatens to push more people into poverty.

We next heard a voice from "lived experience", namely that of Barclay Owen, a garbage collector living in the Central African Republic, describing his experience of poverty via recorded video message (viewable at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1Soph9Md9_Y, with French with English subtitles). The poorest people of that nation are displaced to live in places that are flood-prone, polluted, and greatly affected by climate change. Barclay and his family were forced to live in a dangerous settlement but were lucky to move along the river. Here, he experienced first-hand the effects of climate change, since he lost his house to floods. As a result, he ended up back in an area fraught with violence. He emphasized an important message to all, saying that his fate can be the fate of all of us unless we work together to fight climate change.

The next video exemplified a "voice from the field" meaning a person who is living in the region. In her video message (viewable at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JMqmm8fGubk>), Ms. Gerry Scardo, an activist from the Appalachian region in the United States, spoke on the detrimental effects of coal mining in the area. Large areas were cleared for mining which caused loss of biodiversity and flooding, in addition to pollution from coal burning. She called for a complete transition to renewable energy sources. However, she is dismayed that green industries are not coming to her area since it is not seen as a desirable place to create jobs, and many people have been forced to leave the area for work. She asked for solidarity in fighting climate change and for more money and resources for reclamation of coal stripped lands.



Panelists Mr. Lenen Rahaman (bottom) and Ms. Kerstin Stendahl (top right) with moderator Dr. Antonia Joy Kategekwa (top left)

The moderator then asked the next two panelists to discuss further how climate change plays a role in exacerbating poverty. Mr. Lenen Rahaman, Founder and Executive Director of Mati (which means soil), a grassroots NGO in Bangladesh, which partners with ATD World and works with people living below the poverty line in the fields of women’s empowerment, education and livelihood development. He spoke about climate change in Bangladesh and how it specifically effects children. Throughout Bangladesh, people are dealing with either excess flooding or droughts which hit those living in poverty particularly hard. His NGO aims at reducing poverty through the empowerment of people, reaching out to children to see how they feel about these extreme weather conditions and living in poverty. The children he spoke with expressed high emotions due to anxiety and uncertainty, making it clear to him that this stress was taking a toll on their lives.

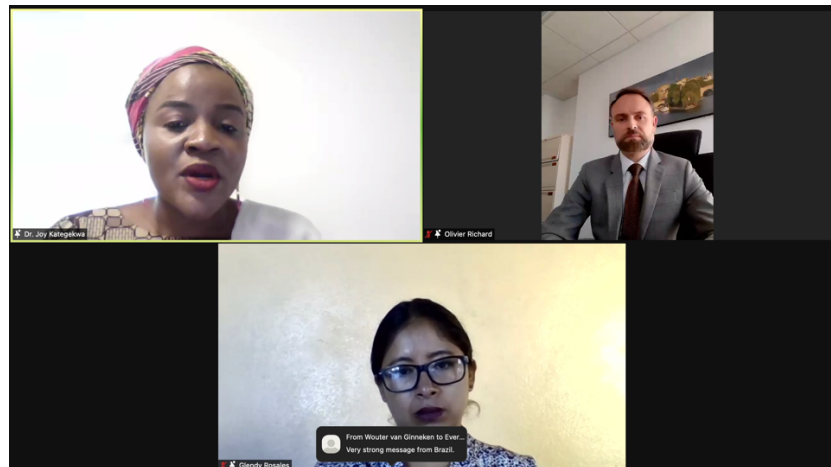
Ms. Kerstin Stendahl, Chief of the Ecosystems Integration Branch in the Ecosystems Division of United Nations Environment Programme, continued the conversation by speaking about the reliance on natural resources of those living in poverty.. As these resources are diminishing, poverty will only get worse. She called on restoring biodiversity and creating new ways to fight climate change as essential to ameliorating this crisis. When asked to expand on possible solutions, she focused on the importance of both short-term emergency measures necessary for big weather events as well as long-term measures to slow the effects of climate change. In addition, she said, achieving the SDGs would go a long way towards addressing climate change, so it should be a central goal going forward.

Mr. Lenen Rahaman, spoke again to highlight the importance of listening to people who are experiencing poverty, and getting their participation.

Next, the moderator presented a video about a holiday home in France, called La Bise, which is an initiative funded by ATD Fourth World to allow those with low incomes to have a place to vacation with their families (ATD Fourth World, 2016) (viewable at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1_2LJSsyStI, in French with English translation). The home gives these families a place to get away from the everyday stressors of life and experience nature together. In a powerful statement, one of the people who had stayed at this home said it “creates

greater self-confidence within one's interiority...being human again and not just a number, or a poverty quota."

The last video of voices from the field shown at the event featured Ms. Ana Lucia Santos de Silva, a community leader from Brazil who works in a farming community which has been hit hard by environmental degradation (viewable at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Jg2Sv5jVmZE>, in Portuguese with English translation). Due to droughts, it has become hard to grow crops and keep livestock alive, which hurts business. She has become president of the Massaroca chapter of The Maria Eufrásia Pelletier Association (<https://www.gsif.it/countries/brazil/>), an organization of women in her village working with other agencies in her village to create an action plan to improve the quality of life for those living in the area. She highlighted the importance of empowering women and giving them a voice in order to help fight poverty.

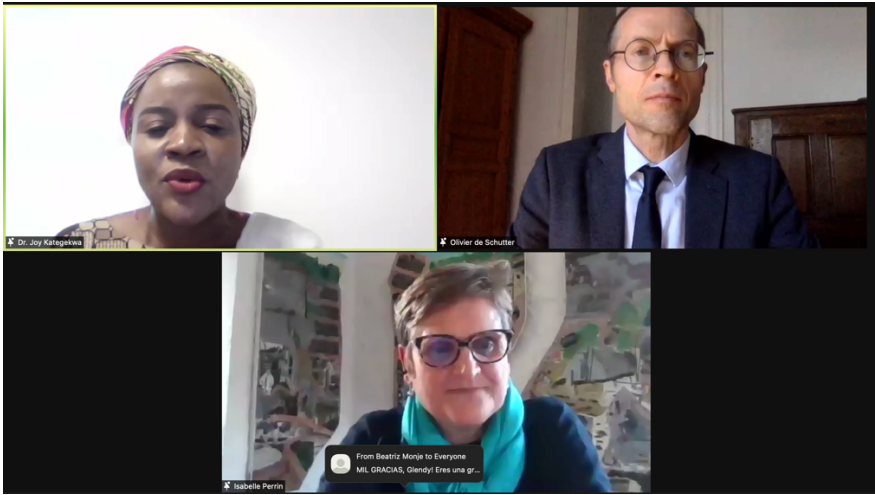


Panelists Mr. Olivier Richard (top right) and Ms. Glendy Rosales (bottom), with moderator Dr. Antonia Joy Kategekwa (top left)

The moderator introduced the next two panelists to discuss ways to combat poverty going forward, including one from civil society and another from government. From civil society, Ms. Glendy Rosales, activist with ATD Fourth World Guatemala and co-founder of a solidarity economy project which works to reduce poverty through job placement, spoke about her grassroots work with people in her area in Guatemala. It can be very difficult to find a job where she lives, so her solidarity economy project creates opportunities of employment. The four pillars upon which her organization operate are: solidarity, inclusion, respect, and training.

Adding the voice of government, Mr. Olivier Richard, Head of the Development and Climate Unit at the French Mission to the UN, warned against tackling poverty first and then tackling climate change, because, he said, if we put off confronting climate change, it will be too late. He discussed the necessity of working together to create any meaningful change, and the importance of all countries to be involved in this fight.

Both panelists concluded by speaking about what makes them hopeful about the future: that there is capacity for change and that small things can add up to bigger changes.



Panelists Ms. Isabelle Pypaert Perrin (bottom) and Mr. Olivier De Schutter(top right) with moderator Dr. Antonia Joy Kategekwa (top left)

Introducing the last two panelists, the moderator asked them to speak on creating a better, more equal world for all. As before, the voices represented two distinct stakeholders, in this case, civil society as well as the United Nations.

As a voice for civil society, Ms. Isabelle Pypaert Perrin, Director General of the International Movement ATD Fourth World, spoke about the grave importance of listening to those who are most vulnerable and responding to what they need as they are often working towards improving their own situation themselves. She also called for connected mobilization against poverty on a monumental scale.

As a voice of the United Nations, Mr. Olivier De Schutter, UN Special Rapporteur on Extreme Poverty and Human Rights, referred to those living in poverty as the real experts on what is essential to fight climate change since they are the ones who see first-hand what is needed. He also spoke on the necessity of fighting climate change and fighting poverty together at the same time. When we invest money into earth initiatives, these initiatives help to create jobs and make living conditions better for those in poverty. In turn, working towards eradicating poverty allows more resources to flow to those that are best able to fight climate change. This balance helps to create more equal societies which further supports social and ecological justice.

The moderator, Dr. Kategekwa, concluded the event by summarizing what she thought were the 10 key takeaways from the speakers. These takeaways highlight that climate change and poverty must be tackled together:

1. Our choices and what we focus our attention on matter.
2. We must move away from fossil fuels towards more sustainable solutions.
3. Poverty must be understood in its real context, from those who are living it.
4. Investment must be taken in those regions that are most affective.

5. The effect on children must be considered in all actions.
6. Internal migration is on the rise and must be confronted.
7. We have to preserve ecosystems and promote biodiversity.
8. Women will play an important role in ending poverty.
9. Collaboration is needed to move forward.
10. Participation has to be led by those who are living in poverty.

Dr. Kategekwa ended the event by urging each of us to pledge to do our part in eradicating poverty.

Watching this presentation, I was very moved by the current state and face of poverty in the world, as well as the need for climate action.

Connection to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals

When establishing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG), the UN member states adopted 17 global goals to be achieved by the year 2030 (United Nations, 2020a). Recognizing the effects of widespread poverty, the UN chose the goal of ending poverty in all its forms everywhere as the aim of the first SDG (United Nations Development Programme, n.d.). This is represented in a logo about “No poverty” (see: (UN Image- <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/news/communications-material/>)). The first target of this goal is to end all extreme poverty by 2030. Already a challenge to achieve, reaching this goal has been even more difficult as a result of the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, since the percentage of those living in extreme poverty has risen for the first time since 1990.



SDG 1 icon: No Poverty

Annually, the UN publishes a report that details progress made towards the SDG targets as well as further recommended measures. The 2021 document, known as *The Sustainable Development Goals Report*, recognizes the necessity for swift action in stating “even before COVID-19, the world was not on track to achieve the goal of ending poverty by 2030, and without immediate and significant action, it will remain beyond reach” (United Nations, 2021d).

The UN has also produced a document entitled *A UN framework for the immediate socio-economic response to COVID-19*, calling for greatly increased socio-economic response to the pandemic in order to create resources for those who are most affected (United Nations, 2020b). However, more needs to be done to make better progress on SDG 1. The 2021 commemoration of IDEG played an imperative role in emphasizing the continued importance of gaining ground on this issue.

In addition, this commemoration event also highlighted how all other SDGs are inter-connected to SDG 1, and that we cannot fight poverty alone in a vacuum. For example, many panelists spoke about the effects of climate change and the disproportional toll on those living in poverty, highlighting that SDG 13, which calls for climate action, is necessary to achieve the targets of SDG 1. In actuality, each of the 16 other SDGs are central to the mission of SDG 1. In the same way, progress on SDG 1 would also go a long way in making progress towards the other SDGs.

Personal Reflections of Christina Pagan

I chose to attend this commemoration event because I was very interested in learning more about what is being done to eradicate world poverty, especially in the time of the COVID-19 pandemic. The issue is also one that is close to my heart, as my father and his family grew up in conditions of poverty. He moved to the mainland United States from Puerto Rico and was fortunate enough to receive a scholarship for college that allowed him a way out of generational poverty. He would share stories with me about his life growing up, and I realized how hard it was for me to truly understand what it is like to live in poverty, especially when I always knew where my next meal was going to come from, and where I would sleep at night. My father would tell me that those of us that are blessed with enough resources should always give back to those who are lacking.

I became particularly interested in what I could personally do to help alleviate poverty during the COVID-19 pandemic. Many people that I know were hit hard by the different facets of the pandemic, whether it was lingering health issues, job loss, or food insecurity. I also witnessed the toll that this took on their mental health. This got me thinking specifically how living in poverty can have a direct effect on mental health, and how those living in poverty also had very limited access to mental health resources, especially during the pandemic. I was grateful to be able to hear the panelists of this event speak on what is being done to increase resources and move forward to eradicate poverty.

I would have loved to hear a panelist speak directly on mental health and poverty, but I do believe that the more we can do to alleviate poverty the more this contributes to a better overall quality of life for all.

How to Get Involved

I note that the theme for the 2021 International Day for the Eradication of Poverty of “*Building Forward Together*” really puts an emphasis on the word “together.” I agree with this emphasis, which is evident in the UN emphasis on multilateralism (working together). In order to make progress towards ending poverty, an interconnected approach is essential, and we all must do our part. According to the UN Secretary-General Guterres, “Solidarity is missing in action – just when we need it most.” Consequently, he calls on all of us to “join hands” to tackle this timely issue (Guterres, 2021).

There are many ways that each of us can get involved. I include resources which provide education and advocacy on eradicating poverty below. It is important to spread the word to get more people educated and involved with this goal of eradicating poverty. Social media is a great outlet for sharing this information. In addition, you can also view and share the replay of the

2021 Commemoration of the International Day for the Eradication of Poverty zoom event. If you are interested in more hands-on advocacy, ATD Fourth World highlights many grassroots volunteer opportunities and fundraising events on their website, given below. Getting involved in other causes which interest you, such as environmental concerns or health issues, can also have a positive effect on poverty, as most issues of social justice are directly intertwined with issues of poverty. No matter how small your contribution, I invite you to join hands with me to take the next step in eradicating poverty together!

More Resources

[Replay- Commemoration of the International Day for the Eradication of Poverty 2021](#) (United Nations, 2021e)

[UN- International Day for the Eradication of Poverty](#)

[All Together in Dignity \(ATD\) Fourth World](#)

- [Facebook](#)
- [Instagram](#)
- Twitter: @ATD4thWorld
- [Get Involved](#)
- [Sign up for newsletter](#)

Social Media Hashtags

#EndPoverty
#BreakTheCycle
#StopPoverty
#IDEP2021
#BuildingForwardTogether
#EndPovertyWeek

UN Special Rapporteur on Extreme Poverty and Human Rights

- [YouTube](#)
- Twitter: @srpoverty
- Email: info@srpoverty.org
- [Sign up for the mailing list](#)

Monica Jahangir-Chowdhury, UN Representative of the International Movement ATD Fourth World:

- Email: monica.jahangir@atd-quartmonde.org
- Twitter: @MonicaJahangir
- [LinkedIn](#)

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EVENT SUMMARY:

Title: 2021 Commemoration of the International Day for the Eradication of Poverty

Date/Time: Friday, 15 October 2021, 10:00 - 11:30 EDT

Location: Virtual summit powered by Zoom

Moderator: **Dr. Antonia Joy Kategekwa**, Strategic Advisor to the Assistant Administrator and Director, United Nations Development Programme's Regional Bureau for Africa in New York

Panelists: **Mr. Achim Steiner**, Administrator, United Nations Development Programme and Vice-Chair of the UN Sustainable Development Group; **Mr. Lenen Rahaman**, founder and Executive Director of a grassroot Bangladeshi NGO Mati; **Ms. Kerstin Stendahl**, Chief of the Ecosystems Integration Branch in the Ecosystems Division of United Nations Environment Programme; **Mr. Olivier Richard**, Head of Development and Climate Unit at the French

Mission to the UN; **Ms. Glendy Rosales**, activist with ATD Fourth World Guatemala and co-founder of a solidarity economy project; **Ms. Isabelle Pypaert Perrin**, Director General of the International Movement ATD Fourth World; **Mr. Olivier De Schutter**, Professor of Law at UCLouvain and at SciencesPo (Paris) and appointed the UN Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights by the Human Rights Council at its 43rd session, in March 2020. **Video Messages:** **Mr. Barclay Owen**, activist living in poverty and facing floods in Central African Republic; **Ms. Gerry Scardo**, environmental activist in the Appalachia, USA; **La Bise**, a family holiday home in France on preserving family links through preserving nature; **Ms. Ana Lucia Santos Da Silva**, a community leader from Brazil.



Building Forward Together:
Ending Persistent Poverty,
Respecting all People and our Planet

Featuring:

- Messages from activists living in poverty facing the impact of Covid-19 and the climate crisis
- Message from the UN system and statements by Ambassadors
- Multi-stakeholder Dialogues on eradicating poverty through social and environmental justice



Friday, October 15, 2021
10:00am to 11:30am EST

Virtual Conference - [CLICK HERE TO REGISTER](#)



Reported by Christina Pagan, a student in the Masters Program of Psychology in Education with a concentration in Spirituality and Mind-Body Practice at Columbia University, Teachers College, a student in Professor Judy Kuriansky’s class on “Psychology and the United Nations,” and a member of the Student Division of the International Association of Applied Psychology. Christina also received her Juris Doctorate in 2007 with a specialty in

Environmental Law, which sparked her interest in environmental justice. In addition, she is committed to ideals of equity and equality and received an academic certificate for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in 2020 from the Ohio State University.

Dr. Judy Kuriansky is an internationally recognized clinical psychologist, and professor of psychology and education at Columbia University Teachers College who teaches the class on “Psychology and the United Nation.” She has been an advocate on behalf of mental health and well-being at the United Nations in her role as representative of the ECOSOC-accredited NGO, the International Association for Applied Psychology and the World Council for Psychotherapy for 18 years, and former chair of the “SGs in Action” campaign that positions health at the nexus of the SDGs.

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https://iaapsy.org/site/assets/files/1228/building_forward_together.pdf