

# VOICE

— UN DESA —

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## Building our digital future together

There is now little distinction between our offline and online lives. The Internet and digital technologies are so woven into the everyday fabric of societies that losing access—or trust—can feel like the ground shifting beneath us. Yet, 2.6 billion remain offline, left out of opportunities for education, healthcare, and economic growth.

Those who are online face growing threats to their privacy, security, and rights, while rapid changes driven by AI create uncertainty and unease about the future.

This December in Riyadh, the [Internet Governance Forum](#) (IGF) convened by the UN Secretary-General will address these issues head-on. The aim? To build a digital ecosystem that works for everyone, everywhere, based on multistakeholder exchanges among diverse communities navigating digital transformation.

Questions like how digital tools can foster peace and sustainability, how we close the connectivity gap, how we mainstream human rights across the digital landscape, and how we ensure AI serves society—not exploits it—are on the agenda. Whether they are government ministers, legislators, youth activists or technical experts, participants come to the IGF as equals. The Forum will foster actionable policy recommendations and deliver impactful messages worldwide.

This year's Forum comes at a pivotal moment, just months after the adoption of the [Global Digital Compact](#) (GDC), which envisions a safer, fairer digital future, and ahead of the WSIS+20 Review in 2025, which will set out new targets for digital development and governance. Both frameworks emphasize the same core idea: digital technologies should be people-centred and approached cooperatively.

As socioeconomic and digital trajectories become interlinked, the need for risk mitigation is clear. But so, too, is the need to tap into the vast ocean of digital possibilities that will help translate technological progress into progress for people and planet.

The IGF holds out promise that global governance and cooperation, harnessing digital solutions for the climate crisis, and combatting threats like misinformation and disinformation – just some of the topics that will be discussed in Riyadh – are all possible.

For more information: [Internet Governance Forum \(IGF\)](#)



## EXPERT VOICES



### Reflections from the SDG Pavilion at COP29

The SDG Pavilion organized by UN DESA on the sidelines of the UN Climate Change Conference has become an annual stop for many interested in climate and SDG synergies. We spoke with two veterans of the past six SDG

Pavilions—Ariel Alexovich, Sustainable Development Officer in UN DESA's Office of the Under-Secretary-General, and Nadine Salame, Senior Programme Management Assistant in the Division for Sustainable Development Goals—about their recent experience at COP29 in Baku, Azerbaijan.

#### **Set the scene for us: What was the energy like at COP29 and the SDG Pavilion?**

**AA:** "Truly, the energy was fantastic. People were very positive and seemed very happy to see us representing the SDGs with our colourful branding and full programme connecting the world's climate work with its sustainable development work.

That said, the workday could be quite chaotic. Each day there were multiple sources demanding your attention at once. For instance, there's the tech team you've just met and are trying to get up to speed, there are partners from the event currently on stage asking for a new microphone, there are people from the *next* event asking about their upcoming PowerPoint, all the while you're taking photos, distributing headphones to the audience, and fielding hundreds of requests for free SDG pins—it's a lot. Fortunately, we have each other to rely upon for support."

**There was a vibrant array of voices represented. Can you tell us about the diversity of perspectives and how they enriched conversations?**

**NS:** “With more than 300 applications for about 50 slots, we were grateful that our partners saw the value in holding their events at the SDG Pavilion. Of course we have a good number of UN DESA-led events, but we open our stage to Member States, partners in the UN system and other stakeholders including youth groups and Indigenous organizations.

We especially enjoy working on the SDG Pavilion because we get to work with different teams across UN DESA. Over the years we’ve had events highlighting the special climate challenges facing small island developing States, forests, sustainable transport, climate finance and the climate impacts related to population growth, among others. This year, the special Forest Pavilion was hosted within the SDG Pavilion, making the conversations even more enriching, lively and diverse.”

**What were some memorable moments that stood out to you?**

**NS:** “Even though we prepare for the SDG Pavilion for months, a lot of the memorable things happen the day before COP starts, during the set-up. Every year we get to the venue and see firsthand what we’re working with. This year, we had a beautiful booth in a prime location next to UNFCCC and near the host country. However, we were missing a wall, some artwork and the label that actually said, “SDG Pavilion.” So, we do a lot of troubleshooting.

I will also remember Baku. It’s a beautiful city and the COP was very well organized in terms of reliable transport shuttles and very little security queues. We had some excellent meals in the city, too. “

**AA:** “For sure, I will remember the people we met, like our crew on the ground from India and Germany, and some of the SDG Pavilion visitors who traded pins with us, especially these three women from Uganda with whom I really made a connection.

Otherwise, some highlights were USG Li Junhua’s engagements in the Pavilion on the first day, and I enjoyed interviewing the Special Envoy for the Ocean, several Resident Coordinators, and explorer Bertrand Piccard in our social media space.”

Watch the events broadcast on UN DESA’s YouTube platform [here](#).

A recap of events can also be obtained via the SDG Pavilion newsletter [here](#).

*Photo credit: UN DESA*





## 5 things to know about the leadership of persons with disabilities

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On 3 December, we celebrate the International Day of Persons with Disabilities (IDPD) under the theme, "Amplifying the Leadership of Persons with Disabilities for an Inclusive and Sustainable Future." The commemoration will highlight the strides made and the challenges ahead. Here are 5 things you should know about the leadership of persons with disabilities:

**1. The leadership of persons with disabilities is based on the principle of "nothing about us without us"**

This phrase highlights the crucial need for their participation, representation and inclusion. It emphasizes the importance of their active involvement in decision-making processes to influence the conditions affecting their lives, ensuring that policies and initiatives consider their viewpoints and priorities.

**2. Over the years, persons with disabilities and organizations representing them have led important community-driven efforts**

These initiatives aim not only to advocate for their rights and well-being but also to promote inclusive development. By using both specific and general approaches, they help improve universal access to essential services and resources. Recent global climate change conferences have demonstrated a growing advocacy for disability inclusion and the rights of persons with disabilities, especially youth with disabilities, in climate action.

**3. The global disability rights movement has achieved significant milestones, including the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) and UN Security Council Resolution 2475**

The [CRPD](#) is especially important because it incorporates development objectives for persons with disabilities into international human rights frameworks and highlights their leadership in creating this treaty. [Resolution 2475](#) was the first instance where the Security Council focused on the protection and circumstances of persons with disabilities in peace and security situations, highlighting their crucial impact on shaping international policy.

**4. The Second World Summit for Social Development in 2025 offers opportunities to enhance leadership among people with disabilities**

The [Summit](#) aims to address social development gaps, revitalize the 2030 Agenda, and stress the importance of including persons with disabilities in achieving sustainable peace and development. This year, the UN General Assembly adopted a resolution entitled "Inclusive development for and with persons with disabilities", calling upon Member States, the UN system and other partners to promote the participation and perspectives of persons with disabilities in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, and continue to advance disability inclusion across the pillars of the UN's work.

**5. Leadership will be front and center at the commemoration of International Day of Persons with Disabilities**

On 3 December, 2024, we celebrate the International Day of Persons with Disabilities (IDPD) under the theme, "Amplifying the Leadership of Persons with Disabilities for an Inclusive and Sustainable Future." The commemoration at UN Headquarters in New York will highlight the strides made and the challenges ahead, including upcoming key global

milestones like the Second World Summit for Social Development in 2025. By harnessing the leadership of persons with disabilities, we can advance towards a future that ensures sustainable peace and inclusive development for all.

For more information: [International Day of Persons with Disabilities](#)

Photo Credit: UNDP/Duško Miljanić



## Rio's future generations are here: It's not game over for climate action; it's game on

By Hailey Campbell, Co-Executive Director, Care About Climate

For every single person alive today, we will leave behind a shared legacy to future generations. Will that future be defined by fear of the catastrophic climate impacts or the rights to a clean, safe, sustainable environment?

Thirty years and 29 UN Climate Conferences ago, world leaders gathered in Rio, Brazil to promise intergenerational equity, restore balance with nature, and fight climate change. World leaders promised to ensure "that current actions do not compromise the needs of future generations".

The future generations of the Rio conference are here. Young people under the age of 30 represent nearly 50 per cent of the global population. To us, it's clear that the Rio promises of intergenerational equity and climate action have been broken.

For many of us in this generation, we've taken matters into our own hands. In addition to school, work, and managing the cost of living crisis, we've started non-profits to fight climate change and gain access to the exclusive UN spaces in attempts to outnumber the [1700+ fossil fuel lobbyists](#) at COPs. We've trained ourselves to build relationships and engage in negotiations as observers to the multilateral climate processes. And, we've organized to hold the line on tackling climate change such that future generations after us have the opportunity to live in a clean, safe, sustainable world that we were promised. All of this, almost entirely as volunteers.

At COP29 – my fifth COP – I spent over 60 hours in climate negotiations. For people in my generation, the outcomes were yet another betrayal of our future. It took 28 COPs to secure even a single mention of fossil fuels and the need to transition away from them, despite decades of global awareness of their impact on the planet.

COP29 failed to deliver the necessary trillion-dollar grants and public-based finance goal, a place to continue discussions on how to transition away from fossil fuels as agreed at COP28, and a work programme aimed at sharing best practices to mitigate climate change. Throughout every agenda item, it seems as though more time was spent defending against backsliding on previous agreements than it was advancing ambitious action that meets the needs of the most vulnerable communities.

When every single country effectively holds a veto and the Presidency is led by those keen to proliferate fossil fuel extraction, it's no surprise that the same side keeps winning. Despite all the reasons to abandon COPs, we keep coming back—not just because leaving the multilateral process would embolden wealthy and oil-rich nations, but because the community we've built through these negotiations is a source of strength, solidarity, and hope. It reminds us that even in the face of broken promises and slow progress, countless people around the world remain committed to fighting for climate justice.

At COP29, one of the brightest moments of hope came from the launch of the [Universal NDC Youth Clause](#), informed by climate policy experts on my team at [Care About Climate](#). This clause is a call to action for governments to recognize that an intergenerational challenge demands intergenerational leadership. Specifically, it urges governments to accelerate intergenerational partnerships in climate policymaking and implementation by embedding principles of intergenerational equity into their Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) under the Paris Agreement. During the height of negotiations, the United Kingdom became the first government to adopt the Youth Clause, offering excitement and hope for a shift in intergenerational climate governance.

Beyond the Youth Clause, I was inspired by the dozens of youth staying up until 2am following negotiations and building cross-constituency partnerships to amplify calls to action. From signs on bathroom stalls and on laptops to policy briefs for negotiators, young people refused to let their future and that of the most vulnerable communities go down without a fight. Though COP has come to another disappointing close, we continue this fight at home, already preparing for the negotiations and climate actions needed in the coming year.

COP30 will return us to Brazil, the birthplace of the climate promises to my generation. As a member of the generation that Rio promised to protect, we look to global leaders and demand better. Though we turn to multilateral processes to provide guidance, it's important to remember that governments don't require a multilateral agreement to demonstrate climate leadership.

Future generations cannot afford another failure. Will 2025 and COP30 finally deliver on the promises of Rio, or will next year be remembered as yet another missed opportunity? The choice is theirs. The consequences are ours.

*\* The views expressed in this blog are the author's and do not necessarily reflect the opinion of UN DESA.*



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## COMING UP



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