

INTERVIEW: ‘It’s time to work with young people, not just for young people,’ – outgoing UN Youth Envoy

10 February 2017 – In his second term in office, former United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon established the Office of the Secretary-General’s Envoy on Youth, subsequently appointing Mr. Ahmad Alhendawi of Jordan as his first-ever Envoy on Youth – the youngest senior official in the history of the Organization.

“I think with my appointment, the United Nations sent an important message that it’s time to work with young people, and not just for young people,” says Mr. Alhendawi, whose tenure as UN Envoy on Youth ends on 13 February 2017.

Mr. Alhendawi, who assumed his position on 17 January 2013, echoes the vision of former UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon who, in establishing the Youth Envoy’s office, had identified working with and for young people as one of his top priorities.

The Envoy on Youth – who also acts as the adviser to and the representative of the Secretary-General on youth-related matters – was given the mandate to harmonize the UN system efforts on youth development, enhance the UN response to youth needs, advocate for addressing the development needs and rights of young people, as well as to bring the work of the United Nations with and for youth closer to them.

In an interview with UN News – recorded days before the end of his tenure as UN Envoy on Youth – Mr. Alhendawi says, “We cannot really achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) or bring peace and prosperity to our world without engaging young people.”

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“Whether we are looking at development issues, peace and security, tackling Climate Change, on all these fronts we need to engage young people because they are capable, ready and very much able to do the heavy-lifting in implementing the SDGs,” adds the UN Envoy on Youth.

The following is the full transcript of the interview:

UN News: You’ve been Youth Envoy since 2013. You were the first-ever UN Secretary-General’s Envoy on Youth. Looking back at the last four years, how do you evaluate your work with the largest generation of youth?

Ahmad Alhendawi: I think, with my appointment, the United Nations sent an

important message that it's time to work with young people, and not just for young people. When I was appointed as Secretary-General's Envoy on Youth I was only 27 years old. And at that time I was probably the youngest in the history of the UN to serve in a senior position at that age, and many people were skeptical about whether that was a good or bad move – some may have thought I was too young to lead or to take care of this important portfolio. But I think what we found out, is that the power of young people – and empowering them in leadership positions – will always pay off. And the UN sends that message to all member states around the world, that it's time to work with young people, by bringing young people in, and allowing them to craft decisions, and to also support their implementation. Looking back, I'm very proud of all the accomplishments we have made, particularly in engaging in drafting the SDGs and convening this amazing [recently concluded] Youth Forum at the United Nations for all member states and youth to come and debate development issues. Many around the world still think of youth as a problem; as a liability, and we don't share that view. We believe young people are an opportunity, and they are an asset for development, peace and prosperity to their countries. I think we are seeing that shift in paradigm where we see important normative gains happening within the human rights field, or issues related to employment, and some significant initiatives supporting youth on different fronts.

So my message to young people is: believe in our shared destiny, because this planet is at risk, and the challenges we are facing today cannot be tackled anymore within the border of one country, no matter what that country is

What's important to remember here is that some of these gains didn't always translate to improvements in young people's lives at the national level. We still have many challenges facing young people. Youth unemployment is still high – some 74 million young persons are still unemployed. Many young people around the world are challenged by what we see today from the increase of hate speech, absence of peace and security, and young people are still struggling to access opportunities. There are some places where there's systematic discrimination against young people. I'm very proud of the important progress we have made, but at the same time I'm very mindful that much more needs to be done, and this largest generation of young people cannot be left behind. I keep reminding everyone that nobody should be allowed to gamble with their future of this generation of young people, and the future generations as well. That's why the world has to unite for youth, and that's the model we adopted in our work from Day One: that we have to unite for youth and to bring the world together. We have to remember that what's at stake today is the future of this generation of young people, and the future of our planet and the future generations.

UN News: So what's your message to the youth around the world?

Ahmad Alhendawi: My message to youth in 2017 is that this is an important moment for them not to lose hope, and to stay determined that we could be the generation that could reverse Climate Change, and eradicate extreme poverty;

that's the vision of Agenda 2030. My vision to young people is to unite around the shared platform offered to us. It's a very exciting thing for our generation now; young people in this generation are fans of using shared platforms. It's all about shared platforms, whether it's a shared economic platform, where you access opportunities by sharing platforms, and I often think of the United Nations as a shared value platform, that's available to all of us to share this important value system – the universal values like the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the UN Charter – that brings all nations together.



In March 2016 the UN Youth Envoy Ahmad Alhendawi discussed youth participation in the implementation of the SDGs with young leaders in Zambia. He also congratulated the Government of Zambia for the successful hosting of the 3rd Global Conference of Young Parliamentarians. The Envoy on Youth called on the Government of Zambia to expand on existing spaces for meaningful youth engagement in the implementation of the SDGs. He also discussed the urgency for more investments and empowerment of adolescent girls, where 42% of girls are married before the age of 18, pledging the UN Country Team to work with the Government to address this critical issue. Photo: UN Youth Envoy Flickr/ Jason J Mulikita



Young Leaders and Fellows meet at United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) where UN Youth Envoy Ahmad Alhendawi opened day-long workshops discussing the youth dimension in implementing the SDGs. The Population Fund engages young people in its work, and advocates for youth engagement in the work of others. The fund also provides support to adolescents and youth to build networks and organizations to advocate for their human rights. Photo: UN Youth Envoy Flickr



UN Youth Envoy Ahmad Alhendawi meets Libyan and Tunisian youth to motivate them to participate in the resolution of conflict and building social peace. According to the UN Support Mission in Libya, Ahmad Alhendawi discusses the importance of youth participation in finding solutions to the conflict in Libya, including Security Council Resolution 2250. The UN Youth Envoy said Mr. Martin Kobler, the Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General in Libya, had stressed the need to further promote the active participation of youth in the ongoing national dialogue and in the implementation of the Libyan Political Agreement (LPA). Photo: UN Youth Envoy Flickr



In August 2016, the UN Youth Envoy made an official visit to Nigeria to discuss youth development and youth issues. Photographed here, Ahmad Alhendawi inspects exhibits mounted by youth beneficiaries of enterprise empowerment. Young people meeting with the Envoy emphasized the need for further support in facilitating their participation in Nigeria's public life, as well as tackling health issues, HIV/AIDS and youth unemployment. Photo: UN

Youth Envoy Flickr



Ahmad Alhendawi and a delegation of UN youth experts concluded a five-day visit to China in the spring of 2016. Mr. Alhendawi met with several youth-led and youth-focused organizations, as well as city government officials encouraging stronger policies and programming for education, health, youth participation and employment. China has the second largest youth population in the world with 272 million young people aged 10-24.



In his visit to Uganda UN Youth Envoy underscored the importance of expediting the adoption of the country's national youth policy. UN Resident Coordinator, Ahunna Eziakonwa-Onochie, expressed the UN country team's interest in joining the Envoy's initiatives by establishing a youth advisory board for the UN country team. Photo: UN Youth Envoy Flickr



During the UN Youth Envoy's visit to Italy in October 2016, he talked about the issue of drug use among young people, noting "it is a real issue, and the way San Patrignano Recovery Community is tackling it, shows that when young people are given an opportunity, they can empower themselves and contribute to their communities." The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime World Drug Report – which provides a global overview as well as regional trends in drug use – shows, for example, that 17.9 per cent among the youth population, aged 12-17 years, reported using illicit substances in 2012. Out of the general population, aged 15-64, the corresponding figure was 5.2 per cent, and drug use was reported to be the highest among those in their late teens or twenties. Photo: UN Youth Envoy Flickr



During a Social Good Summit in New York, September 2016, the UN Youth Envoy Ahmad Alhendawi announced the launch of 'Young Leaders for the Sustainable Development Goals'. "Today I am pleased to join in welcoming the inaugural class of UN Young Leaders for the Sustainable Development Goals," said UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon in a statement delivered by Mr. Alhendawi. "These 17 young change-makers are a testament to the ingenuity of youth and I congratulate them for their exceptional leadership and demonstrated commitment to the Sustainable Development Goals." Photo: Mashable



Soon the Youth Envoy will join the World Organization of the Scouts' Movement as their new Secretary-General. Alhendawi still is the youngest senior official in the history of the organization. He assumed his position on 17 January 2013 with a mandate to harmonize the UN system efforts on youth development, enhance the UN response to youth needs, advocate for addressing the development needs and rights of young people, as well as to bring the work of the United Nations with and for youth closer to them. Photo: UN Youth

My message to young people, as we use different platforms in all spheres of life, is for us to renew our faith and resolve to continue empowering and investing in this shared value system that has basically offered humanity this opportunity to come together for the first time in its history, so that we have something called universal values and international law, and UN agencies; this amazing system that links us together. Of course there are many people out there who will say “that doesn’t always work” – and I know it doesn’t always work – but we have to make it work, and we have to invest more. So my message to young people is: believe in our shared destiny, because this planet is at risk, and the challenges we are facing today cannot be tackled anymore within the border of one country, no matter what that country is. So we need to bridge the gaps, to connect people, and we need young people to believe in this message.

UN News: Your journey with youth will not end with the UN; you’ll certainly continue working with the youth and to advance youth issues, won’t you?

Ahmad Alhendawi: I’m moving from my position as Secretary-General’s Envoy on Youth – it was a tremendous honour and privilege to serve in this position – to continue serving young people, as you rightly said, and I will be joining the World Organization of the Scouts’ Movement as the new Secretary-General. And from that position, I look forward to working with a peaceful army of 40 million scouts around the world, who are also very much excited to work in tandem with the United Nations in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals.

The Scout Movement is a very unique movement that has been offering generation after generation of young, committed individuals that have been supporting their countries and supporting themselves. So it’s a very exciting time to be able to transition to another place of service, where I will continue working with young people, but this time also working directly in getting the commitments we made in 2015 on Climate Change and Sustainable Development Goals translated, and continue to offer opportunities to young people. There is nothing parallel to my belief in this generation of young people, and I think we will be able to unlock their potential to truly be the generation that will get the job done. As I always say, I don’t want 14 years from now, to stand and pass on regrets to another generation. I think [with the SDGs] we do have a bold vision for the future, and we have absolutely no excuse to delay the implementation and to spare no efforts in implementing this vision.

UN News: How about your relationship with the UN?

Ahmad Alhendawi: It was interesting actually, when I went to the Secretary-General to inform him about my wish to take up this position of Secretary-General of the Scout Movement, he said – a very nice line – that “maybe the

UN will lose one, but we will win 40 million (members of the Scout Movement around the world) to work with the United Nations." I think the Scouts have always been there, and I am very committed – and once again I have always been telling young people that the United Nations is not only about carrying the UN badge or the UN passport. I think it is about subscribing to the values and commitments and the goals of the United Nations, and my commitment to those values and ideals will continue to be there. I very much look forward to working in tandem with the United Nations, because I am a big believer in this multi-lateral system, and I think, despite all the deficiencies that you might see, the only solution for us is to invest more in making this system work.

Senior UN officials call for close cooperation to address migrant, refugee flows in Libya

10 February 2017 – The heads of the United Nations agencies for human rights, migrants, and refugees, and the UN envoy for Libya, today met in Geneva calling for international solidarity to address the flows of migrants and refugees in the North African country.

The senior UN officials stressed the need for a comprehensive approach to address the situation of migrants and refugees in Libya as well as to assist the hundreds of thousands of Libyans displaced and impacted by the crisis, according to a press release.

The meeting was between the Director-General of the International Organization for Migration (IOM), William Lacy Swing; the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, Filippo Grandi; the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein; and the Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General for Libya, Martin Kobler.

They called for close cooperation at the regional and international levels, and highlighted the need to protect and rights of migrants and refugees.

Along with many Libyans, migrants and refugees are heavily impacted by ongoing conflicts and the breakdown in law and order in Libya, the four senior UN officials said.

They noted that untold numbers of people particularly those smuggled or trafficked, and those in detention outside of any legal process face grave human rights abuses and violations.

Migrants and refugees are also exposed to malnutrition, extortion, torture, sexual violence and other abuses, according to the joint press release.

[Haiti: Peacekeeping chief points to changes in mandate of UN mission](#)

10 February 2017 – While the security situation in Haiti is not perfect, solid progress has been made over the past few years, the head of United Nations peacekeeping operations has said, stressing that the Organization is considering a change in the mandate of the UN Stabilization Mission in the island nation, known as MINUSTAH.

Wrapping up a week-long visit during which he attended the swearing in of the new Haitian President, Jovenel Moïse, and carried out an out an evaluation of Mission, Hervé Ladsous, the Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations, told reporters yesterday in Port-au-Prince: “The military component of MINUSTAH is likely to disappear in the relatively near future. We are looking at the modalities.”

At the heart of the Mission’s work is ensuring stability, he continued, noting that the recent elections had gone off with few incidents, thanks to MINUSTAH and particularly the Haitian National Police, and the Provision Electoral Council. “I think this is something to be noted,” he said.

He recalled that in October 2016, when the UN Security Council renewed MINUSTAH’s mandate, it had expressed its wish to examine the mandate of the Mission in mid-April. The Secretary-General is to make recommendations to the Security Council on 15 March.

“I think that when we look at the situation in this country compared to what it was a few years ago, we have made a lot of progress,” Ladsous said. “Security is not perfect, but I think it is much better.”

Mr. Ladsous went on to note that the regular strength of the Haitian National Police is set to reach 15,000 and that efforts will continue to strengthen the capacities of this police.

[Somalia: UN Security Council urges sustained momentum towards democratic](#)

governance

10 February 2017 – Welcoming political and security progress in Somalia since 2012, including the recently concluded elections in the country, the United Nations Security Council today highlighted the need to ‘maintain the momentum’ towards democratic governance in the African nation.

In a Presidential Statement adopted today, the 15-member Council also hailed the increased representation of women in the Upper House and the House of the People and underscored the important contribution of women to Somalia’s peacebuilding and State-building processes.

The UN body ‘responsible for matters concerning international peace and security’ also congratulated President Mohamed Abdullahi Mohamed ‘Farmajo’ and paid tribute to former President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud for his service and commended the swift and gracious transfer of power in Somalia.

The new President, known as ‘Farmajo,’ was declared the winner on Wednesday after two rounds of voting by the Somali Parliament in the capital, Mogadishu. The runner-up, incumbent President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud, chose to withdraw from a third and final round.

It also underscored the importance of timely and transparent appointment of ministers and the cabinet, in consultation with the Somali Parliament, and called on the Parliament and all federal and provincial leaders to cooperate fully with the Federal Government in driving forward reform and addressing immediate priorities without delay.

The Security Council further emphasized the need to accelerate agreement between the federal and regional authorities on a federal security sector architecture as well as the importance of good faith cooperation between the authorities to speed up the country’s peacebuilding and State-building process.

It also called on the international community and Somalia’s partners to step up their support to efforts to build and strengthen the country’s national institutions, governance structures and socio-economic infrastructure.

The Council further urged the Federal Government to promote a comprehensive reconciliation process that brings about local, regional, and national cohesion and integration in a climate of respect of human rights and fundamental freedoms, and to establish an effective federal political system.

Also in the statement, the Council recognized that the coming months would be an important

period for Somalia, and said that it would follow progress closely, and reaffirmed its support for peace, stability and development in Somalia.

In Turkey, UN chief Guterres spotlights collective responsibility for refugee protection

10 February 2017 – Underscoring the enormity of the plight of refugees, United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres today appealed for effective burden-sharing in supporting those who have been forced to flee their homes, as well as to those providing them refuge.

“This is a moment to launch an appeal when we see so many borders being closed and when we see so many escaping their responsibilities [...] for effective burden-sharing and to make sure that the integrity of the international refugee protection regime is maintained,” Mr. Guterres said at a press encounter in Istanbul alongside Binali Yildirim, the Turkish Prime Minister.

“One area is [supporting] the countries of first asylum, support to the host communities, support to projects that can help [...] both refugee populations and the host communities,” he explained.

“The second area of burden-sharing is the resettlement of refugees [...] because the protection of refugees is not only the responsibility of neighbouring States of a crisis; it is a collective responsibility of the international community,” added Mr. Guterres.

The UN chief, on his first official visit to the region, also thanked the Turkish Government and people for their large humanitarian support to Syrian people as well as to those from other parts of the world.

In particular, he expressed his appreciation for the role of Turkey in convening and orienting the Astana conference on Syria and that it would lead to the Geneva talks in which the political solution dimension will be at the centre of the discussions.

“The role that Turkey has played has been, in our opinion, extremely positive and we are very grateful and very appreciative for that fact,” he said.

Mr. Guterres also thanked Turkey for its role in convening of the Astana Conference and said: “It is now very important to have in Geneva discussions that go to the substance of the issues and allow for a political solution to start [being] built.”

Recalling the country’s contributions to the international multilateral system, he noted that Turkey is one of the guarantor powers in the UN-supported Conference for Cyprus for the unity of Cyprus, and expressed hope

that the efforts of the two communities that go on meeting at the highest level and the efforts of the guarantor powers will allow for a breakthrough in the near future.

A breakthrough able to fully respect the concerns of the Turkish Cypriot community about its security but, at the same time, compatible with the concerns of the Greek Cypriot community, added the Secretary-General, pledging the support of the UN to the two communities and the guarantor powers to support the search for a solution that is acceptable for all.

The UN chief also noted the importance of political solutions in which people feel duly represented at the political level for successfully fighting terrorism.

Secretary-General Guterres also said there is no plan B but for the two-state solution for the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, and underscored: It is absolutely essential to avoid unilateral actions that undermine the possibility of that two-state solution.

He also noted that his discussions in Istanbul included the situation in Iraq, Libya and Afghanistan as well as the on importance of rule of law and protection of human rights.