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United Nations Announces 17 New Young Leaders for the Sustainable Development Goals

Young Leaders for the SDGs is a flagship initiative of the Office of the Secretary-General's Envoy on Youth which recognizes exceptional young people around the world

21 September 2022 (UN Headquarters, NY) – The United Nations today announced the latest group of [17 Young Leaders for the Sustainable Development Goals \(SDGs\)](#), during the start of the 77th session of the UN General Assembly.

Every two years, the [Office of the Secretary-General's Envoy on Youth](#) recognizes 17 young change-makers who are leading efforts to combat the world's most pressing issues and whose leadership is catalyzing the achievement of the SDGs. Since launching in 2016, the initiative has collectively reached millions of young people around the world.

Following an open call for applications earlier this year, which resulted in more than 5,400 applications from over 190 countries, this next cohort of Young Leaders for the SDGs hail from all corners of the world and work across all pillars of the UN, including sustainable development, human rights, and peace and security.

The group — who are all between the ages of 17 and 29 years old — includes an aspiring astronaut, medical doctor and fashion designer, Paralympic medalist, poet, artists, climate entrepreneurs, peacebuilders, gender justice advocates, and education innovators, among others.

“The 2022 class of Young Leaders for the SDGs represents an incredibly diverse, intersectional and inspirational group of young people who reflect the very best of global

youth activism and advocacy when it comes to challenging the status quo and creating a better world for all,” said Jayathma Wickramanayake, the UN Secretary-General’s Envoy on Youth. “Even amidst the ongoing pandemic, climate crisis and global instability, these young people demonstrate immense resilience, resourcefulness and leadership in finding innovative solutions to the world’s biggest challenges.”

The 2022 Class of Young Leaders for the SDGs include:

- **Mayada Adil** (Sudanese refugee based in France; 29 years old; she/her); Fashion Designer, Medical Doctor & Co-Founder of La Loupe Creative
- **Alyssa Carson** (USA; 21 years old; she/her): Aspiring Astronaut & Girls in STEM Advocate
- **Okan Dursun** (Turkey; 26 years old; he/him): Education and Social Entrepreneur & Co-Founder of Twin Science & Robotics
- **Emmanuel Ganse** (Benin; 24 years old; he/him): Civic and Digital Rights Campaigner & President of Tonafa Institute
- **Richa Gupta** (India; 26 years old; she/her): Education Innovator, Social Entrepreneur & Co-Founder of Labhya Foundation
- **Jamal Hill** (USA; 27 years old; he/him): Paralympic Medalist, Disability Rights Advocate & Founder of Swim Up Hill Foundation
- **Varaidzo (Vee) Kativhu** (Zimbabwe/UK; 24 years old; she/her): Education Activist, YouTuber & Founder of Empowered by Vee
- **Gibson Kawago** (Tanzania; 27 years old; he/him): Climate Entrepreneur & Founder of WAGA
- **Ronelle King** (Barbados; 29 years old; she/her): Gender Justice Activist & Founder of Life in Leggings
- **Luísa Franco Machado** (Brazil; 23 years old; she/they): Digital Rights & Data Justice Activist
- **Paul Ndhlovu** (Zimbabwe; 23 years old; he/him): HIV/AIDS Advocate & Radio Champion at Zvandiri

- **Karimot Odebode** (Nigeria; 27 years old; she/her): Poet, Gender Equality Activist & Founder of Black Girl's Dream
- **Leonardo Párraga** (Colombia; 29 years old; he/they): Peace Advocate, Artist & Founder of Fundación BogotArt
- **Isidora Guzmán Silva** (Chile; 17 years old; she/her): Disability Rights Activist & Founder of Encuentra tu Lugar
- **Eddy Frank Vasquez** (Dominican Republic; 26 years old; he/him): Climate Activist & Founder of Jeventud Sostenible
- **Hanyuan (Karen) Wang** (China; 26 years old; she/her): Climate Tech Entrepreneur, Researcher & Founding Member of Carbonbase
- **Heela Yoon** (Afghanistan; 24 years old; she/her): Peace Advocate & Founder of Afghan Youth Ambassadors for Peace

A [High-Level Selection Committee](#), composed of a group of influential leaders — representing national governments, civil society, the entertainment industry, private sector, and beyond — provided invaluable inputs and feedback as part of the selection process. The Selection Committee included: Connor Franta (Social Media Influencer, Artist and Author), Sônia Guajajara (Indigenous Activist and Politician), Richard Curtis (Screenwriter, Director and Founder of Project Everyone), Adam Met (Member of AJR and Executive Director of Planet Reimagined), H.E. Shamma Al Mazrui (UAE Minister of State for Youth Affairs), and Nikhil Taneja (Co-Founder and CEO of Yuva), among others.

More information on the Young Leaders for the SDGs, including the full profiles of the Young Leaders and their commitments to advancing the SDGs, is available at www.un.org/youthenvoy/2022class.

About the Office of the UN Secretary-General's Envoy on Youth

In 2017, the UN Secretary-General appointed Jayathma Wickramanayake of Sri Lanka as his Special Envoy on Youth and as the youngest senior official in the history of the organization.

Ms. Wickramanayake's mandate is to harmonize the UN system efforts on youth development, enhance the UN response to youth needs, advocate for the development needs and rights of young people, as well as to bring the work of the United Nations on youth closer to them. The Envoy on Youth also acts as the advisor to and the representative of the Secretary-General on youth related matters.

For more information, follow @UNYouthEnvoy on social media and visit our website at un.org/youthenvoy.

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NOTE TO EDITORS

Quotes from the High-Level Selection Committee:

Connor Franta (Artist and Author): Young leaders see the world not as what it is, but it can be. Their constant acts of passionate rebellion drive the positive change humanity requires to flourish.

Nikhil Taneja (Co-Founder and CEO, Yuva): Most of the urgent problems facing the world have been created by earlier generations and are now being inherited by the

youth. We live in a world where every young person has something to say about this, but there's hardly anyone listening. Young leaders need to keep fighting the good fight, and make their voices heard, because it is their world that we are living in, and it is their world that we need to all come together to make better.

H.E. Shamma Al Mazrui (Minister of State for Youth Affairs, UAE): Youth play a very important role in our regional and global future, and today is about our investment in you – and your investment in our world.

Richard Curtis (UN SDG Advocate, Founder of Project Everyone, Comic Relief and Make My Money Matter, Screenwriter and Director): I believe young people have a significant role to play in achieving the Goals or as I like to refer to them, the World's To-Do List. They can do so through not only driving change in their communities, their countries and around the world, but through teaching others – from all backgrounds, sectors and generations – about why change isn't just necessary, it's possible.

Sônia Guajajara (Brazilian Indigenous leader, Author, Activist, Environmentalist and Politician): Young leaders play a fundamental role in understanding the environmental struggle as the center of future discussions. They should start addressing ways of economic change and thus rethinking forms of consumption. Young leaders should advocate for a world that equally fits all individuals from diverse communities, including indigenous people, blacks, LGBTQIA+ people with disabilities and more. It is necessary to take a step back and understand that the future is ancestral.

Hon. Emma Inamutilla Theofelus (Deputy Minister of Information and Communication Technology, Republic of Namibia): Young Leaders have the role of preparing themselves in order to solve today's and tomorrow's complex challenges.

Adam Met, PhD (Member of AJR, Academic, Writer, Activist, and Executive Director of Planet Reimagined): Young leaders are the role models for decision makers. They have rightfully grabbed seats at the table and taken command of the conversation. The social, economic, and environmental landscape is a treacherous terrain that they are learning to navigate today, so they will be able to transform it tomorrow.

Valentina Muñoz Rabanal (UN SDG Advocate): Young Leaders are the great engine to build a sustainable future and reach agreements that can be sustained over time. Innovation and development can't be successfully achieved without youth in decision tables.

Sinead Bovell (Founder and CEO, WAYE): Young people deserve to play a leading role in shaping the futures that they will be living in.

Elizabeth Cousens (President and CEO, UN Foundation): As we approach the half-way mark to 2030, we need young people at decision making tables. This new class of Young SDG Leaders is already showing what it takes to deliver solutions in their own countries. We need their ideas, perspectives, and leadership more than ever.

Sanda Ojiambo (Assistant Secretary-General and CEO, UN Global Compact): You are never too young to lead. In fact, the role of youth to advance the SDG's is more critical now than ever. It is essential that young people are given the opportunity to have a voice and play a greater and more meaningful role in shaping social and economic systems. I have found that young people, all around the world, have the determination and resilience to take on enormous challenges and, using their innovation, creativity, and problem-solving skills, turn these challenges into new opportunities.

David Boynton (CEO, The Body Shop): In order to find solutions to the big issues of our time we must establish new ways of ensuring that the views and ideas of young leaders can be seen and heard – particularly when you consider that the world today is home to the largest generation of young people in history. Climate change, global conflict, social injustice; these are just a few of the desperately pressing issues facing the world – but unfortunately trying to fix these things with the same people, in the same room with the same solutions, isn't working. We need fresh perspectives, which means involving more young leaders in the halls of power, at the very highest levels. We know that when young people get involved good things happen - as they have the vision, spirit and commitment required to bring about the positive changes we collectively need. That's why we have a group of young leaders at The Body Shop, advising me and our Executive Team, and that's also why we have launched our most ambitious global campaign yet Be Seen Be Heard in partnership with the United Nation's Office of the Secretary-General's Envoy on Youth, to get more young leaders seen and heard in decision making spaces around the world. We need young leaders to help steer a change of direction for the future of our planet – and this goes to the heart of what we are aiming to do.

Quotes from the 2022 Class of Young Leaders for the SDGs:

Mayada Adil: Young people are the bridges between generations and we as young leaders should be public servants for the SDGs.

Alyssa Carson: With the internet, young people have the world at their fingertips and can start learning and advancing to begin changing the world.

Okan Dursun: We are the ones who care for the world and dare to take necessary actions for a more sustainable future.

Emmanuel Ganse: Youth are the present and the future and are an effective sum of intelligence for achieving the SDGs.

Richa Gupta: Young people have the lived experience and audacity to solve some of the largest problems in the world. This is why we are key to achieving the SDGs.

Jamal Hill: Unlocking the world of opportunity that becomes available once you remove any elitist barriers will only come from a new generation of young people who no longer accept the biased rules of our old world.

Varaidzo (Vee) Kativhu: Young people are the present and the future; we are the change, and we truly care.

Gibson Kawago: Young people are powerful and energetic enough to identify challenges, explore existing technologies and come up with resilient, clean and environmentally friendly solutions. We are the future, and thus we need to champion the SDGs.

Ronelle King: Young people understand that we're not only fighting for our rights but that of future generations and it is because of this that we're not afraid to take up the charge of safeguarding our collective future.

Luísa Franco Machado: Young people constitute a diverse conglomerate of minds that hold unique tools to lead key transformational change for the society of today and tomorrow, and we should not be taken for granted.

Paul Ndhlovu: The voices, experiences and expertise of young people must inform, shape and direct all programmes, policies and interventions aimed at improving the lives of young people.

Karimot Odebode: Young people have the passion as well as the physical and intellectual capacity to move the world.

Leonardo Párraga: Young people have the courage to dream big, the capacity to act on a large scale and the compassion to include upcoming generations, sentient beings and their environment as a part of our plans for the future.

Isidora Guzmán Silva: Young people know that change will happen if everyone participates and is being heard without anyone being left behind.

Eddy Frank Vasquez: Our generation has the necessary ambition to achieve the SDGs thanks to our non-conforming mindset and our willingness to be and do better. We are the ones responsible for maintaining a peaceful relationship between sustainable development and the ecological balance of climate and oceans.

Hanyuan (Karen) Wang: We were born in an era of extraordinary technological growth, but also global challenges, and it's in our hands to make the world a better place.

Heela Yoon: Often, young people are viewed as perpetrators of violence, not change-makers. Yet in many countries we see that young people are the key drivers of sustainable peace and long-term solutions. To achieve the SDGs and sustainable peace, we must involve young people, especially young women and girls, in decision-making processes.