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SPECIAL FOCUS

OUR CHILDREN’S WORLD

World Information Transfer’s 23rd International Conference on Health and Environment: Global Partners for Global Solutions

United Nations Headquarters, December 1, 2014

Mr. Alex Konanykhyn, Ms. Gianna Simone, Dr. George D. Thurston, H.E. Yuriy A. Sergeyev, Dr. Christine K. Durbak, Mr. Nikhil Seth, Dr. Scott C. Ratzan, Dr. Emily K. Shuman, Mr. Apurv Gupta.

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"Education brings choices. Choices bring power."
Your Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen and Students,

To begin with, I would like to express our sincere gratitude to Ambassador Yuriy Sergeyev, Permanent Representative of Ukraine to the United Nations, for his assistance and the co-sponsorship of this Conference. The Government of Ukraine has been our co-sponsor since we began our Conferences in 1992 before the Earth Summit. I would also like to thank Mr. Nikhil Seth, Director, DESA who has supported our Conferences for the past years, and the Missions of Austria, Belarus, Grenada, Haiti, and Hungary for their participation. Following Chornobyl, WIT began on the premise that without a healthy environment we cannot have healthy people, and that information, science, and knowledge will help governments and people make more informed decisions for the benefit of both the people and the planet. We also learned from Chornobyl that the absence of government transparency and accountability creates unnecessary suffering when people are kept ignorant following a tragedy—i.e. the prevalence of post-traumatic stress disorder in Ukraine, Belarus, and Russia.

Over the years, nuclear energy has been studied in depth—both the hazards and the benefits—particularly in relation to climate change and fossil fuel emissions. We know that radiation does not cause children or animals to be born with two heads, alcohol syndrome is not caused by radiation, and cancer of the thyroid is treatable. We needed a tragedy like Chornobyl to gain better knowledge and understanding of nuclear energy and the importance of governments using the Precautionary Principle in the realm of achieving Sustainable Development Goals for our world. Precautionary Principle is based on the premise of “DO NO HARM.” If there is no scientific finding available, common sense evidence needs to be used before new products or procedures are applied. Action should be based on preventing harm to both the environment and human health.

The Science and Environmental Health Network began in 1994, following the 1992 Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro, and expanded the Precautionary Principle to the misuse of science in developing practices that failed to protect the environment and human health. It has been promoting the incorporation of the Precautionary Principle by all governments, as a basis for environmental and public health policy. Measuring precaution should be based on evidence that has been scientifically determined as indicated for healthy people and the environment. Business models that promote short-term profits and current consumption practices need to be changed. Governments have to be responsible for both people and industry and not cater to business interests. We need to evaluate the risk before business as usual takes over. What I would like to propose is that we focus on two important elements of the Precautionary Principle: climate policy and population growth.

Although we have been warned about the changing climate since the 80’s, we still believe in unproven technological fixes instead of focusing on reducing the use of fossil fuels and promoting renewable energy systems. Structural economic and government changes need to be implemented for reduced carbon emissions, such as a carbon tax which has been derailed by the coal and oil industry. In the final analysis, climate and energy policies need to be reexamined as they will affect everyone and everything that inhabits this world. However, if we implement changes now, we may prevent huge calamities in the future. In many countries the demographic policies are ignored by governments for religious, historical, traditional or social reasons. Unprecedented population growth contributed to the world population increase from 1 billion to 7.5 billion in less than 150 years; while the size of our earth, and the unabated climate changes will decrease our land areas, and places like the magical Galapagos Islands and the North Pole will sink as the ice caps melt. Since the 1994 Population Summit in Cairo, population has increased by 2.5 billion. Rapid population growth has brought humans into collision with the resources needed to sustain them and is the main human-made threat to Sustainable Development Goals.

Bringing up children whose future denies them health and education and condemns them to a life of abuse, and poverty is unacceptable. China’s choice in 1989 regarding size of families was disputed around the human rights violations, but mainly by those that ignore the rights of others. Every universal resolution or Convention on the Rights of the Child is against denying children’s right to health and education. Governments and organizations that ignore the facts are as culpable as the women and men having children for whom they cannot provide. We cannot transform the future unless we accept the responsibility that each of us, educated or not, rich or poor, has in sustaining our world for the benefit of our children. Common sense knowledge and scientific evidence can bring both understanding and ramifications of the issues involved that can benefit humanity in the forthcoming years. The premise of the Precautionary Principle is there to guide our future laws and regulations. If we continue to ignore the Precautionary Principle, a world will be created that, from my perspective, is not what I would wish for our future generations.

Finally, we need to educate our future leaders that they may focus on the needs of our future generations—hopefully, some of them will be among you!

Thank you for your attention.

“Since the 1994 Population Summit in Cairo, population has increased by 2.5 billion.”
Dear colleagues, distinguished guests, I am pleased that Ukraine is co-hosting this essential open dialogue at the United Nations, that gives us an opportunity to discuss a number of the most relevant items of the United Nations agenda.

First of all, let me thank Dr. Christine Durbak of the World Information Transfer for being our sustainable partner at the United Nations for more than twenty-three years now. I would also like to welcome our distinguished speakers of today, and personally Mr. Nikhil Seth, Director of the Division for Sustainable Development, Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA). I am confident that broad public and open expert discussion within the United Nations is a fundamental element of the international policy to frame the national and global priorities for the future development worldwide.

Dear colleagues, Ukraine is gradually recovering from the crisis. A lot has been learned by Ukraine from its conflict with Russia, first of all obtaining a first-hand experience of engaging with the UN in resolving the situation, and clear understanding of the United Nations’ strengths and weaknesses in preventing and addressing such crises. As Ukraine is starting a new page marked by the election of a new President and a new parliament, we have set the two latter principles as milestones for our development. We are committed to conducting all the reforms within the framework of the post-2015 agenda, building upon our progress regarding MDGs. National consultations to define the post-2015 priorities were held in Ukraine in early 2013. The discussions included all relevant stakeholders, the total amount of which reached over 25,000 people. Most of the main development goals that are shaping the Ukrainian government’s priorities are shared by communities worldwide since we all agree on our common aspiration to achieve sustainable development, to eliminate poverty, to sustain healthcare and environment, and to advance democratic governance. However, Ukraine strives to focus on specific goals where our country possesses valuable experience and shares its best practices, such as energy and food security, education and risk reduction management. We would also like to underline that one of the key driving forces of the world’s sustainable future are children and youth. On the 20th of November 2014, the United Nations and the countries around the world celebrated the 25th anniversary of the adoption of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The day before, Ukraine joined the third protocol of this landmark treaty, which became a powerful human rights tool for the well-being of all children in the world. It is often that progress regarding the well-being of children is measured through national statistical averages, but averages don’t capture every life or see the children being left behind in today’s turbulent times. Ukraine is committed to collaboratively promote and develop policies for decent work for young people. A crucial initiative, “Strengthening National Capacity for Effective Youth Development,” stems from our firm belief that Ukraine’s 6.25 million young people aged 15-24, as the next generation of economic and social actors, must be well prepared to integrate into the national and global labor market. Particular attention should be paid to the Technology through Education and Social Media Initiatives aimed at increasing awareness of sustainable development issues with the help of modern technological capabilities. This idea aligns with the strong Ukrainian aspiration to provide extensive technology education programmes in order to empower young society to wisely use Internet instruments and innovative electronic means of information exchange for sharing ideas.

Dear colleagues, Ukraine’s active involvement in international affairs, its commitment to international peace and security, as well as long standing support for development and welfare worldwide stands behind the country’s decision to put forward its candidature for the Security Council – Ukraine’s bid for a 2016-2017 non-permanent seat on the UN Security Council. We put forward our candidature back in 2003.

In our promo-campaign we have decided to emphasize the idea that every child worldwide has the right to express its views of the better world, while adults should look closer and take it to heart. Therefore you can observe the most relevant items of the United Nations development agenda in the 2015 Calendar “The World Through Children’s Eyes,” seen by the Ukrainian children. I would like to cite the President of the General Assembly, Sam Kutesa, who opened a high-level meeting at UN Headquarters on Convention on the Rights of the Child, saying “children are the fundamental building block for achieving the future we want. Indeed, by strengthening their capacity to mature into engaged, responsible and productive adults, society as a whole stands to benefit”.

“We are committed to conducting all the reforms within the framework of the post-2015 agenda, building upon our progress regarding MDGs.”

“Ukraine is committed to collaboratively promote and develop policies for decent work for young people.”
Thank you Christine for that introduction and Ambassador Sergeyev, distinguished other representatives on this panel. It is such a pleasure to meet with all of you and the young people out there. I’ve done this now on a fairly regular basis, and I must say, Christine, I do enjoy this interaction tremendously and the work you are doing.

I must express my word of appreciation, for how you are plugging into the UN and the work we do. So many young minds are engaged and that will help them conceptualize how the global work we do translates into action within each of our spheres of life. It is not something abstract out there; it is something we must try and relate into our own spheres, into the lives we lead, into the jobs we do and to the paths we take in our own careers. So this work is truly impressive, and thank you so much for it. While I am at it, I must also acknowledge the presence of Ambassador Csaba Kőrösi, the distinguished Permanent Representative of Hungary who is here amongst us. He has been the chief architect, in a sense, of the SDG agenda, in helping not necessarily craft but martial thousands and tens of thousands of views into what is contained into this paper called the Report of the Open Working Group, which is encapsulated in 17 goals and 169 targets. But getting there meant listening to views across the world. It meant reflecting views of millions of people, who express their concerns, and how to channel them through the establishment of these global agendas. It meant listening to the views of the entire UN system and the expertise we bring to bear on these issues. It meant bringing together the views of governments. Often it’s comprised of a board of 193 directors and each one pulling at a different angle. So the skill and ability with which Ambassador Csaba Kőrösi and the Kenyan Ambassador managed to do this is really a tribute to diplomacy. It’s a tribute to the skills of bringing together disparate views and casting it in a framework, which will serve as a beacon for the future. Of course, there will be some quibbling in the days ahead, but the core of the agenda in this sense has been defined. So, Ambassador Csaba Kőrösi, thank you very much for that and for what you have done for furthering the development agenda of the United Nations.

Of course, a lot more happened in 2015. It was not only the Report of the Open Working Group. There was a report of the committee of finance on sustainable development. There were several other independent reports. There were reports for panel of experts, which the Secretary-General had established. There were reports that emerged from conversations we had globally. So, there was a lot of movement and excitement around the post-2015 agenda and in the world of development. What we do between now and September of 2015 is really an inflection point in history; how development issues have been considered in the United Nations. It is coming together very profitably. So 2015 is going to be significant because the issues which will impact the young people of today and all the paths we pursue for development, poverty eradication, social development, environmental conservation and protection, creating more peaceful and just societies, protecting the world from prodigious and dangerous climate change; is all coming together through a bunch of agreements. Some of them are soft and some of them are hard; and of course factors the finance, means of implementation, technological support, and capacity building, without which all of these promises will remain hollow. And so we are very excited in the United Nations. I want to share that sense of excitement and enthusiasm with this audience that as we move towards September 2015, we are on the cusp of this big transformation and all of you must do what you can to keep this tempo, this energy, this enthusiasm alive in our hearts and minds. Push people into coming up with more ambition and with more transformation because that’s the world we want and that’s the world all of you have to strive for. The world our children will have to face in the decades ahead is going to be very different from the world we have today. There are several forces propelling this change. Some you have mentioned, Christine, and the most important is going to be the big demographic transitions that are taking place in the world.

By 2050, we will have anywhere from nine to ten billion people living on our planet; we will have a planet strapped for resources; we will have a planet that is technologically very different from what it is today; we will have a planet that is increasingly urbanized, where the major parts of these nine billion people are going to live in cities. The major shift is going to be in Asia, where of these nine billion, six billion people will reside in a continent, which will become 60-70% urban. So you can see the demographics of this change, the type of world we will be looking at in the post-2030 to 2050 period, and how it is going to be so different, defined by new technologies and hopefully by changes that will make the future livable. These are the forces that will be shaping our world. It is a world in which the young people will have opportunities, yes!
But they will have more opportunities that were not imagined when the MDGs were launched in 2000. But at the same time, many of today’s children in the developing world would risk not being able to live out their full potential for want of proper health and education and growing environmental pollution and depletion. War and armed conflict and social strife will also rob millions of children of their futures in many of the countries around the world. If we continued with business as usual, this would be a world of more people, a world living in cities, propelled by more technologies and great connectivity. But there are many uncertainties, particularly those brought about by political conflict, social strife around all kinds of social issues, which will come to the lore.

At the same time, we will have precipitous climate change upon us unless we take serious and strong action on decarbonization today. We cannot wait and we have to take these deep decarbonization actions today. We have severe depletion of our terrestrial ecosystems and marine ecosystems. So that is the world we will head towards unless we do something important and drastic now. An important challenge for the world community will be to ensure a child-friendly post-2015 development agenda, which takes account for the needs of people on the planet. Nine out of every ten of the world’s young people are in the developing world. Developing countries aided by the developing partners need to invest generously in children’s education and health and protect their rights to ensure that these countries will reap a dividend of demographics by enabling these children grow into productive citizens in the coming years. Many of the East Asian countries—for example, the Republic of Korea, Singapore, and Malaysia—did precisely that, and they are reaping the dividends of past investment in youth and children in terms of spectacular economic growth and development.

Now, the 17 goals that I talked about, which Ambassador Kőrösi and Ambassador Macharia have crafted together, contain all the right elements for a child-friendly post-2015 agenda. The first seven goals, covering areas such as poverty and hunger, ensuring health and education, seek precisely to overcome the social and economic deprivation that can hold children behind. It includes very significant goals on promoting and powering women, and I think that is probably something that cuts through the entire agenda of the development goals that are being established. The next five goals deal with ensuring vibrant, growing economies with decent work. That is where the jobs, resilient infrastructure, sustainable development consumption and production, and less inequality will come from. That is how we can reduce the individual environmental footprint in societies, and all of these battles will have to be pursued simultaneously as we move towards 2030. The following three goals concern protecting and restoring the environment and promoting a healthy planet. Climate change, marine ecosystems, terrestrial ecosystems; these are the areas in which we have to work in the years going ahead.

The final goals deal with peaceful societies and societies that are just, where crime and other violence are controlled. Because, in the absence of this, everything else you might think of in development will just not take place.

And of course, finally, ensuring that the means are available for implementing this agenda, financing it, providing and sharing technologies, or making all of this possible in this world; that is the only way that we can have equitable development, and sustainable development. So, the SDGs, when taken together, are very much about ensuring a beneficial physical and material environment for children, adequate educational and work opportunities, and making sure that they will grow into healthy and productive citizens. The SDGs seek to finish the job of the MDGs and also bring the whole world on board, not only the developing countries. It’s a universal agenda; our shape and area is shared and that comes out most strongly, for example, in the dispersions on climate change. It has to be a world where there is an equitable sharing of these global commons and our resources because prosperity only in one part of the world will no longer be tenable unless we have sense of shared prosperity globally. This is a job for all of us in all sectors, public and private, and for all ages.
The UN Secretariat and I look forward to working with all of you, specifically children and youth. As I mentioned, we are truly at an inflection point in development issues, climate change, the post-2015 development agenda, means of implementation through the financing for developing process, and the replenishment of the green climate fund which has been established (to which some amounts have already been pledged). We are still far from the global target of 100 billion dollars by 2020, but we are getting there. But more than that, we need much more. We need new approaches and new orientations. We need new mindsets; we need an ability to look at the goals as actually a map of interconnections, as it’s a mistake to look at these 17 goals as a listing of goals. Each one of them is connected to the other and progress on one is crucially dependent on progress of the other. So, think of this as a map, a map of interconnections rather than a list of goals. So are the targets, which are proxies for the goals, which are indicators, which will be developed and will be proxies for the targets. So these sets of goals, targets, and indicators are really a complex map. They are not a list but an interrelated map, where progress in one will define progress in the others and moving back on some of them will jeopardize progress in others.

“We are still far from the global target of 100 billion dollars by 2020, but we are getting there.”

We need new orientations in the way we look at this integration. We look at monitoring and review framework, which tells us: Hey, is the world really doing well in issues like health, education, energy, water, economic work, protecting the marine ecosystems on creating peaceful societies? How are we going to monitor and review? How are we going to determine what are the barriers to progress in each one of these areas? What are the collective shifts that decision making needs to take place, whether it is national, local, global, or regional? All this has to be part of the exercise in the future. We will need new institutions, which help in this reorientation and implementation of these agreements that will be reached. We need new forms of working together, we need spirit of solidarity, we need a new spirit of partnership, and we need a new spirit of engagement, which focuses not on creating new policy framework, but is focused on implementing the promises that are going to be made in 2015. That is going to be the heart of the success of the post 2015 development agenda—implement, implement, and implement! We don’t want every meeting to be only on issues; we want every meeting to be focusing on where have the problems been in implementation? Have the resources, technology, capacity building matched? Where are the problems and how do we remove these obstacles? Children and youth, their concerns, their aspirations, their sense of engagement, has to be at the center. Tomorrow belongs to the young people and you should be there to shape it, both now and in the future. So, I thank you very much, Christine.

Health diplomacy, which is an area that’s been developed mostly out of Europe but is now being developed within the United States’ State Department and the other concepts I will discuss are health literacy, risk communication, and what to do next. I’m not saying anything negative about the number of goals, targets, and indicators we have in place today, in 2015, but we live in a world where there is constructive ambiguity. Instead of focusing on what the world ought to do, we should pay attention to what the world ought to think about. We cannot predict all of the challenges the world will face, but we can forecast what might happen.

“Children’s Health: Health Diplomacy and Risk Communication”

Let me first thank the chair, Dr. Durbak, for another wonderful event and the Excellencies, distinguished guests, ladies, gentlemen, and the distinguished panelists here today. It’s especially important for me to be here today as it’s the anniversary of the day the UN focused on one of the world’s first health challenges: I’m speaking about World Aids Day. It was the United Nations recognizing HIV that began to galvanize the world’s development population. Years later, I’m pleased to see the United Nations General Assembly deal with non-communicable diseases as well. Mr. Seth represented the challenges of the sustainable development goals and the MDG’s very well. Today, we will also hear from Dr. Shuman on Ebola and other infectious disease challenges that we face. I want to talk about some broader issues and discuss new ideas on how the whole world can get involved. As a private citizen, I’ve been fortunate to get involved in the United Nations’ activities (not including what Dr. Durbak mentioned of co-chair and Innovation Working Group on Women and Children’s Health). A few years ago, I worked with the United Nations’ ECOSOC Council to focus on health literacy. Currently, I’m developing a variety of opportunities to establish public-private partnerships and get the whole world involved with the challenges we face. Nothing is bigger or more important than the future of our planet, our children, and our children’s health and environment.

“We cannot predict all of the challenges the world will face, but we can forecast what might happen.”
or something: countries, our families, our neighbors, our friends, or ourselves. We all have a responsibility to think about health and children’s health. Those of us in the academic world tend to focus on different parts of this. Some of us work on the left, where we think about policy, and want to work in society and social dynamics. We have learned a lot on that side. The other side is rational decisions.

As Dr. Durbak mentioned, there is the precautionary principle, which is supposed to be based on “common sense evidence.” Often times rational decisions are based upon the evidence we have at that time, which might not be the full amount of evidence. The other factors, which we see more in life, are about communication, the life course, and the challenges we face in public health. These issues, like the climate change discussion featured on the front page of New York Times today, ought to be thought about. But we need to be smarter about how we do this. We need to realize that no one piece of this puzzle can solve the situation alone. I’ve been fortunate in my academic life to create the first Journal of Health Communication: International Perspectives. We all communicate, whether it’s interpersonal, talking, or other forms. I’d bet many of you in this room use your phone or mobile device for social media to communicate with the world. We have a new level of communication and evidence for years has shown that communication can make a huge difference in how we galvanize people around common goals, such as the MDGs or the sustainable development goals. Communication also addresses the challenges we face during unfortunate events, such as the Chernobyl nuclear tragedy. We’re past the time where we think of communication as an afterthought; we have begun to integrate communication more.

I have two young sons, 15 and 13, who are trying to think, “where will I end up?” in health diplomacy, literacy, and life. I’m proud to say I’m a grandson of a Ukrainian-born grandmother who came to New York City in search of a better world. I think we all have realized that we change amongst these groups. We might work in government—I worked with the United States Agency for International Development to develop global health communication between the U.S. and 65 other countries. We all can bring unique perspectives from different countries and places. For those early on in their career, think about where you might make the most difference. And for those of us later on, think about how we can work together to create the synergies and make the larger difference. The mission and goals that Dr. Durbak has accomplished with World Information Transfer, as well as many of her colleagues and board members who are here, have helped contribute in that regard. The Lancet, which is the most widely renowned journal on public health out of the U.K., said that health is now the most important foreign policy issue of our time. Thanking Ambassador Kőrösi for the fine work that has been done on the sustainable development goals, I would argue health is the only common currency that we have. The environment is the area, or the mélangé, shall we say, that supports that common currency and humankind. I believe that it’s up to all of us to work together to promote education, health, and the environment. The best advancement that we had last century was not penicillin and vaccines, while they were important. It was the education of women. A systematic analysis published in The Lancet shows that more than half of the reductions in children’s health problems were linked to improvements in female educational achievement. It’s probably the best study that was done on med-analysis. Investing in education today will make the largest difference in the future.

Now let’s talk about how health literacy is engaged in the global agenda. While I don’t have the resolution here, health literacy has been in both ECOSOC, attaining global public health resolutions, and the non-communicable disease General Assembly resolution. It’s something that member states around the world are engaging in, not including the 66 measures that the Chinese put into place.

“We need to realize that no one piece of this puzzle can solve the situation alone.”

My understanding is that last week in India, new measures were put into place. The United States has a national action plan as well as 40 other countries that are working to have health literacy make a difference. So what is this thing called health literacy? It’s not just giving people education and it is not printing materials and saying, “brush your teeth and wash your hands” and “avoid certain practices and that will make a difference”. b That would be the ability on the left of this equation. But health literacy is the right of the equation. It asks: How do we simplify activities to help people make a difference in their lives? How do we make the easy choice the healthier choice? How do we make the easy decision the right decision? How can we make the environment by using appropriate decisions that are both ethical in the short term and thoughtful in the long term? This is the challenge that policy makers and those in the health and global field face today.

There is a new dimension to health literacy, and it is how we deal with social influences and communication technology. This is where I think we have the most promise for increasing the education and health worldwide. How do we make it the social norm to wear a seat belt? How do we make it the social norm that’s it is not right smoke in this room or in public? How do we socially influence that avoiding violence and preventing conflict is the right thing to do? These are the challenges we face and the challenges our future generations will face. We can answer these questions with mobile health technologies, which is the other part of communication technology. There are more mobile devices in this room than wrist-watches; there are more mobile devices than there are toilets in the world.
How can health diplomacy move us forward in sustaining health?

Good, valid health and environmental information should be at an arm’s length reach. At the same time, mobile devices are starting to become a public health hazard for people that use it at the wrong times—operating heavy machinery, or automobiles, or bicycling without looking, or walking across the street. When people should be looking both ways, they are often staring at their phones. An example of utilizing technology to share health information is m-health communication. The United States White House began “text for baby,” allowing pregnant women to obtain useful information about their pregnancy. This program still exists, and is free. This became a MAMA (Mobile Alliance and Maternal Action), and has been developed in a number of countries: Bangladesh, South Africa, and Nigeria. The program evolved to allow women to hear the information in their local language. There is so much more that can be done and early evidence suggests that mobile health communication can make a huge difference. It can complement radios, and create that necessary jump-start for people who do not have access to computers or even televisions.

Can we really educate the world on health issues so that people make the right, appropriate decisions for themselves? Can we get academics and policymakers to see the evidence so that they make decisions which promote sustainable development and sustainable societies? I believe we can. I believe this translates into a lot of different languages and is something that we can all work for.

Currently, I’m focused on a topic that relates to the number one cause of death for 15-29-year-olds globally. The World Health Organization report in 2014 reports it as the number one cause of death for adolescents, and it’s the eight leading cause of death globally. This cause of death is projected to be the fifth leading cause if nothing is done over the next 15 years. And I ask anyone—do you know what that is?

Car accidents are the number one cause of death for 15-29-year-olds. It’s not an infectious disease; it’s not what many people would assume. Hence, the United Nations has a decade of action on road safety, and has targets and discussion points currently in the Open Working Group’s sustainable development goal draft. But, having said that, the UN’s Decade of Action is not enough. Multisectorial engagement is needed. So, two weeks ago, on November 13th, I met here at the United Nations with Special Envoy Amina Mohammad, who is leading the effort. She’s in charge of the sustainable development goals dialogue with the Ambassador of Belgium and a number of CEOs from different companies. In coordination with the UN Secretary for Transportation, this campaign for safer roads represents three million employees who drive three billion miles a year. A difference can begin to be made by putting this issue on the Agenda (not only for our employees and our companies, but for 200 countries where we have operations). As business leaders, we believe that safer roads will leverage expertise in innovation. Facebook and AT&T, who were also part of the coalition, explain that there are ways to prevent technology from causing the harm and distraction that it currently does. We have been working with Ericsson to design new technologies for the lights on the roads, inter-car communication, and driverless cars for the future. Communication has evolved over the years. Look at the words “designated driver.” It meant nothing to people 30 years ago. When the Harvard School of Public Health and the entertainment industry got together and began to talk about designated drivers in sitcoms, TV shows and radio, “designated driver” made its way into Webster’s Dictionary in 1991. Now it is something that has been done to make a difference. We need the next big thing, and I look to the youth to answer: what is the next “designated driver?” What is the next way to lower risk and use the modern technology to make a difference in people’s lives?

I believe everything works in a health diplomatic way—we could have the private sector giving us ideas and aiding with the financing mechanisms. We need to have the ingenuity and ideals that we may champion from different areas of life and have long-term sustainable development change. So what does the path forward look like? Whether they’re driverless cars or doctorless patients, the question must be: are we empowered? Are we emancipated and engaged, competent consumers in society who can make a difference? How can we make smarter choices as individuals, community members, policy makers, diplomats, and citizens of the world? The term I like to use is a “health literacy society” because health is a common currency. It’s up to all of us to take the challenge, to figure out how we can make a difference together and create for a better world.

Again let me thank the chair and World Information Transfer for the dialogue, the opportunity, and the ongoing emphasis over the past 23 years of empowering young minds. Hopefully, many of you will be the next leaders sitting up here in the future, working around the world and with your families to help make a difference. Thank you very much.
Good morning, everyone, and thank you for inviting me to speak here today. I am planning on speaking on the topic of emerging infections and children’s health. I'd like to begin with one of my favorite quotes from Sir William Osler, an eminent Canadian physician and one of the founders of the Johns Hopkins School of Medicine. This quote says “Humanity has but three great enemies: fever, famine, and war; of these by far the greatest, by far the most terrible, is fever.” I like this quote because I’m an infectious diseases physician, so of course I think fever is one of the most important enemies of mankind. I also think that this quote is very true, and unfortunately fever, famine, and war often go together—in many situations of conflict and famine, it turns out to be fever, or infection, that does most of the killing.

As I said, my plan today was to speak about emerging infections in children’s health. And of course the emerging infection that has been on everyone’s mind lately, especially mine in doing planning for hospitals, is Ebola. So I will focus most of my talk today on Ebola, and specifically in West Africa on children’s health, I think it’s helpful to look at some previous epidemics to understand what has happened in the past. I want to highlight two Ebola epidemics, both of which occurred in Central Africa years ago. The first was in Kikwit in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The first outbreak was described there in 1976. The current epidemic in West Africa is the first time that West Africa has seen Ebola—that’s why it took several months after the first cases appeared for a correct diagnosis to be made, because no one suspected that these people had Ebola. Everyone thought that they had some other type of hemorrhagic fever, perhaps even cholera or malaria. The epidemic was therefore able to spread quite far and wide before it was really understood what was happening.

This is a summary of the current epidemic in West Africa. Note that these numbers are a little bit out of date because they’re from a week ago. In fact, since I submitted these slides for the presentation, there have been updated numbers released by the World Health Organization. The countries that have been most affected are Guinea, Liberia, and Sierra Leone. There is now ongoing transmission in Mali as well, with a total of eight cases. There have been cases in Nigeria and Senegal, but those countries are now considered to be Ebola-free. The new cases that have occurred over the past week have primarily occurred in Sierra Leone—as I said, almost 600 new cases. In fact, that seems to be the country now where the epidemic is most out of control. 

In terms of the impact of the current Ebola epidemic in West Africa on children’s health, I think it’s helpful to look at some previous epidemics to understand what has happened in the past. I want to highlight two Ebola epidemics, both of which occurred in Central Africa years ago. The first was in Kikwit in the Democratic Republic of the Congo in 1995. In this outbreak, there were approximately 315 cases of Ebola, about 9% of which occurred in children. When Ebola epidemics occur, children are actually much less likely to become infected than adults. The reason for this is thought to be that children are not acting as caregivers in the home. People who are in the home, caring for people who need them the most.

As a little bit of additional background, most previous epidemics have occurred in Central Africa, predominantly in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. In fact, the Ebola virus itself is named after the Ebola River, which is in the northern part of the Congo. The first outbreak was described there in 1976. The current epidemic in West Africa is the first time that West Africa has seen Ebola—that’s why it took several months after the first cases appeared for a correct diagnosis to be made, because no one suspected that these people had Ebola. Everyone thought that they had some other type of hemorrhagic fever, perhaps even cholera or malaria. The epidemic was therefore able to spread quite far and wide before it was really understood what was happening.

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In terms of the impact of the current Ebola epidemic in West Africa on children’s health, I think it’s helpful to look at some previous epidemics to understand what has happened in the past. I want to highlight two Ebola epidemics, both of which occurred in Central Africa years ago. The first was in Kikwit in the Democratic Republic of the Congo in 1995. In this outbreak, there were approximately 315 cases of Ebola, about 9% of which occurred in children. When Ebola epidemics occur, children are actually much less likely to become infected than adults. The reason for this is thought to be that children are not acting as caregivers in the home. People who are in the home, caring for
relatives who are sick, tend to be older. So it’s typically people in their thirties or so who are becoming infected. I think this is nicely demonstrated by the fact that in the outbreak in Kikrit, 30% of household contacts over the age of 18 became infected, but only 4% of children under the age of 18. Similarly, in Gulu, Uganda in 2000-2001, there was another relatively small outbreak of Ebola. Again, only 9% of cases occurred in children. The case fatality rate in this outbreak, however, was around 60% overall, which is pretty much average for an Ebola epidemic. But 80% of children under age 5 who were infected died. This shows that when children became infected, they were much more likely to die than adults because they were much more vulnerable to the effects of the virus.

In terms of the current epidemic in West Africa, as of September 14, only about 14% of all patients with Ebola were under the age of 15. Similarly, 14% of all deaths occurred in children under the age of 15. In Sierra Leone, the peak in the number of cases and deaths occurs in people primarily in their twenties and thirties. This really demonstrates that children, to a large extent, are being spared from contracting Ebola, and really represent only a small fraction of the cases.

However, if you really want to look at the impact of the Ebola epidemic on children’s health, you have to go beyond statistics. I would like to tell you a couple of stories to illustrate this point. The first story is of a young child who is actually thought to be the index case, the very first case in this current epidemic. This was a one-year old boy who was living in Meliandou, Guinea. He developed fever, vomiting, and diarrhea, and four days later he was dead. Unfortunately, the other members of his household, including his mother who was pregnant, as well as his sister and grandmother, became infected as well. His mother had a miscarriage, and the virus was transmitted to the midwife. In the past, outbreaks have remained fairly small because cases do not spread outside small villages or families.

In Liberia, child immunization rates have declined from a very excellent 97% to 27%.

But in this case, there was a fair amount of travel between villages, so this midwife became infected and presumably she infected other members of her family, and this virus was able to spread that way. The other case that I’d like to tell you about is a premature birth, which occurred in Suakoko, Liberia. This was a 36-year old woman who became infected with Ebola by her boyfriend. She was about 8-months-pregnant at the time and she went into labor. The woman who gave birth died shortly after—maternal complications with Ebola are enormously high, primarily because of hemorrhage. However, in this case, the baby survived, at least temporarily. The question for the baby’s family and other caregivers was what to do with the baby. They thought the baby probably had Ebola. In the end, they ended up trying to care for the baby, but unfortunately the baby died four days later as well. That’s really one of the take-home points here, is that if you just look at the numbers, the impact on children really doesn’t seem to be that profound. But when you think about pregnant women and the effect it’s had on them, you can imagine how many unborn children die as a result of this epidemic. In terms of other impacts, in places affected by this epidemic, there has been a complete collapse of local healthcare systems, which includes closure of facilities and a lack of healthcare personnel, because many healthcare personnel become infected and die of Ebola. There is also a great deal of misinformation, and people actually believe that by participating in healthcare, by getting vaccinations, that that’s how Ebola is being spread. The result of this is that there has been a lack of care for routine illnesses including malaria and HIV, so people are dying from things that they don’t normally die from in these areas because they cannot receive care. There has also been an enormous disruption of immunization programs, and in fact, in Liberia, child immunization rates have declined from a very excellent 97% to 27%. There have been outbreaks reported of measles and other communicable diseases. This is an enormous problem.

There has also been a great deal of civil unrest in these areas and it’s important to note that in Liberia and Sierra Leone, these countries were recovering from years of civil war. To have this epidemic introduced at this time is quite devastating.
Air Pollution and Children’s Health

Good morning everyone, I’ll be talking about an environmental problem that I think all of you are really familiar with, and yet is an ongoing global health threat. So what is air pollution? I think that a simple definition is the presence of one or more unwanted substances or contaminants in the air. It can have a negative effects on the constructed environment that we live in—statues, buildings—and it can have a negative impact on health of humans, of animals, and of course, the natural environment that we live in and rely on. There has always been air pollution, and there are what we call natural sources of air pollution, such as forest fires, volcanic eruptions, and dust storms, like the 2001 storm in the Gobi Desert. Certainly, humans can make these worse, but these have been around for a long time. For the Gobi Dust Episode, you get an idea of how we’re all really connected. You can see from satellite photos that the particles from the dust storm traveled across the Pacific and then entered into the United States, and then wafted across. So it’s proof of principle that the pollution in one part of the world does go around the world and affect everyone. Even here in New York City, you could pick out the effects of the Gobi Dust Storm that was happening in China. Then, of course, there is what we call anthropogenic sources of air pollution, and that comes from various sources we’re familiar with, including burning coal for electricity, which is a big problem especially in the middle of the country. And that’s a problem throughout the world, a growing problem—more and more countries are burning more and more coal to make electricity for growth. We talked about traffic as a danger to children in a previous talk and that there’s also pollution that comes from these vehicles as well, both gasoline and diesel vehicles, and then refineries and industry and buses and other vehicles.

One way to look at pollution is to see it as primary or secondary pollution. Primary pollutants are the ones that come directly from a tailpipe or a stack—one example is benzene from gasoline, and another is sulfur dioxide from coal power plants. Coal has especially high levels of sulfur, and when it’s burned, that sulfur is released into the atmosphere and then eventually it reacts into sulfuric acid, causing acid rain and/or causing people to breathe the acid. Soot from diesels, coal burning, and electricity-generating plants create a lot of particle pollution. Particles sort of have a double-danger in that, first of all, they contain lots of toxic pollutants in them, so that they themselves are dangerous. But they are also a vector for gasses, which can get absorbed into the particles, and then the particles give them a free ride to your lungs, where they can get into the bloodstream. So they are an enabler of other pollutants to get into your lungs—they are very small particles that can insidiously get past your body’s defenses.
Large particles are taken out in the upper airways and you’ll swallow them or sneeze them out, but our body’s defense doesn’t work against smaller particles from combustion. These defense our body’s defense system and go right into the deepest part of the lung. We can also talk about secondary pollutants—ones that are formed in the atmosphere. One example of that is ozone, which is a powerful oxidizing agent and is very chemically reactive and basically eats away at the lung when you breathe it in. In the upper atmosphere, there is concern that there is not enough ozone, but down where people are we do not want it because it’s toxic to humans. It’s good for up there but not down here. Ozone is a secondary pollutant, created in the atmosphere, which increases in the daytime and decreases again at night then forms again the next day. So the particles, even though they’re very small and you can’t see them individually, you can see their effects on visibility. High numbers of particles scatter light and smear the light so that it lowers visibility. There are about 1.2 million premature deaths in China every year from air pollution. Where’s that pollution coming from? The biggest problem is coal burning and its release of particles and sulfur and other pollutants. This pollution causes damage to lungs, possible increase or worsening of pulmonary disease, damage to the pulmonary immune defense system, and alterations in lung functioning. Pollution can also damage the heart, affecting the system that controls heart rhythm, adding to the risk of cardiac disease. Children are more at risk of the adverse health effects of air pollution for several reasons. One is that they breathe more air than adults do—per pound of body weight, an infant breathes twice as much as an adult on a per kilogram-weight basis. They also spend, as they get older, more time outside, exercising, growing, and developing, and pollution has been found to inhibit the growth of their lungs and their bodies. An increasing problem around the world is asthma, and we’ve done studies looking at kids with asthma and their lung function and the ability of the kids to breathe in and out. The incidence of their asthma attacks rose as the ozone levels rose. We found that, of the particles most affecting the kids with asthma, it was the diesel particles. And then in the global burden of disease report, there are the estimates of the causes of death in the world and, of course, some of the top few are dietary risk, high blood pressure, and tobacco smoking, but next comes household pollution from biomass burning and then about three million deaths per year from outdoor air pollution. If we add those together, indoor and outdoor pollution, we’re looking at a leading cause of death in the world. And the pollution pours into the children.

Potential Effects of Air Pollution on a Human Lung

Lung Injury

Altered Lung Function

Exacerbation of Pulmonary Disease

Altered Pulmonary Immune Defense

One of the things that I have talked about for many years is the health benefits of going forward with climate change mitigation. Places that clean the air the most get the most health benefits. One of the problems with climate change is that people think their efforts at cleanup will benefit others who do not invest in it the same way, but the local health benefits is a strong argument that says if you clean the air for climate change, you’re also going to get health benefits. The economic health benefits far outweigh the cost of cleanup.

My overall conclusions are that air pollution is a large and growing health problem; indoor biomass and coal burning air pollution are major health problems throughout the world, especially in the developing world; diesel soot pollution increases the incidences of health problems experienced by children with asthma; reducing traffic-related pollution can improve health and reduce health disparities because the poorest among us often live near highways and are the ones that get the most exposure; taking action to reduce climate change carbon dioxide emissions will also lower other air pollutants and provide significant localized human health benefits. Thank you for your attention.
“Transparent Business for a Sustainable World”

The future of our children’s world depends, in large part, on their ability to earn a good living. One reality that everyone has to face is that opportunities to earn a good living are not evenly distributed. Young people in developing countries have much lower chances of finding high-paying jobs than their counterparts living in cities like New York or San Francisco. This disparity results in many young professionals choosing to emigrate; to permanently leave their countries and move to major international business centers. This “brain drain” further increases disparity, which is why I’d like to share with you information on the technology and trends which will allow our younger generation to compete for the most lucrative jobs without having to abandon their home countries, which means the elimination of the stress and costs associated with emigration. Technology is making remote, computer-based work transparent to the degree that monitoring and managing a worker in a remote location, anywhere in the world, becomes as easy as if he or she worked in the same office as the manager. Location is no longer a factor or a disadvantage.

Before delving into the details of this technology, I’d like to point out that transparency is a major business trend, already affecting many aspects of business, including sales, hiring, financing, stock, and brand value. It is important to understand that this trend is an unavoidable consequence and, if viewed properly, benefit of the IT revolution.

Merriam Webster’s dictionary defines transparency as “free from pretense or deceit; frank; readily understood; characterized by visibility or accessibility of information, especially concerning business practices.” In other words, transparency is a way to develop trust, which serves as a basis for long-term business relations. The main factor fueling the transparency trend is a stable and robust Internet. It greatly increases the ability to find qualified workers throughout the world and makes it nearly impossible to

Example: IT Outsourcing Market

- Globally: $288B
- Infosys: $6.7B, 160,000 employees
- India: $140B, 2.8 million direct jobs
- Ukraine: $1.5B = .5%

For example, whereas just 20 years ago businesses seeking a programmer would only have the option of seeking a local provider, nowadays Elance.com alone provides 386,097 companies connection to freelancers who are available for remote hiring. An employer such as SynapseIndia, which shows verifiable earnings of over $2.5 million and has a user feedback rating of 4.9 (out of 5) based on 641 jobs completed on Elance, has a major competitive advantage over other providers of their service—local or remote—who don’t disclose their earnings or provide any compelling evidence of customer satisfaction. At TransparentBusiness.com, we see how major corporations routinely choose remote companies with a solidly positive customer satisfaction record over local providers. Other online freelancing platforms which facilitate this type of global outsourcing include oDesk.com, Guru.com, Yandiki.com and Cloudsource.us.
Each of these companies offers such transparency features as the ability to monitor the work of remote workers. Customer feedback and sales volume affects not just computer-based work but online sales, too—they are key trust factors on websites such as Ebay or Amazon, where buyers rate not just sellers but also each product. Websites such as Wikileaks, Glassdoor, RipOff Report, Compaints.com or BBB.com make it difficult, if not impossible, to keep problems related to products or corporate performance and practices hidden, so corporate executives are realizing that attempts to create false expectations have become counter-productive. In the end, it is a much better practice, and actually easier, to avoid the hype and instead exceed customer’s expectations.

A good example of this trend is the hospitality industry. Hotels and resorts that create unrealistic expectations and are unable to deliver on those false promises are receiving low feedback ratings on sites like Expedia, Zagat, and TripAdvisor, compared to hotels that set expectations that they subsequently exceed. User-generated feedback is a major factor affecting the choice of hotels and resorts, so less transparent providers are doomed to see losses in revenues. Another change factor to consider is the Sarbes-Oxley Act, which, in the wake of the 2008 economic meltdown, requires very detailed disclosure by publicly traded companies.

An excellent example of pro-active use of transparency as a competitive advantage is the CloudsourceToUkraine.com initiative. Its purpose is to grow the IT outsourcing industry in the Ukraine from its current level of $1.5 billion per year to over $40 billion per year. To differentiate its services from traditional IT outsourcing, the initiative stresses transparency of “cloudsourcing,” which provides for significantly higher efficiency. Our group was pleased to contribute TransparentBusiness.com technology pro-bono to support this objective of the Ukrainian government. The global IT outsourcing market exceeds $300 billion per year, so the countries that succeed in attracting a significant percentage of this industry will provide great opportunities for their top talent and boost their economies. In conclusion, transparency will be a major decisive factor in the future, determining which businesses will profit in a global economy that relies on remote employees and a decisive factor affecting our children’s work perspectives. Thank you.
In a recent Quantitative analysis of Twitter, Facebook, blog posts, and YouTube videos specifically related to the Arab Spring Movement, the University of Washington found that during the week before Egyptian president Hosni Mubarak’s resignation, the total number of tweets from Egypt ballooned from 2,300 per day to 230,000 per day. Videos of protestors went viral, political commentary and ongoing discussion highlighted these events as political change swept throughout the affected regions. The top 23 videos received almost 5.5 million views!

We as consumers and social advocates are switched on 24/7. The idea that each and every individual in this room has an audience of some shape or form online might not even strike you, but because of digital networks and constant communication, we can command, control, and highlight topical issues in real time to affect meaningful change. The idea of a global village was first popularized by Marshall McLuhan in his 1964 works in relation to understanding the media ecosystem. The robust nature that social media injects into the global communications ecosystem and the democratic process can be truly realized when we analyze the effects the same topic can have on an audience, with different mediums being utilized.

“Today approximately two billion people are online, including 500 million active Facebook users.”

Take video for example. If we as the general public did not see actual footage of Michael Brown being shot by a police officer in Missouri, our reaction would be significantly different than if we were just reading about it or listening to reports on the radio. The rate and volume of information we can share instantaneously online through social networking sites is phenomenal. This completely changes communications frameworks and, indeed, the social and political process. We can leverage brands, people, and issues in real time like never before, allowing these groups and individuals to grease the cogs of this meaningful communications tool.

NGOs and civil organizations rely on engagement and the mobilization of key stakeholders and citizens to further agendas and drive home change. Social media networks are all about mobilization and engagement. When starting small and well coordinated engagement campaigns, getting everyone involved and onboard is often the best way to begin leveraging an audience. Please be aware—a rush to embrace social media does not equate to social success. Organizations must possess a deep understanding of community interest in order to engage effectively. We have an untold number of conversations driven by more sources than ever before, and it’s of paramount importance that we map out and monitor key influencers that drive conversations and advance an organization’s mission or support its campaigns. This is known as strategic activation. Social media engagement requires a concerted effort with defined responsibilities within the team to share content, participate in conversations, and support community interest. An organization needs to think about a clear and overarching strategy with editorial planning and content management across all platforms.

**Haiti 2010**

On Jan, 12th a 7.0 magnitude earthquake strikes Haiti, killing 220,000 and destroying 250,000 residences and over 30,000 commercial buildings. Almost immediately, Facebook and Twitter launch fundraising support campaigns; The American Red Cross Foundation collects 7 million dollars in 24 hours by allowing people to make $10 donations using cell phones. Numerous online poker sites held online tournaments with all entry fees and winnings going towards direct relief.

**Kony 2012**

On March 5th, the organization Invisible Children, launched an online video designed to start a social media movement against African cult and militia leader, Joseph Kony, an indicted war criminal. The campaign’s stated goal was to have him captured and removed from power by the end of that year. The video went viral and reached 100 million views in six days! Invisible Children became the most “liked” non-profit on Facebook with over 3.1 million fans. The Kony resolution was launched in the US House of Representatives eight days later!
ASL Ice Bucket Challenge

The ice bucket challenge consisted of one person selecting another to publicly throw a bucket of ice over themselves, a simple task for a great cause. No one could have predicted the huge success the viral marketing ploy had—over one million challenge videos posted on Facebook, raising over $100 million dollars and counting. There are some valuable lessons to be learned from this fascinating social media marketing ploy: small $5 and $10 donations from a large group of people really does have the power to create profound change. Social media has brought everyone to the table.

Social Media and Education

Nokia capitalized on the growing popularity of social networking in South Africa with the launch MoMath, a mathematics teaching tool that targets users on the instant messaging platform. Mixit is South Africa’s most popular social media platform, with over 10 million active users as of 2012.

Ms. Gianna Simmone
Activist and Actress

“Rwanda: Rebuilding in a War Torn World”

I come from a past of abuse, cruelty, and abandonment. In living life with a survivalist and forward-thinking mindset, I have decided that the way forward is in helping others. Early in my career as an actress, I began donating to inspiring causes, including one that provides college scholarships to female survivors of the Rwandan genocide. In the trials I have overcome, I have found healing in helping. I have empathy for innocent people that have had to endure horrifying acts of injustice. It is that divine impulse to put the needs of somebody else ahead of your own that I wanted to talk about. Sacrificial kindness and compassion is the reason why I am even alive today, and I know the importance of carrying that on.

After years of supporting but never meeting these women, I had the opportunity to visit Rwanda and hug each one we made a difference for. The opportunity to see the devastation of the genocide only further reinforced my willingness to help and empower—not only the women, but also those working for other noble causes in Rwanda. After meeting with President Kagame, it became apparent that areas needing assistance included health, environment, and education.
By giving young women scholarships, they will have the opportunity to become the next leaders of Rwanda. The goal of the visit to Rwanda was to bring together a high-profile group of people that had both resources and celebrity to help those working to improve conditions there. The rip was organized by former members of President Kagame’s staff. During the final day of the mission, the President, First Lady, and four ministers spent time discussing their primary needs with our team. These included the improvement of their health system, their environment, and their system of education. It was apparent that continuing to provide educational resources to the country was the first step in creating a labor force that would allow the Rwandan economy to continue to grow and develop. Two companies, Full Sail University and University of Phoenix, accepted the President’s suggestions of finding ways to move English from the third to the second language of the country. Kigali University is expanding to include a medical school, and it will be assisted by an exchange of ideas and financial support from the University of Florida.

Kigali University has launched a four hundred-bed medical center, which will be the second medical facility of its kind in Rwanda. Agriculture is a huge part of the Rwandan economy. Finding a healthy way to feed the people and export food are major objectives of Rwanda. The University of Florida focuses heavily on agriculture, and by partnering with the University of Kigali, Rwanda will benefit from the latest techniques in developing non-GMO food resources.

What inspires me most about Rwanda is that it is not letting its past define it. It has its eyes firmly fixed on what lays ahead, on a clear destination that it moves towards every day. In overcoming my own challenges growing up and moving past great obstacles, I found a great empathy for the experiences of the Rwandan people. I hope this will inspire people in their challenges, in all parts of the world. Even in the most challenging conditions there can be change, with discussion, and by taking appropriate action. Just as the Rwandan people have, I choose to take action and move forward.

Mr. Apurv Gupta
Youth Representative

“The World We Want”

Your Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen; and fellow Students,

My name is Apurv Gupta and I study at the University of Edinburgh in the U.K. Firstly, I would like to thank World Information Transfer for giving me the opportunity to represent the voice of young people at its 23rd International Conference. It is a great honor and pleasure to be speaking amongst such accomplished dignitaries at such an influential venue; the United Nations. However, what’s even better to see here today is the number of young people attending this conference!

While I know most of you are probably skipping school to be here today, as am I! But what I’m sure most of you didn’t realize, is that the delights of missing a lecture at university, you would actually land yourself in an even more intellectually stimulating master-class on health and environment, now did you?! You see, adults trick us. So...we young people have got to stick together and that is what my address is about. That if we join forces, we can create the world we need today.

Socrates said that, “the secret of change is to focus all of your energy not on fighting the old, but on building the new.” This is exactly what we, the young people of the world, need to focus upon. Not in criticizing the current state of the affairs, but rather in infusing new vigor and energy in our own commitment. Replacing our anger with compassion. It is with this pursuit that I would like to share a few ways in which we can do this to counter the multiple problems that challenge our world.

I would like to begin by sharing an anecdote from an experience in Peru. A few years ago, I joined a group of students for a voluntary project in the remote village of Cuzco high up in the Andes Mountains. The aim of the Project was to construct two greenhouses that would allow the community members to grow much needed vegetables and herbs to provide a nutritional supplement to villagers’ carbohydrate rich, and monotonous daily diet. Working alongside the Peruvian organization ECOAN (Eco Sistemas Andinos), our team further assisted with other environmental tasks such as conducting health surveys. Our ultimate goal was to develop a more self-reliant community while protecting the Andean biodiversity and promoting the sustainable use of natural resources.
One day, a local boy aged around twelve to thirteen approached some of us and enquired as to where we had obtained the wooden logs that we were to use for our project. One of our project members responded by saying, “From a nearby forest.” The boy seemed content with the answer, and proceeded to inquire in the most innocent manner if we were thieves?

We all burst out laughing… perplexed by our reaction he further proceeded to ask us if they were of any direct use to Pachamama? (Pacha-mama; is the goddess mother-earth in Incan mythology) to which we responded by stating that, “no it’s actually for you and your entire village.” That those logs would help the boy and his family grow all sorts of vegetables once we finished constructing the greenhouse. Baffled by our response, he verified, “It’s for me?” We said, “yes.” Astonished by our answer, while hiding a cheeky grin he said, “Then why didn’t you steal anything from me?”

You see Peruvians are taught from a very young age that the earth is mother that protects all. Her health has a direct correlation to their health. She is viewed not as an entity from which one receives multiple things like wood, water, land, air etc., but rather as a living entity, another individual to whom we are all related to.

So when, in essence, we took the wood from the forest, the boy naturally assumed that its use would be put to benefit the forest. If it was stolen from ‘pacha-mama,’ the least that could have been done was to create something for her. It was the simple understanding that what we take from the earth, we need to give back to it as well. The world as we know it today in its deteriorating tragic state is in part for this very reason.

No one individual takes responsibility for their actions towards something that is owned by all. No one looks for water, until their own house is on fire.

This incident really resonated with most of us as it gave us a very different perspective on looking at the world. We grow up learning that the earth is a platform for human life, when in reality it’s quite the opposite. We are not on it, but are rather a part of it. It’s health has a direct bearing upon ours.

It’s just this little shift of perspective that if one adopts, one can really recognize the world we need today.

Your Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen

We have gathered here today in resolute, determined to find solutions and remedies for global environmental challenges. Today let these halls not only echo our voices to world leaders but rather future leaders. The world may be 4.5 billion years old, but in spirit it remains very young! Today, almost half of the world’s population is under the age of 25. Making us a family 2.5 billion strong.

Imagine the endless possibilities and course of action we can take should all of us, young people, unite in this common endeavor. This is, therefore, the foundational stone of solving each and every problem that we need to lay—that we need to be united in our effort. The second we stop passing the blame and acknowledging the problems we face, we will have the world we need today.

The next step would be to hone our individual talents. Each of us have some skills that we can use to better the world we live in. The young boy I met in Peru had the courage and innocence to provoke thought amongst those around him, even though he probably doesn’t know it yet.

“The world may be 4.5 billion years old but in spirit it remains very young .... 2.5 billion is under 25.”

But if we all reflected, I can guarantee you will find that one talent that makes you unique. So at an individual level, locate such talents within yourself. Ask yourself what comes to you with much comfort and ease? Are you a good writer? Then write to inspire action. Are you a good orator? Then speak to encourage. Are you good at giving advice? Then formulate strong opinions on issues that matter and do not settle for anything less. In whatever you do, use yourself as an instrument for change.

You are your greatest tool and inaction is our greatest challenge. If all 2.5 billion of us today pledge to rise boldly towards such inequalities, equipped with the knowledge, talent, and will to tackle them, we will have a world that is awake to such realities, and that is the world we need today.

My next advice, and perhaps the most crucial, is about nurturing qualities of empathy and compassion. Our world is plagued with many problems: social, cultural, and environmental. These are problems that do not discriminate against race, class, creed, or color. We have rising disease and decreasing sanitation; rising population and decreasing occupation; rising environmental degradation and decreasing action; rising poverty and decreasing opportunity.

“continued on p. 20”
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TELEPHONE: (212) 686-1996
FAX (212) 686-2172
E-MAIL: wit@worldinfo.org
ELECTRONIC EDITION AVAILABLE ON:
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FOUNDER & EDITOR-IN-CHIEF:
Dr. Christine K. Durbak

MANAGING EDITOR:
Modou Cham

ASSISTANT EDITORS:
Philip Bracey and Aslesha Dhillon

TRANSLATIONS:
Chinese: Josephine Au
Spanish: Patricia Munoz Tavira
Ukrainian/Russian: Oleh Harasevych

REGIONAL DIRECTORS
CANADA:
Taras Boychuk
440 Rathbun Rd. Apt. 501
Toronto, ON M9C 357
Tel: (416) 781-3807
E-mail: webforge@gmail.com

CHINA:
Josephine Au, William Cho
3 Hop Yat Road 4th Floor,
Kowloon, Hong Kong, China

EASTERN EUROPE:
Prof. Mykola Prytula,
Prof. Stefan Heryliv,
Prof. Hanna Kapustian
K. Levychkoho 11a, #15, Lviv, Ukraine
Tel/Fax: (380) 32 76-40-39 & 76-68-18
E-Mails: mykola.prytula@gmail.com,
steftko54@gmail.com

EUROPEAN UNION:
Dr. Michel Lools
Oosterveldlaan 196
B-2610 Antwerp, Belgium
Tel: 32-3-448-05-54; Fax: 32-3-449-75-74
E-Mail: mlools@humaninfo.org

Tanya Kuzyk
via Caio Leilo, 15, Roma, 00175 Italia
tanya.kuzyk@yahoo.it

LATIN AMERICA:
Prof. Patricia Munoz Tavira
Willemsstraat 14 03036
1210 Brussels, Belgium
Tel: 32 (0) 48 66 79006
E-mail: patriciatavira@gmail.com

USA:
Dr. Claudia Strauss
475 Park Ave. S. 22nd fl.
New York, NY 10016
Tel: 212-686-1996
Fax: 212-686-2172
strauss@worldinfo.org

WE HAVE NOT INHERITED THE WORLD FROM OUR FOREFathers...WE HAVE BORROWED IT FROM OUR CHILDREN.”
KASHMIRI PROVERB

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“continued from p. 18”

In short, if our world was on Facebook and/or Twitter, it would have no friends and it would have no followers. We are a generation that will inherit all these crises. Crises that are very big, but we are also a generation that has never had a better opportunity to address them. As socially sentient beings, we all have the ability to feel without having experienced. One doesn’t have to go through the trauma of a hurricane ripping your house apart to feel for someone who has. One doesn’t have to lose a loved one to an earthquake to understand the sorrow of someone who has. As humans, we have the fundamental characteristic of feeling empathy. If we can develop the ability of feeling and understand the pain of another without ever having even met them, it will give us a motivation and reason to create the world we need today. We may come from different lands and speak in different languages or interact in different ways, but in essence, we are born borderless.

“Education brings choices, choices bring power”
- Christine K. Durbak, Founder of WIT

How we choose to associate with this power of hyperconnectivity, known as social media, can have a colossal effect on the urgency of action that is much needed in the world today.

Your Excellencies, distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen; and above all young people. The climate is changing, so should we. Let’s strive to be a generation that does not play the blame game. A generation whose conviction is not curbed by political incorrectness. A generation whose passion is not dwindled by bureaucracy. A generation whose courage is not weakened by inaction. A generation whose resolve is not wavered by apathy. Because that is the world we need today. Thank you.

Dr. Strauss, Dr. Durbak and Mayor Comitta (center) with WIT’s current interns.
First row – Elizabeth Guner, Paige Stokols, Alis Yoo, Daniel Cho, Brain Hansol Lee, Modou Cham, Eman Osagie Philip Bracey.
Second row – Shan Cheema, Minji Han, Aslesha Dhillon, Apurv Gupta, Stephanie Harris, Elise Freeman.

HOW YOU CAN HELP:
WIT is a non-profit, international, non-governmental organization, in consultative status with the United Nations, dedicated to forging understanding of the relationship between health and environment among opinion leaders and concerned citizens around the world. You can help us with your letters, your time, and/or your donations.

We are generation which is connected 24/7, 365 days a year. This is our privilege and our burden. The challenge is therefore ensuring that these cross-boundary bonds, connections, and networks are of a passionate and humanitarian value.

“Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful committed citizens can change the world. Indeed it’s the only thing that ever has”
- MARGARET MEAD