

UN celebrates voice and visibility of women and girls with autism

Activists and ambassadors gathered at the United Nations on Thursday to underline their commitment to empowering women and girls with autism, a lifelong neurological condition that begins in childhood and is characterized by some degree of impaired social behaviour, communication and language.

Women and girls were the focus on [World Autism Awareness Day](#), observed on 2 April: a segment of the global population that faces “multiple challenges,” as UN [Secretary-General António Guterres](#) stated in his [message](#) for the Day.

Speaking at the commemorative event in the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) Chamber, Alison Smale, head of the UN Department of Global Communications, outlined some of the many forms of discrimination women and girls with autism face.

“They are denied equal access to education and employment, to healthcare services, justice and equal recognition before the law, and they are far too often denied the freedom to make their own choices,” she stated.

Julia Bascom, Executive Director of the Autistic Self Advocacy Network, provided an overview of the state of women and girls with autism.

She said they are diagnosed much less frequently than men and boys, and often much later in life: sometimes only after bringing in their own children for assessment.

“The diagnostic criteria for autism are normed off of four-year-old white boys in upper middle-class families in the United States,” she reported. “So, anyone who doesn’t fit in that box has an uphill climb.”

With one child in 160 on the autism spectrum, Ambassador Mahmoud Saikhal of Afghanistan stressed the need to fight stigma and promote inclusion, but also to highlight the contributions made by people with autism.

He gave examples such as Eileen Parker, inventor of a weighted blanket that helps some people with autism to feel calm enough to fall asleep, and Dr. Temple Grandin, a leading advocate.

“Events like this help to give a voice to those who may otherwise be left behind,” he said, reading a statement on behalf of Miroslav Lajčák, the President of the UN General Assembly.

Ensuring that “no one is left behind” is the promise of [the Sustainable Development Agenda](#) for a more just and equitable future that world leaders have committed to bring about by 2030.

Ms. Smale, the UN official, called for giving women and girls with autism a

direct role in policy making on matters that concern them.

“To achieve the inclusive society to which we aspire, we must ensure that the fundamental rights enshrined in the [Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities](#), adopted by Member States at the UN in 2006, are known and respected and are recognized as applying to everyone, including women and girls with autism,” she said.

Though based in the US, the non-profit Autistic Self Advocacy Network – Ms. Bascom’s organization – works to empower people with autism globally, under the rallying call of ‘Nothing About Us, Without Us!’

“As a society we still see autism as a negative, sad, scary thing. But for autistic women, an autism diagnosis can be a tool for empowerment,” she told the UN audience.

“It’s an answer, it’s an explanation, it’s a way out of cycles of self-blame and guilt. It’s a passport to an entire community. And if we’re lucky, it’s a connection to the understanding, support and services we need in order to truly thrive –sometimes for the first time in our lives.”

[Marking Sport for Development Day, Japanese athletes take UN Global Goals forward](#)

“Let’s use the 2020 Olympics and Paralympics as an opportunity to let the world know about the importance of [SDGs](#) [Sustainable Development Goals],” said [Koji Murofushi](#), the gold medalist in hammer throw at the 2004 Athens Olympics, in his video message.

The [2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development](#) and its 17 SDGs were adopted by world leaders in 2015 as a blueprint to achieve a healthy planet where people can live free of poverty and hunger by 2030.

“I often see poverty with my own eyes when I go overseas for tennis matches. Now, donation is probably the only way I can contribute but I support activities aiming to eradicate poverty,” said [Mai Minokoshi](#), a professional tennis player, in her message.

The campaign was launched by the UN Information Centre (UNIC) in Tokyo and Japan Sports Agency, with the support of Sport for Tomorrow, a Government-private joint venture, to commemorate the [International Day of Sport for Development and Peace](#), annually observed on 6 April – the day the first modern Olympics was held in 1896.

In the [2030 Agenda](#), sport's role for social progress is acknowledged as "an important enabler of sustainable development."



Video screen shot

A collage of screen captures from video messages by Japanese athletes joining a United Nations-backed campaign to promote Sustainable Development Goals through sports.

"I believe Olympics and Paralympics symbolize peace. I hope for a day where everyone can live peacefully" says [Taiki Morii](#), a silver medalist in Alpine skiing in 2018 PyeongChang Paralympic Winter Games.

The campaign has now gone beyond Japan, with [Sally Conway](#) of Scotland, who won the bronze medal in judo at the 2016 Rio Olympics, and [Kreshma Rasikh](#) from Afghanistan's national women soccer team, joining the growing ranks of athletes disseminating their video messages on social media platforms.

The International Day of Sport for Development and Peace was [created](#) by the UN General Assembly in 2013.

In her message for the Day, Audrey Azoulay, Director-General of the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization ([UNESCO](#)), said that sport relies upon the concepts of respect, understanding, integration and dialogue, and it contributes to the development and fulfilment of individuals regardless of age, gender, origins, beliefs and opinions.

“That is why [sport is a unique forum](#) for action and reflection to transform our societies,” she said.

[UN envoy calls for restraint ahead of renewed protests at Gaza fence](#)

Ahead of tomorrow’s planned protests at the Gaza-Israel border, the United Nations envoy on the Middle East peace process has called on Israeli forces to exercise maximum restraint and on the Palestinians to avoid friction at the Gaza fence, which was the scene of deadly violence amid similar demonstrations last Friday.

In a [statement](#) on Thursday, UN Special Coordinator Nikolay Mladenov said he is “[following with concern](#)” the continuing preparations and rhetoric for Friday’s so-called ‘Great Return March’ in Gaza.

“Demonstrations and protests must be allowed to proceed in a peaceful manner. Civilians, particularly children, must not be intentionally put in danger or targeted in any way,” he underscored.

Mr. Mladenov’s warning follows deadly violence last Friday, 30 March, during which thousands of Palestinians marched to Gaza’s border with Israel to protest the long-standing blockade of the enclave.

According to reports from the Palestinian Health Ministry¹⁵ Palestinians had been killed and more than 1,000 injured.

Some of the casualties were reportedly the result of live ammunition used by Israeli security forces during the March. Other casualties followed armed clashes between Palestinians and Israeli security forces, including the shelling of a Hamas observation point.

There were also reports from Israeli security forces of militants attempting to get through the fence in an attempt to plant explosives. Palestinians also reportedly sent a nine-year-old girl through the fence, but Israeli forces were able to send her safely back.

In the aftermath of the clashes UN [Secretary-General António Guterres](#) called for an [independent and transparent investigation into the incident](#). The Security Council had also convened an [emergency meeting](#) on the clashes.

‘Zero stocks’ for nearly half of essential medicines

Quoting partners on the ground, a UN spokesperson said today that supplies of essential drugs and medical disposables are running low at health facilities

in the enclave while an ongoing electricity crisis that has hampered the functioning of hospitals.

“There are currently zero stock levels for nearly half of the list of essential drugs and for a quarter of the list of essential [medical] disposables in Gaza,” Stéphane Dujarric, the spokesperson of the UN Secretary-General, said at a regular news briefing in New York.

“An estimated \$1 million is urgently required to support the health system in Gaza for drugs, disposables, equipment, gases and lab materials in the coming 6 to 8 weeks,” he added, noting that humanitarian partners are working to prioritize urgently required medical items and coordinating the disbursement of supplies in preparation for the expected medical increased needs.

[The world banks on sunshine, UN says in renewable energy report](#)

In 2017, solar energy dominated global investment in new power generation like never before, according to a new United Nations-backed report, which shows a steady move away from fossil fuel-based power production to ‘green’ power sources.

Last year, the world installed a record 98 gigawatts of new solar capacity, far more than the net additions of the rest – other renewables, fossil fuel and nuclear, according to the [Global Trends in Renewable Energy Investment 2018](#) report, released Thursday by the UN Environment Programme (UNEP) and its partners.

Solar power also attracted far more investment than any other technology, at \$160.8 billion, up 18 per cent.

A driving power behind last year’s surge in solar was China, where an unprecedented boom saw some 53 gigawatts added – more than half the global total – and \$86.5 billion invested, up 58 per cent.

The extraordinary surge in solar investment shows how the global energy map is changing and, more importantly, what the economic benefits are of such a shift – *UNEP chief*

“The extraordinary surge in solar investment shows how the global energy map is changing and, more importantly, what the economic benefits are of such a shift,” said UNEP chief Erik Solheim.

“Investments in renewables bring more people into the economy, they deliver

more jobs, better quality jobs and better paid jobs. Clean energy also means less pollution, which means healthier, happier development,” he said.

Last year was the eighth in a row in which global investment in renewables exceeded \$200 billion – and since 2004, the world has invested \$2.9 trillion in these green energy sources.

Overall, China was by far the world’s largest investing country in renewables, at a record \$126.6 billion, up 31 per cent on 2016. There were also sharp increases in investment in Australia, up 147 per cent to \$8.5 billion; Mexico, up 810 per cent to \$6 billion; and Sweden, up 127 per cent to \$3.7 billion.

UN Asia-Pacific forum adopts declaration to accelerate transition to sustainable energy

Meanwhile, countries in the Asia-Pacific region, which is projected to account for two-thirds of global energy use between now and 2040, committed to accelerate the transition to sustainable energy by scaling up their share of renewables, as a United Nations forum in Bangkok wrapped up on Thursday.

“There is a palpable sense of the enormous opportunities ahead that can transform the energy scene,” Shamshad Akhtar, the Executive Secretary of the UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific ([ESCAP](#)), told the two-day forum, acknowledging the growing recognition by governments, the private sector and investors, that a sustainable, low carbon energy system is the only option to safeguard the future.

The highlight of the Second [Asian and Pacific Energy Forum](#) was the adoption of a ministerial declaration, which lays out a series of actions to encourage the sustainable use of energy, including through greater regional cooperation to facilitate cross-border infrastructure and energy trade to advance [the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development](#).

Organized by ESCAP, the Forum provided a platform for governments, the UN system, private companies, international organizations, and civil society organizations to review the region’s implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 7 ([SDG7](#)) on affordable and clean energy.

Delegates concluded that Asia and the Pacific has made remarkable progress on universal access to electricity, with renewable energy surpassing price benchmarks that were only expected in 2020. However, greater efforts are needed throughout the region to achieve targets on reliance on clean fuel and renewable energy, and energy efficiency.

Global food price index rises for second consecutive month – UN agency

Global food prices rose for the second consecutive month with the index for these commodities averaging 172.8 points in March, 1.1 per cent higher than in February, the United Nations food security agency announced Thursday.

According to the UN Food and Agriculture Organization, the rise was driven by “robust increases” in the prices of cereals (165.6 points) and dairy products (197.4 points), averaging 2.7 per cent and 3.3 per cent higher, respectively, than their prices the previous month.

Wheat prices increased mostly on weather worries, including prolonged dryness in the United States of America and cold wet conditions in parts of Europe. Similarly, maize – another major cereal – saw its prices rise on back of strong global demand and deteriorating crop prospects also in Argentina.

FAO also anticipates that 2018 world maize and wheat production could decline based on early forecasts. Worldwide wheat output could drop to 750 million tonnes, about 1 per cent below its near-record level of the previous year.

In 2017, worldwide cereal production, including wheat, hit a record level, up 33 million tonnes from 2016, to nearly 2,646 million tonnes globally.

Price indices for sugar and vegetable oils, however, recorded declines in March, averaging 186 points and 156.8 points, respectively. The meat price index (169.8 points) remained almost unchanged from February.