

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.”

We believe young people are an opportunity, and they are an asset for development, peace and prosperity to their countries

“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.

[Yemen: As food crisis worsens, UN agencies call for urgent assistance to avert catastrophe](#)

10 February 2017 – The number of food insecure people in Yemen has risen by three million in seven months, with an estimated 17.1 million people – more than two-thirds of the entire population of 27.4 million – now struggling to feed themselves, according to a joint assessment by three United Nations agencies.

The speed at which the situation is deteriorating and the huge jump in food insecure people is extremely worrying, said the Food and Agriculture Organization's (FAO) Representative in Yemen, Salah Hajj Hassan, in a news release.

Bearing in mind that agriculture is the main source of livelihood for the majority of the population, FAO is urgently calling for funds to scale up its agricultural livelihoods support to farmers, herders and fishing communities to improve their access to food in 2017 and prevent the dire food and livelihood security situation from deteriorating further, he added.

Of the 17.1 million food-insecure people, about 7.3 million are considered to be in need of emergency food assistance, according to the preliminary results of the Emergency Food Security and Nutrition Assessment, which attributed the rapid deterioration of the conditions to the ongoing conflict.

The UN and humanitarian partners has recently launched an international appeal for \$2.1 billion to provide life-saving assistance to 12 million people in Yemen in 2017 – the largest-ever humanitarian response plan for the war-torn country.

The joint assessment was conducted by FAO, the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the World Food Programme (WFP) in cooperation with the authorities in

Yemen. It is the first national, household-level survey conducted in the country since the escalation of the conflict in mid-March 2015.

Rates of acute malnutrition were found to have passed the "critical" threshold in four governorates, while agricultural production is falling across the country.

Even if they survive, these children risk not fulfilling their developmental potentials

"We are witnessing some of the highest numbers of malnutrition amongst children in Yemen in recent times," said UNICEF's Country Representative, Meritxell Relano.

She warned that children who are severely and acutely malnourished are 11 times more at risk of death as compared to their healthy peers, if not treated on time.

"Even if they survive, these children risk not fulfilling their developmental potentials, posing a serious threat to an entire generation in Yemen and keeping the country mired in the vicious cycle of poverty and under development," she said.

Stephen Anderson, WFP Country Director, also sounded the alarm. "The current level of hunger in Yemen is unprecedented, which is translating into severe hardship and negative humanitarian consequences for millions of Yemenis, particularly affecting vulnerable groups."

"Tragically, we see more and more families skipping meals or going to bed hungry, while children and mothers are slipping away with little to sustain themselves," he said.

WFP is urgently calling for support to provide food for the seven million people who are severely food insecure and may not survive this situation for much longer, he added.



Source: OCHA 2017 Humanitarian Response Plan for Yemen

Meanwhile, the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) reported that fighting in the coastal districts of Al Mokha and Dhubab in the western governorate of Taizz is spreading to the inland districts of Al Wazi'iyah and Mawza.

"A result is that more than 34,000 people have fled their homes," UNHCR spokesperson William Spindler told reporters in Geneva.

The UN refugee agency has mobilized assessment teams across displacement sites in Hudaydah, Ibb and the district of Maqbanah in Taizz, where recently displaced people are being hosted and began deliveries of emergency

assistance, including basic relief items and emergency shelter.

As of 1 February 2017, UNHCR had received only \$738,303 of the \$99.6 million needed for the refugee agency's operational response in Yemen this year.

The Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) said that extremely worrying reports have emerged about the impact on civilians of the fighting over the past two weeks, in the southwestern port of Al Mokha in Taizz Governorate. Credible reports indicate that Houthi-affiliated snipers shot at families attempting to flee their homes in Houthi-controlled areas – suggesting the use of civilians as human shields.

“Civilians were trapped and targeted during the Al Mokha fighting. There are real fears that the situation will repeat itself in the port of Al Hudaidah, to the north of Al Mokha, where air strikes are already intensifying,” UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein said in a news release.

[‘The world needs science and science needs women,’ UN says on International Day](#)

11 February 2017 – United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres today urged greater investments in teaching science, technology, engineering and math to all women and girls as well as equal access to these opportunities.

“For too long, discriminatory stereotypes have prevented women and girls from having equal access to education in science, technology, engineering and math (STEM),” said Mr. Guterres in his message for International Day of Women and Girls in Science, marked annually on 11 February.

“As a trained engineer and former teacher, I know that these stereotypes are flat wrong,” he said, explaining that they deny women and girls the chance to realize their potential – and deprive the world of the ingenuity and innovation of half the population.

“On this International Day, I urge commitment to end bias, greater investments in STEM education for all women and girls as well as opportunities for their careers and longer-term professional advancement so that all can benefit from their ground-breaking future contributions,” he said.

Earlier this week, the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization released its UNESCO Science Report: Towards 2030.

'Female engineers and computer programmers wanted,' is the main message of the report, which shows that women are increasingly graduating with life science degrees, but still rare in engineering and computer science, especially in developed economies.

An analysis of computer science shows a steady decrease in female graduates since 2000 that is particularly marked in high-income countries, it states.

The share of women graduates in computer science between 2000 and 2012 slipped in Australia, New Zealand, the Republic of Korea and the United States, as well as in Latin America and the Caribbean.

This should be a wake-up call, UNESCO said. Female participation is falling in a field that is expanding globally as its importance for national economies grows, penetrating every aspect of daily life.

The share of women working as engineers is also higher in some developing countries, with increases observed in sub-Saharan and Arab countries. Women in the United Arab Emirates, for example, have benefited from national policies that promote training and employment of Emirati citizens, and in particular women.

In her message on the Day, UNESCO Director-General Irina Bokova called for empowering women and girls to learn and research.

We must raise awareness about the work of women scientists by providing equal opportunities for their participation and leadership in a broad spectrum of high-level scientific bodies and events, Ms. Bokova said, calling also for mentoring opportunities for women.

In 2016, UNESCO and the L'Oréal Foundation launched the manifesto For Women in Science, to engage governments and stakeholders in promoting the full participation of girls and women in science.

For its part, UN Women noted that science and technology offer unique opportunities for women and girls to overcome a number of the barriers they typically face. For example: mobile money has empowered and transformed the lives of millions of women previously thought to be 'unbankable' by enabling them to directly access financial products and services.

Women with skills in science and technological fields can help improve vital infrastructure such as water and power supply, and in doing so ease the responsibilities that women and girls carry of providing unpaid care work for the household.

Similarly, Internet and mobile technology can help bridge barriers to education for the 32 million girls who are out of school at the primary level and the 29 million at the lower secondary level, explained the main UN entity on women's empowerment and gender equality.

Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics estimates based on data from its

database, July 2015

Encouraging women to do research

Women now account for 53 per cent of world's bachelor's and master's graduates in science and 43 per cent of PhDs, according to the UNESCO report. Since 2000, there has been a steady increase in female graduates in agricultural sciences, likely driven by an emphasis on national food security and the food industry.

In sub-Saharan Africa, for instance, female graduates in agricultural science have been increasing steadily, with women comprising 40 per cent or more of graduates in Lesotho, Madagascar, Mozambique, Namibia, Sierra Leone, South Africa, Swaziland and Zimbabwe.

Medicine is also a field increasingly popular with women, with six out of 10 researchers being women in both medical and agricultural sciences in Belarus and New Zealand, for instance.

In research, however, women still lag men at 28 per cent. The figure fluctuates geographically with women in Southeast Europe are on par with men, and at 44 per cent in Central Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean. According to the report, the numbers are particularly low in the European Union, sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia.

To encourage women and girls to study and work in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM), the UN has organized a number of events around the world.

In New York, a high-level event is underway today tying gender, science and the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The event was organized with support from the Government of Malta, as the president of the Council of the European Union.

AUDIO: American astronaut Peggy Whitson is making history as the first woman ever to command two missions aboard the International Space Station.

[South Sudan, Africa's largest refugee crisis, needs urgent response – UN agency](#)

10 February 2017 – With already more than 3.5 million displaced within and outside the borders of South Sudan and thousands more driven to neighbouring countries every day, the United Nations refugee agency has appealed for an

urgent peaceful resolution to what has now become Africa's worst refugee crisis.

Recent new arrivals report suffering inside South Sudan with intense fighting, kidnappings, rape, fears of armed groups and threats to life, as well as acute food shortage, William Spindler, a spokesperson for the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) told the media at a regular briefing in Geneva.

More than 60 per cent of the refugees are children, many arriving with alarming levels of malnutrition enduring devastating impact of the brutalities of the ongoing conflict, he added.

However the crisis, third only to the displacements in Syria and Afghanistan and now in its fourth year, has received less attention and is plagued by chronic levels of underfunding.

UNHCR said that its response capacities are overstretched in the countries hosting the refugees and the lack of funds is affecting critical and life-saving efforts such as providing clean, drinking water, food, health and sanitation.

Last month, the agency revised upwards its funding requirements for 2017 to \$781.8 million (some \$297.9 million or 61 per cent higher than the earlier budget) in light of new needs of those who have been displaced due to renewed fighting, increased violence and resulting food insecurity since July last year.

The agency's last year funding appeal of \$649 million received only 33 per cent of the amount needed.

500,000 displaced in four months more than 4,000 every day

The period between September and December 2016 saw almost half a million South Sudanese seeking refuge in neighbouring countries an average of almost 4,100 people every day for four months.

According to Mr. Spindler, as the global displacement trends reflect, those fleeing South Sudan are being hosted by the poorest communities in the neighbouring countries, under immense pressure with scarce resources.

Noting that the welcome South Sudan refugees received in the neighbouring countries is encouraging he cautioned that the lack of resources to respond is also extremely worrying.

The majority of the refugees are being hosted by Uganda (about 698,000), followed by Ethiopia (about 342,000), Sudan (305,000), Kenya (89,000), the Democratic Republic of the Congo (68,000) and the Central African Republic (4,900).

We are working with authorities in South Sudan's neighbouring countries to provide life-saving support and look after the basic needs of those arriving in desperate conditions, the UNHCR spokesperson said, renewing

a call on donor countries to step up support to the humanitarian efforts for the South Sudan situation.

South Sudan has faced ongoing challenges since a political face-off between President Salva Kiir and his then former Vice-President Riek Machar erupted into full blown conflict between forces loyal to each in December 2013. The crisis has produced one of the world's worst displacement situations with immense suffering for civilians.

Despite the August 2015 peace agreement that formally ended the war, conflict and instability have also spread to previously unaffected areas.

[‘Year of Pulses’ closes with call to build on strong momentum among farmers, private sector – UN](#)

10 February 2017 – Although the International Year of Pulses has helped raise awareness globally of the many benefits of pulses, such as beans, lentils and chickpeas, gains must be further strengthened to achieve the international community's new development goals, the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) said today.

“It is essential to maintain the momentum,” FAO's Deputy Director-General Maria-Helena Semedo told the Year's official closing ceremony today, which was hosted by Burkina Faso, according to a news release.

Realizing that pulses – defined as edible dried seeds of plants in the legume family – are “small but powerful allies” in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the UN General Assembly designated 2016 as the International Year and nominated FAO to lead implementation.

Since the Year's launch, connections have been fostered among key actors from farmers' organizations to the private sector to facilitate information exchange and policy dialogue on the production, trade and consumption of pulses.

Leaders in policy and research have tackled the top pulse issues at several international forums, and national committees have been established. A technical pulses database was created, a cookbook featuring recipes from international chefs was published, and the official multilingual website, with over half a million visits, promoted a rich array of information on pulses.

Though the Year has now officially closed, there has been a sound call to keep the momentum alive and continue activities beyond 2016.

Training programmes on the value of pulses should be supported, particularly for schoolchildren, farmers and extension workers. Policies and programmes should focus more on pulse producers, particularly small-holder farmers and young people, Ms. Semedo said, noting that FAO will carry on working with stakeholders from governments to family farmers to promote pulses.

Pulses are packed with minerals such as iron, zinc and folate and have been an important part of diets around the world for centuries.

Pulses are a valuable ingredient in achieving UN Sustainable Development Goal 2 which aims to end hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition, and promote sustainable agriculture.

The plants contribute to climate change adaptation and mitigation. They add large amounts of beneficial nitrogen to the soil and require little fertilizer. Growing pulses with other crops enhances soil fertility, improves both crops' yields, and contributes to a more sustainable food system.

In addition, pulses have a very low water footprint compared to other protein sources, can be grown in very poor soils, and help reduce the risk of soil erosion and depletion. For poor farmers, growing pulses contributes to stable livelihoods, additional income and improved nutrition.

Burkina Faso's President, Roch Marc Christian Kaboré, said: "To better cope with the triple problem of soil fertility management, reducing the adverse effects of climate change and the issue of food security, producing and consuming pulses is a great opportunity, especially for the most vulnerable people."

Overall, global pulse production has been slowly but steadily increasing. In 2014, global production reached 77 million tonnes, up 21 million metric tonnes since 2001.