



SDGs CONFERENCE 2023

In the Margins of the UNGA78

TRANSFORMING OUR WORLD

www.unga-conference.org

Wednesday

20 September 2023

NEW YORK



YouTube

Attend in-person
John Jay College
of Criminal Justice



JOURNALISTS AND
WRITERS FOUNDATION

**JOHN
JAY** COLLEGE
OF
CRIMINAL
JUSTICE



**JOURNALISTS AND
WRITERS FOUNDATION**

in partnership with



The Journalists and Writers Foundation (JWF) is an international civil society organization dedicated to culture of peace, human rights, and sustainable development. The JWF promotes diversity and inclusion by creating forums for intellectual and social engagement, generates and shares knowledge with stakeholders, builds partnerships worldwide and develops policy recommendations for positive social change.

- JWF is a 501(c)3 non-profit organization registered in New York State.

- JWF is associated with the United Nations Department of Global Communications.

NEW YORK - Headquarters - www.jwf.org

56 W 45 Street 4th Floor New York, NY 10036

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SDGs CONFERENCE 2023

IN THE MARGINS OF THE UNGA78

TRANSFORMING OUR WORLD

Wednesday, 20 September 2023 | www.unga-conference.org

DATE: 20 September 2023 (Wednesday)

TIME: 10:00 AM – 4:00 PM (New York EST)

VENUE: > **In-person** - John Jay College of Criminal Justice
> **ZOOM** - [click HERE](#) for registration

ORGANIZER: Journalists and Writers Foundation in collaboration with its Global Partners and John Jay College of Criminal Justice

PARTICIPANTS: High-Level Representatives of UN Member States, the United Nations and other International Organizations, the Private Sector, Civil Society Organizations, Human Rights Defenders, Journalists, Academics, Researchers, and Practitioners.

WORKING LANGUAGE: English

BACKGROUND

In the margins of the 78th Session of the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA), the Journalists and Writers Foundation (JWF) and its 36 Global Partners from 24 countries are organizing the hybrid SDGs Conference on 20 September 2023, Wednesday to convene world leaders, diplomats, civil society members, journalists and academics to discuss contemporary impediments for the timely and effective implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

The SDGs Conference 2023, formerly known as the UNGA Conference, is the flagship event of the Journalists and Writers Foundation, creating a platform for diverse stakeholders to discuss the Global Agenda 2030, offer innovative solutions, strategies, and policy recommendations to advance the culture of peace, human rights, and sustainable development. As 2023 marks the 8th annual SDGs Conference, this global event gathered over 150 high-level speakers across the globe forming an interdisciplinary group of distinguished panelists to discuss a particular set of agenda over three panel sessions and propose a framework for action for the full and effective implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals. While accelerating the recovery processes from COVID-19 is still among the priorities of various UN agencies, progress towards Sustainable Development Goals is appallingly off track.

Time is running by as we are already over halfway through the 2030 target deadline. Considering the backward status of the SDGs, while world leaders arrive in New York to address the UNGA78 this September, elaborating on the contemporary challenges of the implementation, building a new momentum to increase progress, and renewing political commitments to reinforce international solidarity to foster multilateralism will be at the core of the diplomatic engagements. “Leaving No One Behind” has been the foundational vision of the Sustainable Development Goals to thrive towards establishing peaceful, inclusive, and just societies, clean and healthy environment promoting fundamental human rights of all living creatures.



Yet, given the current progress of the Global Goals, this promise is in peril. Therefore, UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres signals a genuine turning point delivering on commitments around a timely established action plan and indicates that a “Fundamental shift is needed in commitment, solidarity, financing and action - to put the world on a better path.” (1)

To address the gaps and challenges that emerged after erupting wars, increasing humanitarian crisis, and alarming climate change, the SDG Summit (18-19 September 2023) and High-Level Week of UNGA78 will be focal gatherings to strengthen civil society, private sector, intergovernmental and academic partnerships to support Secretary-General Guterres’ delivery of a “Rescue Plan for People and Planet” based on three primary areas: (2)

- Equipping governance and institutions for sustainable and inclusive transformation,
- Prioritizing policies and investments that have multiplier effects across the goals,
- Securing a surge in SDG financing and an enabling global environment for developing countries.

As a result of the diligent review of the 2022-2023 agenda items and priority working areas of diverse UN agencies and offices, as well as world-renowned international summits, the SDGs Conference 2023 will address **(1) Building a New Momentum Towards the 2030 Deadline for The SDGs (2) Press Freedom as an Instrument to Defend Human Rights for All and (3) Widening Gap between Erosion of Democracy and Rise of Autocracy** in the margins of the UNGA 78th Session on 20 September 2023, Wednesday.

The 3 Panel Sessions of the SDGs Conference 2023 will contribute to the following Sustainable Development Goals:

Target (5.2) Eliminate all forms of violence against all women and girls in the public and private spheres, including trafficking and sexual and other types of exploitation;

Target (5.5) Ensure women’s full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic, and public life;

Target (10.2) By 2030, empower and promote the social, economic and political inclusion of all, irrespective of age, sex, disability, race, ethnicity, origin, religion or economic or other status;

Target (16.1) Significantly reduce all forms of violence and related death rates everywhere;

Target (16.3) Promote the rule of law at the national and international levels and ensure equal access to justice for all;

Target (16.10) Ensure public access to information and protect fundamental freedoms, in accordance with national legislation and international agreements;

Target (16.a) Strengthen relevant national institutions, including through international cooperation, for building capacity at all levels, in particular in developing countries, to prevent violence and combat terrorism and crime;

¹ Progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals: Towards a Rescue Plan for People and Planet, Report of the Secretary-General (Special Edition), https://hlpf.un.org/sites/default/files/2023-04/SDG%20Progress%20Report%20Special%20Edition_1.pdf

² Ibid (1).



Target (16.b) Promote and enforce non-discriminatory laws and policies for sustainable development;

Target (17.16) Enhance the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development, complemented by multi-stakeholder partnerships that mobilize and share knowledge, expertise, technology and financial resources, to support the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals in all countries, in particular developing countries.

Target (17.17) Encourage and promote effective public, public-private, and civil society partnerships, building on the experience and resourcing strategies of partnerships.

SDGs CONFERENCE 2023

IN THE MARGINS OF THE UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY 78TH SESSION

20 September 2023, Wednesday (10:00 AM – 4:00 PM EST)

www.unga-conference.org

PROGRAM

Hybrid | New York | John Jay College of Criminal Justice

10:00 AM – 10:30 AM

Welcome Remarks and Opening Session

10:30 AM – 12: 00 PM

Panel Session 1: Building a New Momentum Towards the 2030 Deadline for the SDGs

12:15 PM – 01:45 PM

Panel Session 2: Press Freedom as an Instrument to Defend Human Rights for All

02:00 PM – 03: 30 PM

Panel Session 3: Widening Gap between Erosion of Democracy and Rise of Autocracy

03:30 PM – 04:00 PM

Closing Session

04:15 PM – 05:30 PM

John Jay College Reception for SDGs Conference Participants



PANEL 1: BUILDING A NEW MOMENTUM TOWARDS THE 2030 DEADLINE FOR THE SDGS

The long-term social, economic, and well-being challenges posed by COVID-19 Pandemic are still ongoing. Thereupon this unprecedented global crisis, 2022-2023 has been a year of deterioration on various grounds. Positive peace, freedom of expression, fundamental civil and political rights have been declining, while transnational crimes, the influx of forcibly displaced people, and authoritarian regimes across the globe have been on the rise. Day to-day implications of the climate crisis are now in action in many Global South countries enforcing people to leave their homeland due to food insecurity, violence and political instability responding to this utmost urgent environmental call. The largest setbacks were recorded in political terror scales and internal conflicts.⁽³⁾

War in Ukraine, Taliban's take-over in Afghanistan, and the internal conflict that erupted in Sudan have created inevitable regressions in many of the Sustainable Development Goals. Besides these armed conflicts and internal political instabilities, democratic States fell behind in the progress track as well. Given this critical momentum, Secretary-General calls for an urgent renewal of commitments meaningfully involving all development stakeholders to break through for a better future for all and deliver the promise of Global Goals.

In order to work on effective and transformative action-oriented policy making for the second half of the implementation timeline, our global community must acknowledge the following critical assessment: "Only about %12 [of the SDGs] are on track; close to half, though showing progress, are moderately or severely off track and some %30 have either seen no movement or regressed below the 2015 baseline".⁴

Another striking unfolded truth is the absence of accountable, up-to-date, gender-disaggregated data. The recently released SDG Progress Report indicates that about 8% of latest available data are from 2023, 21% from 2022, and 54% are from 2020 - 2021. Goal 16: Peaceful, just, strong institutions, Goal 13: Climate change and Goal 5: Gender equality are among the targets with the least current available data. Academic institutions' innovative research methodologies to close the data gap is crucial to scale up the delivery of peace and development promises.

Panel Session 1 - Building a New Momentum Towards the 2030 Deadline for The SDGs will discuss:

- The latest progress of the Sustainable Development Goals halfway through the 2030 deadline: Emerging challenges
- Strengthening institutions and political commitment in timely achievement of the SDGs: local, and regional governments aligning with the private sector
- Sounding an alarm for urgent action on increasing internationally comparable, gender-disaggregated, available data collection
- SDG 17: Partnerships for the Goals as a pivotal actor to break through a sustainable, peaceful future
- The New Agenda for Peace: A Pack for a transitioning era of geopolitical complexities

³ 2022 Global Peace Index – Key Results, Institute for Economic and Peace, [https://www.visionofhumanity.org/peacefulness-declines-to-lowest-level-in-15-years/#:~:text=The%2016th%20edition%20of%20the%20annual%20Global%20Peace%20Index%20\(GPI,deteriorated%20by%200.3%25%20in%202021.](https://www.visionofhumanity.org/peacefulness-declines-to-lowest-level-in-15-years/#:~:text=The%2016th%20edition%20of%20the%20annual%20Global%20Peace%20Index%20(GPI,deteriorated%20by%200.3%25%20in%202021.)

⁴ Ibid (1).



PANEL 2: PRESS FREEDOM AS AN INSTRUMENT TO DEFEND HUMAN RIGHTS FOR ALL

Freedom of the press is a prerequisite and catalyst for all human rights. Despite the fundamental role of the media and journalists in enabling a free and independent flow of information to foster peaceful and inclusive societies, there is a constant decline in press freedom recorded over the last decade. Misinformation, disinformation, technology and oppressive governance trends are bonded together fueling undemocratic state actions. Committee to Protect Journalists indicates that “the number of journalists jailed around the world set yet another record in 2022 as authoritarian leaders doubled down on their efforts to silence dissenting voices and stifle press freedom”.⁽⁵⁾

We are, therefore, at a crossroads to better defend press freedom and rebuild independent journalism to combat the rise of tyranny and uphold human rights for all. Polarized political discourses majorly fueled by government authorities over heavily controlled media outlets further manipulate and marginalize different ends of society resulting in widespread hate speeches. The 2023 World Press Freedom Index of Reporters Without Borders indicates that 69 countries are in problematic situations, while 38 are in difficulty and 20 are in extreme situations. Silencing critical voices of diverse media outlets jeopardizes pluralism in society. This year’s index particularly reflects on the challenges brought into light by the “digital ecosystem’s fake content industry”.⁽⁶⁾

Despite this fact, there is also a virtual reality that social media platforms provide democratized platforms for dissident journalists and human rights defenders, whose space has been shrunk by respective illiberal governments. Rapidly evolving information environments, digital platforms and technological advancements create contemporary challenges to ensure the safety of journalists, foster systemic attacks on dissident media outlets and increase online

harassment on social media platforms.⁽⁷⁾ Women journalists continue to be on the frontline facing various forms of gender-based violence. Even though digital harassment and online aggressiveness pose serious threats to journalists’ physical and mental well-being, these venues serve as a new way to raise global awareness of the recent humanitarian crisis and mobilized civil society members calling on state actors and intergovernmental organizations to uphold international human rights law.

Panel Session 2 – Press Freedom as an Instrument to Defend Human Rights for All will discuss:

- A decade of decline for the global press freedom
- Digital transformation and technological advancements creating new media outlets: Freedom on the Internet and social media
- Rising threats for journalists: politicized judiciaries and online harassment
- Disinformation campaigns and state’s use of media as a venue of propaganda
- Gender-based violence and violations against women journalists

⁵ Attacks on the Press, Committee to Protect Journalists, <https://cpj.org/2022/12/attacks-on-the-press-in-2022/>

⁶ 2023 World Press Freedom Index, Reporters Without Borders, https://rsf.org/en/2023-world-press-freedom-index-journalism-threatened-fake-content-industry?year=2023&data_type=general

⁷ World Press Freedom Day 2023, Shaping a Future of Rights: Freedom of expression as a driver for all other human rights, UNESCO, <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000384177>



PANEL 3: WIDENING GAP BETWEEN EROSION OF DEMOCRACY AND RISE OF AUTOCRACY

The intermediate distance between democracies and autocracies is increasing as 2023 remarked the 19th consecutive year of decline in democratic governance worldwide.(8) There is a formidable increase in the number of transitional/hybrid regimes particularly in Central Europe and Asia in the last decade. With the rise of various state- led crimes and conflicts, many formerly democratic nations are trapped in the cycle of autocracy prioritizing political interests over human rights norms, oppression of citizens` right to peaceful protests, increasing forms of violence, consolidating power at the expense of ruling out checks and balances systems. Populist leaders continue to abuse the will of the voters, polarize societies, induce hatred within communities and limit political pluralism.

In 2022 – 2023, there were many critical elections that the global citizens, journalists, and intergovernmental observatories closely monitored. Many polls took place in electoral autocracies where multiparty candidates existed but only in the sphere of limited freedom of expression and insufficient components of free and fair election processes. In many of the elections that took place under the shadow of oppressive regimes, civic activism still strived to protect their fundamental civil and political rights despite the high cost of imprisonment or forced displacement.

Under these circumstances, responsibility on the shoulders of democratic states and intergovernmental organizations increases as decisive actions must be taken through multilateral diplomacy to support democratic governance and uphold human rights for all. Supporting civil society which operates under high risks of reprisals in hybrid regimes and global advocacy for the release of political prisoners and human rights defenders are vital actions.

The Widening gap between democracies and autocracies is not only an impediment to local governance but the oppressive regimes pose a global threat to the rule of law and human rights as transnational repression are reportedly on the rise. Direct attacks on dissidents living in exile, co-opting other countries to act against international human rights law, mobility impediments, online intimidation and surveillance remains among the primary methods of repression.(9) The security of human rights defenders, journalists, academics, and civil society members who sought protection in another state remains in a dilemma as the extra-judicial acts of autocratic leaders continue their coordinated mobilities in host countries.

Panel Session 3 – Widening Gap between Erosion of Democracy and Rise of Autocracy will discuss:

- Elections under electoral autocracies: Recent analysis from country cases
- Civil society resilience and solidarity against the authoritarianism
- Keeping a spotlight on human right defenders in distress and advocating for the release of political prisoners
- The proliferation of transnational crimes for global peace and security
- Rising trends of populism

⁸ Freedom House, Nations in Transit 2023, https://freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/2023-05/NIT_2023_Digital.pdf

⁹ Transnational Repression as a Growing Threat to the Rule of Law and Human Rights, Council of Europe, <https://rm.coe.int/transnational-repression-as-a-growing-threat-to-the-rule-of-law-and-hu/1680ab5b07>





PIONEERS IN SDGs AWARDS 2023

CALL FOR PROJECTS

Submission Deadline : **8 September 2023**

1st Place: Pioneers in SDGs Award + \$2,000 cash prize
 2nd Place: Pioneers in SDGs Award + \$1,000 cash prize
 3rd Place: Pioneers in SDGs Award + \$500 cash prize

5 Additional Awards 250\$ cash prize each
 5 Changemakers Award 100\$ cash prize each

APPLY NOW

Pioneers in SDGs Awards celebrates exceptional organizations and individuals who have made significant contributions to sustainable peace and development while promoting human rights, the rule of law, and democracy at local, national, and global levels. The Journalists and Writers Foundation, together with its 36 Global Partners from 24 countries, acknowledges the Pioneers in SDGs who effectively implement Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) through innovative and creative projects. The mission, dedication, and unwavering commitment of these Pioneers in SDGs exemplify their role in creating a better world for all.

To achieve tangible results in sustainable development, it is essential for all stakeholders, including governments, the private sector, and civil society, to join forces in the development, implementation, and evaluation of the SDGs.

Selection Criteria

The selection of projects will be based on four key criteria, each holding substantial significance:

Innovation : This criterion evaluates the project's approach to devising creative solutions to global challenges, emphasizing its innovative contributions to social, economic, and environmental development.

Stakeholders : The involvement of key players in decision-making processes is paramount. This criterion assesses the project's inclusiveness in decision-making, free from any form of discrimination based on race, ethnicity, gender, or other factors.

Scope : This criterion encompasses the planning, implementation, and evaluation processes of the project. It evaluates the project's goals, objectives, indicators, and tangible outcomes, emphasizing a comprehensive and well-structured approach.

Impact : The project's contributions to individuals, organizations, and society at large are evaluated in terms of their impact on social, economic, and environmental development. This criterion assesses the project's ability to create meaningful and positive changes in the world.

Awards

1st Place: Pioneers in SDGs Award + \$2,000 cash prize
 2nd Place: Pioneers in SDGs Award + \$1,000 cash prize
 3rd Place: Pioneers in SDGs Award + \$500 cash prize

Additional Awards

Innovation Excellence Award: + \$250 cash prize
 Stakeholder Engagement Award: + \$250 cash prize
 Scope Achievement Award: + \$250 cash prize
 Transferable Impact Award: + \$250 cash prize
 Young Changemakers Award: + \$250 cash prize

Submission & Evaluation

The esteemed international jury will meticulously evaluate each project based on four discerning criteria: innovation, stakeholders, scope, and impact. These projects are envisioned as exemplary models that have the power to inspire individuals and organizations worldwide, driving positive social change and contributing to the UN Sustainable Development Goals.





SDGs CONFERENCE 2023
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JOURNALISTS AND
WRITERS FOUNDATION

ROOFTOP JWF High-Level Reception 2023

18 September 2023, Monday | 6:30pm - 9:00pm | New York

In the Margins of the UN General Assembly 78th Session



Excellency,

You are cordially invited to the JWF High-level Reception 2023 to celebrate the 8th Annual SDGs Conference 2023: In the Margins of the United Nations General Assembly's 78th Session with the presence of diplomats, journalists, academic, civil society leaders, and expert speakers from around the world.

Journalists and Writers Foundation
www.jwf.org

JWF HIGH-LEVEL RECEPTION 2023
18 September 2023, Monday

ROOFTOP | Penthouse45
432 W 45th Street, New York, NY 10036

*Light food and beverages will be served.

*This invitation is for two Guests

RSVP Required
info@jwf.org | 1(646)838-4882

Date/Time/Place
18 September 2023 | 6:30 pm – 9:00 pm
432 W 45th Street New York, NY 10036



ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSION

TUESDAY
19 SEPTEMBER 2023
11:00 AM – 1:00 PM EST

JOHN JAY COLLEGE
524 W 59TH STREET
NEW YORK, NY 10019



JOURNALISTS AND
WRITERS FOUNDATION



ROUND 1

**THE ROLE OF HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS FOR
SUSTAINABLE PEACE AND DEVELOPMENT**

ROUND 2

**CIVIL SOCIETY CONTRIBUTIONS IN
ACHIEVING THE SDGs: BEST PRACTICES**

RSVP HERE →



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On the sidelines of the SDGs Conference 2023, the Journalists and Writers Foundation and its Global Partners is organizing the Roundtable Discussion to discuss critical issues to promote and protect sustainable peace and development. This side-event aims to create a platform for the international delegations of civil society members, journalists, academics, experts, and human rights advocates participating at the SDGs Conference 2023 to share their expert opinions, exchange ideas on various development challenges and offer inclusive solutions to the contemporary challenges on social, economic, and development issues.

Round 1: The Role of Human Rights Defenders for Sustainable Peace and Development

- The importance of a bottom-up approach through the best practices of civil society organizations.
- Inclusion of civil society members, human rights advocates, women leaders, and young pioneers in the policy-making stages with inclusive action-oriented strategies.
- How to combat current state-led attacks on civil society members and human rights defenders shrinking their space, risking freedom of peaceful assembly.

- Tools and skills required to empower youth leadership in local and national decision-making bodies.
- New challenges and barriers eliminating the meaningful participation of civil society members in establishing peaceful communities: Rise of online harassment, politicized judiciaries, limited freedom of speech, gender-related barriers.

Round 2: Civil Society Contributions in achieving the SDGs: Best Practices

- Promoting sustainable development through meaningful participation of civil society.
- Engaging NGOs to deliver solutions to the needs of the local community.
- Challenges and threats faced by civil society organization to serve the needs of the society
- Promotion and protecting civil society space for sustainable peace and development.
- Building partnerships and collaboration among civil society and NGOs worldwide.
- Innovative projects and initiatives that make a positive social change.
- The United Nations and UN Platforms to influence decision-making and policy change.
- NGOs working in many different areas, including with education, health, poverty eradication, human rights, gender equality and indigenous issues.



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PANELIST BIOGRAPHIES

OPENING REMARKS: Mehmet Kilic, President, Journalists and Writers Foundation | USA
Cemre Ulker, Representative to the UN DGC, Journalists and Writers Foundation

Keynote: Ulziisuren Jamsran, UN Women Representative to Kyrgyzstan | Kyrgyzstan



Ulziisuren Jamsran joined the UN Women Kyrgyzstan Country Office as a Representative in June 2019. Ms. Jamsran's experience includes over 20 years of experience in international development, and strategic and managerial leadership in gender and women's issues in Moldova, Ukraine, Kyrgyzstan, and Kazakhstan for UNDP, UNIFEM, and UN Women. Earlier, she was the UN Women's Gender Adviser for Moldova and Ukraine, Regional Governance Specialist in Almaty, Senior Rural Development Specialist and Social Development Advisor in Kyrgyzstan and Ukraine, and Poverty Alleviation Specialist in Mongolia. Ms. Jamsran has a Specialized Master's in Leading Change from the University of Oxford and HEC Paris, and an M.A. in Economics from the Mongolian State University.

Keynote: H.E. Ms. Thilmeeza Hussain, Ambassador, Permanent Mission of Maldives to the UN | Maldives



Her Excellency Ms. Thilmeeza Hussain is the Ambassador of the Maldives to the United Nations. Formerly, Ambassador Hussain was a key member of the Foreign Relations Committee (FRC) of the then main opposition party, the Maldivian Democratic Party (MDP), where she lobbied to maintain close relations with the government of the United States and other agencies to garner support in the restoration of democracy in the country. Additionally, Ambassador Hussain championed the climate change and sustainable development agenda, where she was the lead negotiator for the Maldives, at the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20) and Co-chaired the Sustainable Development Working Group for the 48-members of Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS). Ambassador Hussain has a kinship for doing non-profit work for social good as she founded the Voice of Women in the Maldives and was an Advisory Council Member for Climate Wise Women, and Women's Earth Climate Action Network to advocate for the cause.

Keynote: H.E. Ambassador Dr. Carlos Garcia, Secretary General of United Nations Association of El Salvador, Former Ambassador of El Salvador to the UN | El Salvador



Prior to his current post, Ambassador Garcia was the Permanent Representative of El Salvador to the United Nations and served at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs as Director of Multilateral Affairs, and Chief of the Caribbean Affairs. Before being appointed to the Permanent Mission of El Salvador to the United Nations on July 1, 1996, Ambassador Garcia served at Ministry of Foreign Affairs of El Salvador, San Salvador as Director of Multilateral Affairs, and Chief of the Caribbean Affairs. As of June 2019, he has been appointed as President & CEO of The Organization for Poverty Alleviation and Development (OPAD) at the United Nations, United States of America, Asia, and Latin America & the Caribbean. In August 2019, Ambassador Garcia was selected to be 2019 Grand Marshall of the Salvadoran Parade in New Jersey that was held on September 15, 2019 in New Jersey.



Keynote: H.E. Mr. Stan O. Smith, Ambassador, Permanent Mission of Bahamas to the UN | Bahamas



H.E. Mr. Stan O. Smith is the Permanent Representative of Bahamas to the United Nations. Before his latest appointment, Ambassador Smith served as personal assistant to Prime Minister Perry Gladstone Christie from 2018 to 2021. He was Ambassador-at-Large between 2015 and 2017, Head of the Legal Division in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, as well as a contributor to its United Nations teams on human rights. During that time, he also provided general foreign policy development support. Before his diplomatic career, Ambassador Smith practiced law in Barbados between 2005 and 2015. Earning a bachelor's degree from St. Mary's University in Canada, he is also a graduate of the University of the West Indies Law School.

Moderator: Silvia Osman, Associate Professor, National University of Political Studies and Public Administration | Romania



Silvia Osman is an Associate Professor at the National University of Political Studies and Public Administration, Department of Sociology in Romania. Author of more than 20 books, Silvia Osman has also published many articles on literature, discourse and multicultural dialogue, paradigm shift in education, and mindsight within the framework of multimodal approaches to communication. She completed Foreign Policy and Diplomacy Program of the Romanian Diplomatic Institute. Ms. Osman has her Masters in European Integration from the UCDC, Faculty of Law and Administration Studies at Bucharest, and holds her PhD in Esthetics, Theory, Pedagogy and History of Theater.

Panelist: George Abualzulof, Senior Human Rights Adviser, United Nations Development Coordination Office (DCO) | USA

- *The latest progress of the Sustainable Development Goals halfway through the 2030 deadline*



George Abualzulof is a Human Rights defender with around 30 years of field focused experience in a variety of Human Rights areas including within conflict, developmental, and post conflict situations. Before joining UN DCO as its Chief of Universal Values Section, Mr. Abualzulof served as the Senior Human Rights Advisor to the United Nation Resident Coordinator Office and the United Nations Country Team in Jamaica MCO since 2018, and the representative of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) in Yemen from 2013-2016. In 2016 he was appointed as the director of the Qatar based UN Human Rights Training and Documentation Center for South West Asia and the Arab Region. Mr. Abualzulof worked with UNICEF MENA for 5 years as a justice for children specialists and as the General Director of Defence for Children International / Palestine Section for 10 years. He holds a Master's degree in Children's Rights from University of Freiburg and Institute of Children's Rights in Sion, Switzerland and a BA degree in Social Work and Psychology from Bethlehem, Palestine.

Panelist: Patricia Garcia AO, Partnership Development Manager, Institute for Economics and Peace | Australia

- *Contemporary challenges of development in the transitioning era of geopolitical complexities and conflicts*



Patricia Garcia is the Partnership Development Manager of the Institute for Economics and Peace (IEP). Patricia has worked for more than 20 years in some of the world's most dangerous conflicts including Afghanistan, Bosnia, Kosovo, Rwanda, Sudan, South Sudan and the Thai-Burma border. She has been appointed an Officer of the Order of Australia in 2016 and was a finalist in the 2016 NSW Australian of the Year awards for her contribution and services to the international humanitarian aid and development sector over the past two decades. Patricia Garcia was a Human Rights Research Fellow at the University of Sydney's Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies from 2000–2002 and designed the Human Rights course for the Master of Peace and Conflict Studies at CPACS. Ms. Garcia is also an Honorary Associate at the University of Sydney where she is a sessional lecturer on peace and human rights with a passion to promote and advance the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals Agenda.

Panelist : Dr. Ranjana Kumari, Director, Center for Social Research | India

- *Sounding an alarm for urgent action on increasing internationally comparable, gender-disaggregated, available data collection*



Dr. Ranjana Kumari is the Director of Centre for Social Research as well as Chairperson of Women Power Connect. Dr. Kumari has dedicated her life to empowering women across the South Asia region, and is also a prolific writer of many well-known publications. She has served as the Coordinator of the South Asia Network Against Trafficking (SANAT) in Persons and is a member of the Central Advisory Board on "Pre Conception and Pre Natal Diagnostic Tests Act, 2001", as well as the Central Advisory Committee for Prevention of Trafficking in Women and Children. Dr. Ranjana Kumari combines the two roles of a women activist and scholar with great felicity and panache. Having dedicated her life to significant social causes, Dr. Ranjana Kumari continues to impact the lives of many with her dedication and zeal. She has her MA, M.Phil and Ph.D in Political Science from Jawahar Lal Nehru University.

Panelist : Jenifer Vaughan Fenton, Spokesperson/Senior Media Adviser, UN Special Envoy for Syria | Switzerland

- *Strengthening media institutions and political commitments for sustainable peace and security*



Jenifer Vaughan (Fenton) has been the spokesperson at the United Nations Office of the Special Envoy for Syria since May 2019. Ms. Vaughan attends the SDGs Conference in her personal capacity. Previously, she worked for Al Jazeera in Doha and New York, and CNN in Atlanta, Jerusalem, London, and Abu Dhabi, holding senior positions, including an Executive Producer. Ms. Vaughan also worked for the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) in Palestine, and the UN Refugee Agency in New York. Vaughan held the Yale Poynter Fellow-in-Residence for the 2017–18 academic year. She has won several major industry news awards, including multiple Peabody Awards.

Panel 2 : PRESS FREEDOM AS AN INSTRUMENT TO DEFEND HUMAN RIGHTS FOR ALL

Moderator: Tania Bozaninou, Journalist, To Vima Newspaper | Greece



Tania Bozaninou is a journalist from Greece working since 1997 for To Vima on Sunday, as its Editor-in-Chief. Ms. Bozaninou covers a variety of topics, from diplomacy, foreign affairs to human rights and migration. She has reported from several countries in the Middle East, including Afghanistan, Israel and the Palestinian Territories, and Europe. After completing her studies of Economics at the University of Athens, Tania Bozaninou received an MA in Journalism and Communications Policy from City University in London.



Panelist: Batya Ungar-Sargon, Opinion Editor, Newsweek | USA

- *State of Press Freedom under Autocratic Regimes: State`s control of media as a venue of propaganda*



Batya Ungar-Sargon is the Opinion Editor of Newsweek. She is the author of "Bad News: How Woke Media Is Undermining Democracy" and the forthcoming "Promised Land: The Working Class Struggle for the American Dream." Formerly, she was the Opinion Editor of the Forward and has written for the New York Times, the Washington Post, Foreign Policy, Newsweek, the New York Review of Books Daily, and many other publications. Batya Ungar-Sargon has appeared numerous times on MSNBC, NBC, the Brian Lehrer Show, NPR, and at other media outlets. She holds a PhD from the University of California, Berkeley.

Panelist: Paula Penfold, Stuff Circuit, Investigative Journalist | New Zealand

- *Gender-based violence and violations against women journalists*



Paula Penfold is an investigative journalist based in Auckland, New Zealand. Penfold reports for the video-led team Stuff Circuit at the country's largest media organisation, *Stuff*. Her work consistently returns to human rights themes across a wide range of issues. A five-year investigation into the miscarriage of justice Auckland man Teina Pora for rape and murder contributed to the quashing of his convictions; two landmark projects exposed hidden aspects of New Zealand's role in the war in Afghanistan; and a major 2022 investigation, *Fire and Fury*, analysed the motives of the key players in New Zealand's "freedom movement", whose occupation of the country's Parliament grounds ended in a violent riot. Stuff Circuit's work is frequently awarded both nationally and globally, and Paula Penfold was named New Zealand's broadcast reporter of the year in 2022 and 2019.

Panelist: Abdulhamit Bilici, Former Editor-in-Chief, Zaman News, Journalist | USA

- *The role of a free and independent media for electoral democracies*



Abdulhamit Bilici is the Former Editor-in-Chief of the now-closed Zaman Newspaper. He was also the Chief Executive Officer of its English-language version, Today's Zaman. Mr. Bilici was the General Director of Cihan News Agency and the Editor of Aksiyon Weekly Magazine. He has a Master's Degree from Department of Economics at Istanbul University and has an MBA degree from Faculty of Management at Fatih University. Abdulhamit Bilici has been living in exile as a journalist in the USA after the failed-coup attempt in Turkey. Mr. Bilici is an expert on Turkish politics and continues his journalism career by writing freelance articles for various media outlets.

Panelist: Christina Piaia, ProJourn Legal Manager, Reporters Committee for the Freedom of the Press | USA

- *Upholding the rule of law for the protection of journalists: Increasing legal harassment towards media members*



Christina Piaia is the legal manager for the Protecting Journalists Pro Bono Program at the Reporters Committee for Freedom of the Press. She oversees legal intakes for pro bono matters concerning prepublication review and access to public records and develops relationships with law firms and corporate partners to provide journalists with pro bono legal assistance. Prior to ProJourn, Ms. Piaia served as a trial attorney with the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission and supervised the Gender-Based Harassment Unit at the NYC Commission on Human Rights, working extensively on gender discrimination claims with a focus on community outreach and education. Before the Commission, Christina Piaia spent three years as an international human rights attorney, working on the ground with local grassroots organizations. As a passionate public interest attorney, she serves as pro bono counsel for several nonprofits and on the board of the Chris Hondros Fund.





Ivy Murugi is the Global Youth Representative of the World Organization of the Scout Movement. She is experienced in Mental Health and Sexual Reproductive Health Advocacy working with Youth-Led and Youth-Serving organizations. Over the last 3 years, Ivy Murugi has served as the Team Lead for a Mental Health initiative dubbed Healing Invisible Wounds. Involved in resource mobilization & fundraising, program design and delivery as well as overall team coordination to meet set objectives in providing innovative solutions that promote the overall wellbeing and resilience of young people and communities. I am committed to ensuring individuals have access to advanced mental health care services, transforming the stigma narrative surrounding mental health and supporting integration of MHPSS into thematic areas such as Peacebuilding and Climate Action.

Panel 3 : WIDENING GAP BETWEEN EROSION OF DEMOCRACY AND RISE OF AUTOCRACY

Moderator: Melissa Mahtani, Journalist, Senior Producer | USA



Melissa Mahtani is an Emmy-nominated Senior Producer and Reporter for CNN's award-winning digital team where she produces, writes and creates content across all platforms since 2012. Mahtani has interviewed change-makers across the globe such as Vladimir Kara-Murza from Russia, Masih Alinejad from Iran, Afghanistan's youngest Mayor Zarifa Ghafari and the first lady of Namibia as well as celebrities like Naomi Campbell, Kristin Davis, Adwoa Aboah and Lin-Manuel Miranda. In addition to writing breaking news stories and feature articles, Mahtani currently reports for CNN's award-winning gender focused "As Equals" team, hosting and moderating events for wider impact and engagement. She also plays a key role in designing the social strategy around special events including bespoke CNN Town Halls, CNN Heroes and coverage from the United Nations General Assembly.

Keynote: Mr. Naseer A. Faiq, Chargé d'Affaires, Permanent Mission of Afghanistan to the UN | Afghanistan



Mr. Naseer Faiq is the current Charge d'Affaires of the Permanent Mission of Afghanistan to the United Nations in New York. Born and raised in Afghanistan, Mr. Faiq began his career in politics after joining the Afghanistan Foreign Service in 2005. Over the years, Mr. Faiq has held various high-profile positions within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Afghanistan. He has served as the Deputy Director General for Regional Cooperation Directorate twice (2012-2013 and 2016-2019). Mr. Faiq has also served as a Minister Counsellor, Counsellor, and Third Secretary at the Permanent Mission of Afghanistan to the United Nations from 2008-2019. Mr. Faiq received a Bachelor's Degree in Administration and Diplomacy from Kabul University and a Master's Degree in Administrative Science from Farleigh Dickinson University.

Panelist : Berta Valle, Nicaraguan Journalist, Human Rights Defender | Nicaragua

- *Keeping a spotlight on human rights defenders in distress and advocating for the release of political prisoners*



Berta Valle is a recognised Nicaraguan activist, journalist, and human rights defender. With fifteen years of experience as a senior television anchor and station manager working with top morning shows in Nicaragua, Ms. Valle is one of the most-recognized broadcasters in the country. In 2016, she was nominated as an independent to represent Managua in the National Assembly by the Independent Liberal Party as part of its National Coalition for Democracy. However, Nicaragua's Supreme Court, controlled by Ortega loyalists, disqualified the party's electoral coalition and Valle was blocked from running. Since 2018, Valle, her daughter and mother-in-law have been living in exile due to the political persecution faced by her husband Félix Maradiaga and his family. Maradiaga was forcibly disappeared by the regime in June 2021 after announcing his intention to run against Daniel Ortega in November's presidential elections.

Panelist : Guilherme Stolle Paixão e Casarões, Professor of Political Science and International Relations | Brazil

- *Populism as threats to global peace and security*



Guilherme Stolle Paixão e Casarões is a Doctor and Master of Political Science from the University of São Paulo, a Master of International Relations from the University of Campinas (San Tiago Dantas Program), a specialist in History and Political Cultures from the Federal University of Minas Gerais. He has a degree in International Relations from the Pontifical Catholic University of Minas Gerais. He is Vice-Coordinator of the Graduation in Public Administration of the Getulio Vargas Foundation (FGV EAESP) and Professor of FGV in the areas of Public Administration, Political Science and International Relations. He was a visiting fellow at the Tel Aviv University (2011) and Brandeis University (2015). Guilherme Stolle Paixão e Casarões has published researches and articles in the areas of Brazilian Foreign Policy, Brazil-Middle East Relations and International Relations Theory.

Panelist : Johan Heymans, Managing Partner, Venote Criminal Law and Human Rights | Belgium

- *Strengthening the rule of law to combat the rise of authoritarianism: Intergovernmental Responses*



Johan Heymans is the Managing Partner of Venote Criminal Law and Human Rights. He obtained his Bachelor's Degree in Law from Namur University in 2010 and his master's degree from Leuven and Tilburg in 2012. He then took a master of laws (LL.M.) in international and US criminal law at New York University. Mr. Heymans later worked in Phnom Penh for the prosecutor's office at the Khmer Rouge Tribunal and was also a guest lecturer in international criminal law at the Royal University of Law and Economics in Cambodia. He has been a teaching assistant in criminal procedure at the Law Faculty of the Antwerp University since 2015. He also gives guest lectures at Ghent University and at the Belgian Institute for Judicial Training. Johan Heymans is also active as a human rights expert at the Council of Bars and Law Societies of Europe (CCBE) and at Fair Trials.

Panelist: Dr. Fatih Demiroz, Director, Nonresident Research Fellow, European Center for Populism Studies | USA

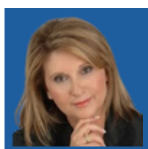
- *Rising trends of populism and its impacts on democracies*



Fatih Demiroz is an Assistant Professor at Sam Houston State University and a nonresident research fellow at the European Center for Populism Studies. He received his Ph.D. in public affairs from the University of Central Florida. Prior to his assignment at SHSU, Dr. Demiroz worked at the Florida International University as a visiting faculty and Rhode Island Department of Health as a researcher. His research interests are social and organizational networks, disaster management, governance, and behavioral public administration.



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Deputy Minister of Migration and Asylum in Charge of Integration
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H.E. Helen Clark

Former Prime Minister
(NEW ZEALAND)



Hon. Prof. Bob Carr

Former Foreign Minister
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H.E. Celia Parnes

Former Head of the Secretary of Social Development of the State of São Paulo
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Dr. Wayne Henry, JP

Director-General of the Planning Institute, Ministry of Finance and Public Service
(JAMAICA)



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Former NSW Minister for Education and Training
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H.E. Mark Botomani

Minister of Information, Civic Education and Communications Technology
(MALAWI)



Adama Dieng

Former USG, Special Advisor of the UN Secretary-General on the Prevention of Genocide



Lakshmi Puri

Former Assistant-Secretary-General, Deputy Executive Director of UN Women



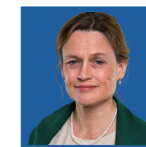
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Member of the Committee on Foreign Affairs (Senegal)



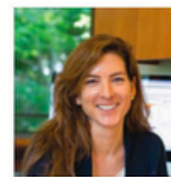
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Former Ambassador of India to Kazakhstan, Sweden and Latvia



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State Refugee Organizer, Florida Immigrant Coalition | USA



Burak Haylamaz
Human Rights Solidarity | UK



Prof. Diane Elson Emeritus Professor, University of Essex, Department of Sociology | UK

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

1 NO
POVERTY



2 ZERO
HUNGER



3 GOOD HEALTH
AND WELL-BEING



4 QUALITY
EDUCATION



5 GENDER
EQUALITY



6 CLEAN WATER
AND SANITATION



7 AFFORDABLE AND
CLEAN ENERGY



8 DECENT WORK AND
ECONOMIC GROWTH



9 INDUSTRY, INNOVATION
AND INFRASTRUCTURE



10 REDUCED
INEQUALITIES



11 SUSTAINABLE CITIES
AND COMMUNITIES



12 RESPONSIBLE
CONSUMPTION
AND PRODUCTION



13 CLIMATE
ACTION



14 LIFE
BELOW WATER



15 LIFE
ON LAND



16 PEACE, JUSTICE
AND STRONG
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17 PARTNERSHIPS
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