

Ahead of International Day, UN and Smurfs team up to promote happiness and sustainable development

18 March 2017 – Every person – no matter how big, small or blue – can make the world more peaceful, equitable and healthy, the United Nations today told young people at a special ceremony for the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) that included the Smurfs and a handover of the key to Smurfdom.

Voice actors from the upcoming animated movie *Smurfs: The Lost Village* joined 1,500 students from the international Model UN conference to celebrate the upcoming International Day of Happiness, which focuses on personal well-being, and the SDGs, which include decent work for all, education and health services.

In a special blue carpet presentation, the United States stars of the movie Demi Lovato, who voices *Smurfette*, Joe Manganiello who is *Hefty* and Mandy Patinkin or *Papa Smurf* honoured three young students promoting the SDGs in their communities with a symbolic key to the Smurfs Village in recognition of their work.

"On behalf of all Smurfdom, thank you for your work in awakening everything, in your community, through social media, all over the world, in the ways that you have chosen to encourage people everywhere to make this world a better place for those who are so vulnerable in every way imaginable," Mr. Patinkin told Karen Jerath, Sarina Divan and Noor Samee.

VIDEO International Day of Happiness 2017 – Small Smurfs Big Goals

Ms. Jerath, who is 20 years old, invented a containment device that could prevent offshore oil spills and ensure the protection of marine life. She was joined by Ms. Divan, 17, who expanded a UN Foundation girl empowerment initiative at her high school and beyond, and Mr. Samee, also 17, a UNICEF blogger and advocate on social justice issues.

Given a giant key with the SDG multi-coloured logo by UN Under-Secretary-General for Communications and Public Information, Cristina Gallach, the students were told "the world needs you to continue."

"Never be afraid to speak up and to make this world a wonderful, beautiful, hopeful, optimistic place full of freedom, joy, justice and dignity, good food, good water, good opportunities for people everywhere, forever," said Mr. Patinkin.

The "Small Smurfs Big Goals" campaign was created to encourage people to visit SmallSmurfsBigGoals.com to find out how to contribute to

achieving the SDGs, and to share information, ideas and images on social media.

As part of today's festivities, the UN Postal Administration unveiled a special edition stamp sheet featuring the Small Smurfs Big Goals campaign.

The stamps, which feature images of the Smurfs and the SDG logos, were presented by UN Assistant Secretary-General for Management, Stephen Cutts, and the Belgian Ambassador to the United Nations, Marc Pecsteen de Buytswerve.

The event, held at the UN General Assembly in New York, was organized by the UN, UNICEF and UN Foundation, ahead of the International Day of Happiness marked annually on 20 March.

In 2015, the UN launched 17 SDGs that seek to end poverty, reduce inequality, and protect our planet — three key aspects that lead to well-being and happiness.

Along with New York, celebrations were held around the world to mark the campaign and the SDGs.

On Monday, the film cast along with the UN, UNICEF and UN Foundation will be at the Empire State Building to turn the iconic tower blue in honour of the International Day of Happiness and the Small Smurfs Big Goals campaign.

Smarter use of natural resources can inject \$2 trillion into global economy by 2015 – UN

17 March 2017 – The United Nations has found that smarter and more efficient use of the world's natural resources today can yield an "environmental win-win" by injecting \$2 trillion into the global economy by 2050 while also offsetting the costs of ambitious climate change action.

Citing new research from the International Resource Panel in a news release today, Erik Solheim, Head the UN Environment Programme (UNEP), called it "an environmental win-win."

The global population, which is set to grow by 28 per cent, is predicted to use 71 per cent more resources per capita by 2050. Without urgent steps to increase efficiency, the global use of metals, biomass, minerals – such as sand – and other materials will increase from 85 to 186 billion tonnes per year by 2050.

The report, "Resource Efficiency: Potential and Economic Implications," which was commissioned in 2015 and released in Berlin at the G20 meeting, found that while investment in ambitious climate action would cause a 3.7 per cent fall in per capita gross world product by 2050, more sustainable use of materials and energy would not only cover the cost of keeping global warming below 2 degrees Celsius, but also add an extra \$2 trillion to the global economy by 2050.

"By making better use of our planet's natural gifts, we will inject more money into the economy to create jobs and improve livelihoods," Mr. Solheim stressed. "At the same time we will create the necessary funds to finance ambitious climate action," he added.



Executive Director of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) Erik Solheim. UN Photo/JC McIlwaine

The report analyzed four paths that countries could take over the next three decades, ranging from 'business as usual' to a scenario where they adopt both ambitious climate policies and improve resource efficiency.

For example, between 2005 and 2010, a programme in the United Kingdom recycled or reused seven million tonnes of trash destined for the landfill. This move saved six million tonnes of carbon dioxide emissions, close to 10 million tonnes of virgin materials and 10 million tonnes of water. It also increased business sales by £176 million, reduced business costs by £156 million and created 8,700 jobs.

Although other key findings point to uneven economic gains of resource efficiency and slower resource extractions, which would reduce revenues and affect jobs in some industries – such as mining and quarrying – countries still stand to gain more by implementing compensation and transfer policies to ease the transition to more efficient practices, than by continuing to support inefficient activities, according to the report.

In addition to economic benefits, the analysis illustrates that resource efficiency and climate action would reduce global resource use by around 28 per cent in 2050 compared to current trends.

For G7 countries, resource efficiency, coupled with ambitious climate action, would increase Gross Domestic Product by \$600 billion in 2050 (\$600 per person, or 1 per cent).

The International Resource Panel is a group of experts in natural resource management hosted by UN Environment.

'The clear objective of our time is parity' rooted in women's empowerment – UN chief Guterres

17 March 2017 – Gender parity at all levels – political, cultural, economic and social – is a central objective and must be based on women's empowerment, Secretary-General António Guterres told women's rights activists and civil society representatives today during a town hall-style discussion at United Nations Headquarters in New York.

Parity is important in all areas of political and social life, said Mr. Guterres adding: "This is a battle [...] a struggle." Generally no one likes to lose positions they have long held, but the reality of gender parity is that many more women will be in positions that today are occupied by men. "But that's a good thing," he said, noting that in his experience, gender parity means better decision-making and better management.

Alongside UN Women Executive Director Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, as well as Deputy Secretary-General Amina Mohammed and his senior staff, Mr. Guterres set the stage for the end of the first week of the 61st Commission on the Status of Women, known as the largest inter-governmental forum on women's rights and gender equality. The theme this year is women's economic empowerment in the changing world of work.

The Secretary-General sought suggestions and opinions of the civil society representatives on how the UN can move forward on its commitments on gender equality. He opened the discussion by sharing life lessons on the issue, telling the gathering that during his time as Prime Minister of Portugal, one of his most difficult battles had been putting family values on the national agenda.

"There was kind of a national conspiracy to make sure that no one talked about it" from the police to the judiciary and public in general, it was as if the problem did not exist, but it was a very serious problem, he said, noting that much had to be done in those areas, including through legislation and broad based campaigns to put it on the agenda.

'The central question is empowerment at all levels'

Later, as UN High Commissioner for Refugees, he saw that women and children were the most vulnerable among those that fell under his agency's mandate. Indeed, women were "doubly vulnerable," and over his tenure, he learned that while international legal protections are important, "we live in a male-dominated world and a male-dominated culture, so the issue goes beyond protection: the central question is empowerment."

Indeed, without it, protection is not possible, he added.

The question of empowerment has many dimensions, one being to ensure that men and women are able, in parity, to assume their responsibilities at all levels; political, economic, social and cultural. “And so, parity for us in the UN is a central objective, at the level of senior management, as well as the entire staff.”

“So this is a very central question,” said the UN chief, inviting the enthusiastic audience to share their perspectives on ways to push the issue forward, in cooperation, not only as an objective regarding the rights of women but “an objective in relation to the quality of our societies and the international community as a whole.”

'Links with civil society are a way to improve governance, not limit government'

Responding to questions, Mr. Guterres acknowledged that there is a backlash today against many of the gains women have made over recent decades “and we need to be very active in that regard in order to reverse this trend.” But this is not only true of women's rights, there is also a backlash against civil society in general and in many dimensions of human rights.

Offering his take, the Secretary-General said: “As societies become more complex, and as social media's [impact continues to grow] and governments feel less and less secure because they have less instruments of control, one of the attempts is to try to keep civil society under control [...] Limiting civil society space is a reaction to the feeling of governments that they are losing control of society.”

Indeed he said this is apparent in many countries around the world, but the key is to ensure that governments understand that links with civil society are a way to improve governance, not limit the power of government.

“I think we need to have a strong campaign to make sure that governments understand that working with civil society is the best way to rule a country, and that they understand that the UN needs to apply the same procedures within its work, because what is true at the national level in relation to the quality of democracy is also true at the global level in relation to the governance of democratic institutions.”

UN Broadband Commission urges public-private partnerships to reach 'the unconnected'

17 March 2017 – New public-private partnerships are essential if broadband is to reach everyone and help accelerate the achievement of global sustainable

development goals, members of the United Nations broadband commission said today.

“ICT [information and communications technology] and broadband are linking everyone and everything for the betterment of economies and societies,” said Rwandan President Paul Kagame, Co-Chair of the UN Broadband Commission for Sustainable Development, during its spring meeting in Hong Kong.

“We are motivated by wanting to have the global community connected, especially the billions of unconnected. We will succeed when we work together: government, industry and civil society leaders,” he added.

The Broadband Commission was established by the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) and the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in May 2010 with the aim of boosting the importance of broadband on the international policy agenda, and expanding broadband access in every country as key to accelerating progress towards national and international development targets.

Following adoption of the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in September 2015, the Commission was re-launched as the Broadband Commission for Sustainable Development to showcase and document the power of ICT and broadband-based technologies for sustainable development.

According to a press release on the meeting, some 5 billion people are currently without mobile broadband access, meaning that the paths to access digital services and applications are blocked for much of the world's population – holding back progress on sustainable development.

RELATED: UN Internet Governance Forum closes with call to close 'digital divide'

The release also said that at the spring meeting, the need for a new deal between all players was roundly debated, with renewed commitment to work towards concrete actions that will effectively connect the unconnected with broadband – especially to support least developed countries.

In particular, emphasis was placed on remote and rural areas which represent the biggest challenge and where barriers to access need to be also viewed through the prism of affordability and content, notably local and multi-lingual content.

Houlin Zhao, ITU Secretary-General and Commission Co-Vice Chair, stated, “ICTs underpin vital achievements and modern services in many sectors, and governments and industry must increasingly work together to create the conditions so badly needed to facilitate the growth of broadband for sustainable development,” he stressed.

Irina Bokova, UNESCO Director-General and Commission Co-Vice Chair, noted, “We must ensure the digital revolution is a revolution for human rights, in order to promote technological breakthroughs as development breakthroughs.”

South Sudan now world's fastest growing refugee crisis – UN refugee

17 March 2017 – The number of South Sudanese fleeing their homes is alarming, the United Nations refugee agency today said, announcing that 1.6 million people have either been displaced or fled to neighbouring countries in the past eight months ago.

A famine produced by the vicious combination of fighting and drought is now driving the world's fastest growing refugee crisis, the spokesperson for the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), Babar Baloch, told journalists at the Palais des Nations in Geneva.

He added that the rate of new displacement is alarming, representing an impossible burden on a region that is significantly poorer and which is fast running short of resources to cope.

Refugees from South Sudan are crossing the borders to the neighbouring countries. The majority of them go to Uganda where new arrivals spiked from 2,000 per day to 6,000 per day in February, and currently average more than 2,800 people per day.

The situation is now critical, said Mr. Baloch, warning that recent rains are making the humanitarian situation more difficult.

The UN agency is reiterating its calls for financial support. Aid for South Sudanese refugees is only eight per cent funded at \$781.8 million, and UNHCR's funding appeal for Uganda urgently needs \$267 million.

The situation in Uganda is a first and major test of the commitments made at the Summit for Refugees and Migrants last September, the spokesperson said.

RELATED: World leaders at UN summit adopt 'bold' plan to enhance protections for refugees and migrants

One of the main achievements of the Summit was to create a refugee response framework that integrates humanitarian and development efforts. This translates into giving refugees land and allowing them to access job markets, for example.

The situation of refugees in Uganda could impact how the UN and humanitarian partners are working to support national authorities in the other neighbouring countries – the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ethiopia, Kenya and Sudan.

No neighbouring country is immune, said Mr. Baloch.