



QUNO

Quaker United Nations Office

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Presentation: Panel discussion on national frameworks

The 2030 Agenda: A Peace Framework for Youth

Good morning everyone! I am so pleased to join you for this Dialogue and Exchange Program, and am excited to be in a room full of such dynamic and diverse young people dedicated to building peace. I would like to express my sincerest appreciation to the organizers, in particular the American Friends Service Committee, for this opportunity to be with you.

My name is Megan Schmidt, and I work with the Quaker United Nations Office, or QUNO, in New York. Our office represents the concerns of Friends at the UN, and works to support a United Nations that prioritizes peace and prevents war. We strive to do this through our programming on conflict prevention and peacebuilding, and I lead on the peacebuilding front.

Our time this morning is dedicated to exploring different peace frameworks, and seeing if and how you, youth working to promote peace in your country and on your continent, can use these frameworks in your activities. I've been asked to reflect on one such framework, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Who here has heard of the 2030 Agenda? Can I see a show of hands? Thanks for that! Well I'm going to share a bit more on the following: what is the 2030 Agenda? Why is this relevant for young people? And how can young peacebuilders move this agenda forward.

So let's begin with the "what."

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is the international community's ambitious response to global development challenges, and it will guide the priorities for people, planet, partnership, peace and prosperity for the next generation. This is a universal agenda, meaning that it's accepted by ALL countries, and is applicable to ALL countries, no matter how big or small. So this means that all of us have a responsibility too, whether you're from the US like me, from any of the 16 countries represented here, or any place in the world.

And while I'll talk more about this in a few minutes, I'd just like to say that young people were instrumental in getting the 2030 Agenda adopted. They brought their voices to the negotiating table, and worked to make sure that governments heard from them. Also, the innovation, leadership, and hard work of youth like all of you will be critical for the Agenda's success.

Now back to what the agenda is.

The 2030 Agenda focuses on five critical areas, or the five "Ps"

1. People: a commitment to end poverty and hunger, and to ensure dignity and equality for all

2. Planet: efforts to protect natural resources and climate for future generations
3. Partnership: the recognition of the need to implement the agenda through global partnerships
4. Peace: now this P may be the most important for you: a commitment to foster peaceful, just, and inclusive societies
5. And Prosperity: action to ensure prosperous and fulfilling lives for all.

Now to uphold these five Ps, the Agenda outlines 17 sustainable development goals, or SDGs, with 169 targets that define the way forward. These goals and targets are also tools to measure success and challenges. For example, there's Goal 16 that sets out targets for fostering peace, justice, and inclusion. This goal has 10 targets! There's Goal 5 on gender equality and empowerment of women and girls, and Goal 5 has six targets. Or Goal 2 on ending hunger, which has five targets. So just from these three large goals and their many targets – Goal 16 on peace, justice, and inclusivity; Goal 5 on gender equality; and Goal 2 on ending hunger – you can see how ambitious this agenda is! What I hope you also see from highlighting these three examples is that these goals reinforce one another and are interrelated. So you can't have peace when women and girls aren't included, or your population is going hungry.

The 2030 Agenda, with its 17 SDGs goals and 169 targets provides a new approach to development and to fostering peace.

First, this is an inclusive agenda, and an inclusive approach was taken from the very start. This approach involved young people, who brought their experience and knowledge to the table. And this inclusive approach is important to how the 2030 Agenda is going to move forward – which is in partnerships all throughout the world. This means that all of us – you and me – have a role to play in living up to this plan of action.

Second, this agenda is flexible. We are all different. We come from different countries, we speak different languages, we have different cultures, laws, and governments. No one size fits all approach will work across all of this diversity. The 2030 Agenda recognizes that, and it calls for countries to take action based on their unique experiences and places in the world. Also, the 2030 Agenda calls for other actors – like the UN – to be flexible in their support to countries.

And third, the 2030 Agenda is comprehensive. Let's go back to the 5 Ps – people, planet, partnership, peace, and prosperity – and the 17 SDGs and 169 targets to deliver on them. This is quite a full agenda. This is an agenda that recognizes you can't have peace without protecting the environment; that you can't better the lives of your people without working in partnership. And so it sets out a framework that tries to capture a full picture of what is needed to transform our world.

So, in 2015, all governments adopted the 2030 Agenda, a universal and comprehensive framework; an agenda that pledges to reach the furthest behind first and make sure no one is left behind.

Now, I can imagine that you're thinking – “that's great that governments created this framework at the United Nations, but why should I care? What does the 2030 Agenda mean to me?” So, I'd like to share some thoughts that I hope you'll consider about why the 2030 Agenda is relevant for you, a group of young people working to promote peace in your countries and on your continent.

First, it's important to point out that recent development progress has been uneven, and many young people throughout the world are affected by this. Young people in all corners of the globe still experience multiple layers of discrimination, including limited political inclusion, the effects of poverty, and limited access to healthcare, quality education, or meaningful employment. Young people have much to gain if the 2030 Agenda and its 17 goals are fully implemented.

Second, you are a tremendous and dynamic force for political change and social transformation. Just look at this DEP! There are over 100 of you from 16 countries gathered together to harness your skills for building peace in your countries and continent. Right now, there are more young people in the world than at any other time in history! Imagine what is already being done, and what more can be done going forward by this diverse part of the population in your countries, regions, and across the globe.

Third, today's young people are going to grow up alongside the 2030 Agenda. You are going to live in a world that is directly impacted by the successes and failures to push this agenda forward, and will benefit from lending your voices, experience, and knowledge to its implementation.

Fourth, the 2030 Agenda is peace framework. Peace is one of the five "Ps" I talked about earlier. By signing on, governments have said that building long-term, sustainable peace is needed in their countries and throughout the world. This should be key for you as young peacebuilders. The 2030 Agenda can be a tool for you in your peace work, and can be a way for you to engage with and hold your governments to the task of delivering on their commitments.

Fifth, as I mentioned before, young people played a key role in the process that led to the development of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs. Young people should continue this great work that they started, and lead in the implementation of this framework that they were critical in developing.

And the impact of the inclusion of young people is what leads me to my final point, which is that the 2030 agenda itself recognizes the centrality of youth. Young people are embedded in the very fabric of this agenda. More than 1/3 of the 169 targets reference youth either implicitly or explicitly, with 20 youth specific indicators existing over 6 SDGs. The agenda also specifically highlights the role of young people, stating that "children and young women and men are critical agents of change and will find in the new goals a platform to channel their infinite capacities for activism into the creation of a better world." The agenda also notes that the future of humanity lies "in the hands of today's younger generation who will pass the torch to future generations."

For these reasons, I hope you will want to play a part in the success of the 2030 Agenda, and the success of taking care of our people and our planet, of building partnerships not only in your community, but with your neighbors, or new people you meet during this conference.

Now, lastly let's focus on the how – how can you use this framework?

For the 2030 Agenda to be successful and meaningful, it will require partnerships. Efforts to move the agenda forward will need to understand the national and local realities facing a country.

Now, you will be the best ones to know if and how your work contributes towards sustainable development, what more you can do at home and together for your continent, and what issues need

to be prioritized. I'd like to share a few things you can consider, and hope that these ideas will help with your work during this DEP.

While the 2030 Agenda is an ambitious framework that was developed at the UN, the responsibility to act rests with every government. And the hard work will be happening at the national and local levels. The 2030 Agenda recognizes that the huge tasks of ending poverty, creating peaceful, just, and inclusive societies, and taking measures to protect the future of this planet will require strong partnerships, including with young people like you. You can consider if and how you may be able work with your local officials in their work on this agenda, or with UN offices in your country. Also, you can think about how to advocate for action by your national government, calling on it to tackle the pressing needs facing your country.

After listening yesterday and getting to know many of you, I see that you are already doing work that is building peace and promoting inclusivity. You're contributing towards this agenda already. Your efforts to promote inclusivity in your government, to ensure peaceful elections, to stand up for the rights of women and girls, to make sure everyone can have access to healthcare and education – all of this contributes towards building peaceful societies. So, I encourage you to take a closer look to see how work you're doing might already relate to the 2030 Agenda, and then to think about what more you can do. How can you use your great work to inform and influence your government, or the UN? Also, how can you use your Peace Network to learn from each other and share across your countries and your borders? What tools will you need so you can stay connected when you go back home, to share more on what's challenging in your countries, and to see how you can support one another in your efforts to promote peace?

The 2030 Agenda also calls for governments to report on what they've done to deliver on the SDGs. First, this includes a national review, meaning that all states have to share updates with their people on progress and challenges for implementing the 2030 Agenda. Second, all governments participate in an annual meeting called the High Level Political Forum, which takes place at the UN. This Forum allows governments to report on the work they've done. For example, Kenya, Zimbabwe, Togo, Nigeria, Ethiopia, Botswana, and Benin will be reporting this year. These different processes – the national reporting or the UN reporting - can be opportunities for you to influence and to inform your governments and the international community. You can consider developing ways to share progress and challenges in your countries by doing things like creating shadow reports, or holding events about your work and your experiences.

Now, before closing, I think it's also important to say that the 2030 Agenda is still new, and its implementation is still a work in progress. This creates challenges because there isn't a clear and defined way forward on what this really looks like, or on how to report on progress and challenges. But this also gives you as young peace leaders opportunities to influence and to inform what is being done in your countries, on your continent, and at the global level. It gives you an opportunity to consider how you can act in your daily lives to help practice peace, justice, and inclusion. If you lend your voices and expertise to these processes now, you can be instrumental in shaping how they move forward to 2030.

So on that note, I'd like to thank you for this opportunity to share a bit more on the 2030 Agenda, and I really look forward to learning from you on if and how you see this universal, and ambitious agenda for people, planet, partnership, peace, and prosperity as relating to your efforts as young peacebuilders. Thank you!