

Empowering Youth Through Partnerships
Peace Boat and the Dutch Youth Council Joint Side Event Report

In recognition that youth have a critical role to play in helping to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals, Peace Boat and the Dutch Youth Council held a joint side event at the UN High Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development titled, “Empowering Youth Through Partnerships.” The event was held on Wednesday, July 13, 2016 at the United Nations Headquarters in New York City, and focused on youth partnerships and responsibility toward the implementation of the SDGs.

Peace Boat US Director Emilie McGlone gave an overview of Peace Boat's Global Voyages, which are organized 3-4 times annually and have high youth involvement. The voyages help to support and strengthen local initiatives for peace and sustainability within the holistic framework of the SDGs. Ms. McGlone provided a number of partnership examples, including Peace Boat's educational programs with youth organizations to increase awareness of and promote action on the Sustainable Development Goals in Latin America, and its work with UNISDR's “Making Cities Resilient” campaign to create training programs that bring together young leaders from across the globe to share experiences, best practices, and pressing issues in Disaster Risk Reduction.

Ms. McGlone was joined by Peace Boat US interns and participants of the Global Kids youth leadership program, who recently traveled to Latin America with Peace Boat for a special summer program that focused on the SDGs. The youth recounted their activities on the program, including working with a Kuna indigenous community in Panama to raise awareness of the SDGs, witnessing firsthand the effects of climate change on wildlife in the region, and learning directly about the peace process in El Salvador and its implications for other countries.

A presentation about Peace Boat's Ecoship project was another highlight of the event. Currently under development, this Ecoship will serve as the world's most sustainable cruise ship and will sail as a flagship for climate action and a messenger for raising awareness of the SDGs in nearly 100 countries a year. The innovative ship will also serve as a venue for bringing stakeholders from all sectors together toward the implementation of the SDGs, and as a vehicle to transport people and ideas around the world.

Moderating on behalf of the Dutch Youth Council, Max Van Deursen explained how he and others founded the organization in order to foster youth participation in helping to achieve the SDGs. The Council began by speaking with many young people about the SDGs and examining how youth are engaged in their implementation. They used this information to file a national report on the subject. Mr. Van Deursen, asserted that youth participation is taken for granted, which is the reason their organization decided to create a global report on youth engagement.

In addition to Mr. Van Deursen's presentation, three members of the Dutch Youth Council panel gave presentations on the challenges that youth face. One spoke about the problem of finding official data that can be used to measure progress in certain areas. Finding a way to measure progress is important, but without sufficient or reliable information the task is extremely difficult. Another speaker noted that even though there is much discussion taking place on the SDGs, reporting is crucial in the assessment of the impact of projects, and is necessary for understanding what works or does not work. Civil society, they noted, needs to be accountable and work toward progress by gathering data and making reports. Their actions should be evidence-based, and not merely propelled by good intentions. The last speaker noted that many young people need to be empowered to contribute to sustainability. He emphasized that youth participation in achieving the SDGs will only be truly meaningful if young people are engaged equally, without discrimination. This means making sure that voices of youth from slums, HIV-infected youth, and other marginalized groups are included. Millions of young people, especially girls, continue to be denied education, a situation that hinders youth participation in sustainability efforts.

The event concluded with audience members eagerly exchanging ideas on how youth can be empowered. Ideas included providing more educational opportunities for youth; creating more partnerships between youth organizations and between youth organizations and financial supporters; shifting resources from bloated military budgets to youth initiatives; and fully integrating youth into key decision making bodies and processes rather than simply having token youth representatives.

The event served as an important space for young people to discuss challenges to youth involvement in achieving the SDGs, and to affirm the importance of overcoming these challenges and ensuring that the youth reach their full potential. Peace Boat and the Dutch Youth Council look forward to continuing to work together, and with other organizations towards this goal.