“Our world is in deep trouble—and so too are the Sustainable Development Goals.” Secretary General Antonio Guterres did not mince his words in addressing the Heads of State and Government Ministers attending the High Level Political Forum at the UN in July 2022. In a world reeling from the effects of the COVID pandemic, beset by conflicts, geopolitical instability, global economic turndown, food and energy insecurity, and the worsening climate crisis, the Sustainable Development Goals are perhaps more crucial than ever.

During the period 5 – 13th July the progress on attaining the SDGs was reviewed with the focus placed on SDG 4 (quality education), SDG 5 (gender equality), SDG 14 (life below water), SDG 15 (life on land), and SDG 17 (partnerships for the Goals). Forty four countries presented their “Voluntary National Reviews”, sharing challenges and good practices and Civil Society representatives pushed for action and accountability. It is clear from the VNRs presented that a lot more needs to be done to accelerate progress on the SDGs.

While statistics showed that progress has been severely limited by the pandemic, the Sustainable Development Goals continue to offer the best roadmap or blueprint for a green recovery which “leaves no one behind”. This was asserted by the UN Secretary General. This is - a goal which to which all member states re-iterated their commitment in a negotiated political declaration. Watch the short video

The Human Right to a Clean, Healthy and Sustainable Environment

On July 28th, in an encouraging display of consensus, the UN General Assembly (UNGA) voted overwhelmingly (160 – 0) with 8 abstentions, to adopt the resolution recognizing the right to a clean, healthy, and sustainable environment as a universal human right. The UN Secretary-General António Guterres welcomed the passage of the resolution, noting that it was a “landmark development,” five decades in the making and asserting that it will help to reduce environmental injustices, close protection gaps and empower people, especially those in vulnerable situations.

Why are UNGA resolutions important, even if they are not legally binding? As David Boyd, Special Rapporteur on Human Rights and the Environment noted, they can serve as effective catalysts for action. By way of an example he cited the 2010 Resolution on the right to water and sanitation which resulted in “a cascade of positive changes that have improved the lives of millions of people.” It is hoped that the UNGA resolution will prompt member states to enshrine the right to a healthy environment in their national legislation and regional agreements, thus enabling people “to challenge environmentally destructive policies under human rights legislation.” Read more

Global Crisis Response Group...

As part of the UN’s response to the interlinked crises related to the War in Ukraine, UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres established the Global Crisis Response Group in April 2022. The coordinating group has been charged with actively focusing their efforts on three fronts with enormous humanitarian consequences globally: - food, energy and finance. They aim to mitigate the impact of the Ukraine crisis on global markets which have left millions of people around the world on the brink of famine and extreme energy poverty. Launching the third brief produced by the Global Crisis Response group in early August, Secretary General Antonio Guterres highlighted the immorality of oil and gas companies making huge profits on the back of the poorest during the pandemic while also contributing to the climate crisis. The report recommends that governments find effective funding for renewable energy solutions, such as publicly financed cash transfers and rebate policies to protect vulnerable communities. Windfall taxes to fund social protection measures for the most vulnerable are suggested while also advocating for a transition to more cost-effective renewable energy. Watch the short video
The Black Sea Grain Initiative.

Brokered by the UN and facilitated by Turkey, the initiative was signed in Istanbul, Turkey, on 22 July 2022 after negotiations involving Russia and Ukraine. A Joint Coordination Center was established in Istanbul within five days. Bringing together Ukrainian, Russian, Turkish and UN representatives to implement the initiative. Dubbed a “beacon of hope” by UN Secretary-General António Guterres, it made provision for the movement of ships carrying commercial grain exports in a type of maritime humanitarian corridor. After inspection, ships stranded there since 24th February are cleared to depart from the Black Sea port of Odessa. Significant volumes of grain for export, commercial foodstuffs and fertilizer are inspected. The first shipment started on 1st August. The agreement covers 120 days and aims to address the global food security crisis, famine in the Horn of Africa and bring down food prices in the global market.

The 10 yr Review Conference – Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty

The Tenth Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons was held during four weeks in August 2022 after a two year delay due to the COVID pandemic. As UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres noted in his opening remarks, the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) is a landmark international treaty. “Its unique status is based on its near universal membership, legally-binding obligations on disarmament, verifiable non-proliferation safeguards regime, and commitment to the peaceful use of nuclear energy” Its objective is threefold: a) to prevent the spread of nuclear weapons, b) to promote cooperation in the peaceful uses of nuclear energy and c) to work towards nuclear disarmament. With a total of 191 States signatories to the treaty, including the five nuclear-weapon States, it provides an essential foundation for the pursuit of nuclear disarmament.

RSHM News Briefs:

During a five-week period in July/August, our RSHM NGO welcomed a summer intern from Emmanuel College, Boston. Mariana Kordorsky shared a reflection on her internship:

“On the first day of my internship, walking into the UN, I expected to be met with a sea of older businessmen hurrying to their next obligation, similar to the streets of NYC. To my surprise, I waited behind two lines of African children, all holding small signs and barely concealing their excitement for World Kiswahili Language Day (July 7th). This first impression makes me smile but also perfectly encapsulates my experience at the UN. There is a palpable depth and vibrancy within the building from the beautiful gifts from member states to the rich diversity of its inhabitants, all working together to achieve a common goal.

Primarily, I worked with the RSHM NGO during the High-Level Political Forum (HLPF) which focused on the world’s progress regarding the UN’s 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). After experiencing lively debates regarding the best tactics to fight pressing global issues like climate change, food insecurity, nuclear proliferation, gender-based violence, and more – I left not defeated but inspired. Undeniably, what stood out to me was a unanimous commitment to refuse to settle for the current status quo. There is a stubborn optimism that encourages innovative solutions, ambitious projects, and increased youth engagement which inspires hope that a better world for tomorrow is inevitable”.

Mariana Kordorsky

Distribution
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