

Event Summary

Unlock the Future

**Building the Coalition
for Young People
and Future Generations**

22 September 2021



***“You, the youth, inspire me.
You’ve been mobilizing in record
numbers to fight for issues, which are
important to the world.***

***I know there are going to be times where
it’s going to be tough, where it feels like an
uphill battle, do not get tired, do not get weary.
Keep fighting.***

***You deserve to be at the heart of every
conversation because you, the youth,
you are our future.”***



Pita Taufatofua
Olympian and UNICEF
Ambassador

At a time when young people face a series of emergencies they did not cause, how can the world come together to listen to their voices, respond to their demands, and work with them as designers of their futures?

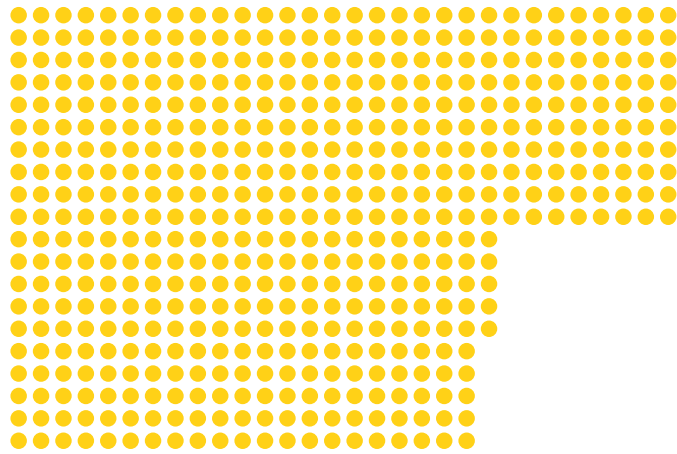
These are the questions we came together to answer at the [Unlock the Future](#) event on Wednesday 22 September 2021.

As the world's biggest youth-led and youth-focused organizations, we hosted a high-level event at UNGA 76 to signal our shared intent to deliver on the priorities of **next and future generations** and to explore how we can help young people shape their futures.

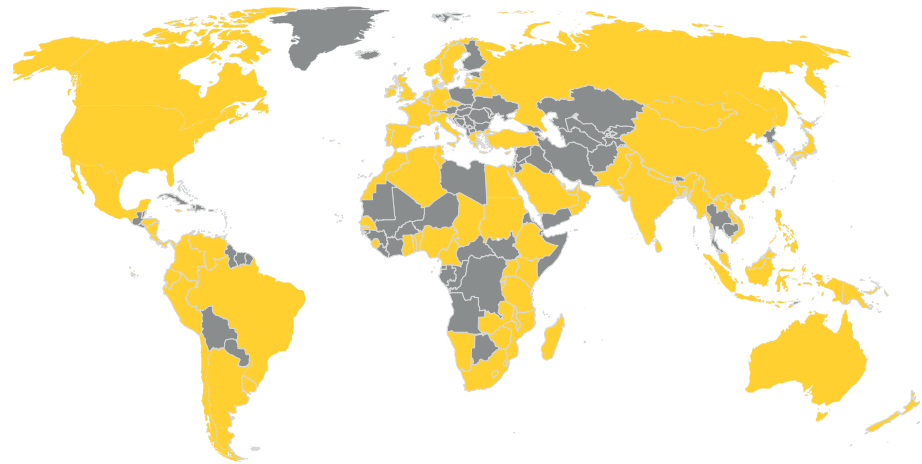
The event was led by young people from across the world. It also modelled the **intergenerational solidarity** that we need to unleash the future; we heard from inspirational speakers of all ages.

At the end, leaders of our organizations presented the [Unlock Declaration](#) – a commitment to building a coalition with and for all young people and future generations.

***Find out more about who came, what was said,
and what happens next!***



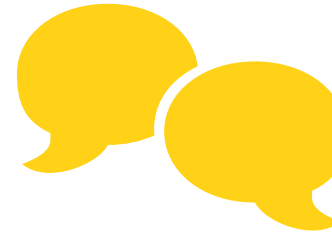
The event had **515** attendees



People from **105 countries** registered



The youngest attendee was born in **2011**, the oldest in **1940**



People listened in **Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Russian** and **Spanish**



The **#UnlocktheFuture** hashtag reached roughly **16 million** people, and had **750 social media mentions**

What Was Said?

(You can watch the full event [here](#))

Unlock the Future

The event kicked off with insights from two fantastic female leaders, who invited us to 'unlock the future'.

In conversation with Aishwarya Machani, Muzoon Almellehan and Hilda Nakabuye highlighted the dangers of failing to urgently address the crises threatening the livelihoods and futures of the world's young people.

They called on leaders to invest in the next generation (roughly half of the world's population under 30) and future generations (the 10.9 billion or so people likely to be born by the end of the century).

They identified their keys to unlocking the future - immediate investment in education systems and rapid action to tackle the climate crisis.



Muzoon Almellehan
UNICEF Goodwill
Ambassador, Syria



Hilda Nakabuye
Founder, Fridays for
Future, Uganda



Aishwarya Machani
Next Generation Fellow,
UN Foundation, UK

"Young people are doing their part and trying their best to fight. They raise their voices and they don't give up. They must be at the table - it should be the norm not the exception."

Muzoon Almellehan

"We need our leaders to put on their big boy pants, to stand up and to take concrete climate action. For so long they have let us down but this is the time that they show us they are capable of changing the system."

Hilda Nakabuye

"Young people have proven they will be persistent even in the face of challenges like a pandemic. So, why isn't change happening? Unfortunately, I think this comes down to the inaction of leaders."

Aishwarya Machani

Leadership for the Future

In the next segment, we listened in to an in-person conversation between Heads of State and Government and young leaders at the Swedish Mission in New York.

The young leaders presented *Our Future Agenda* – a vision and plan to address the education, employment, and environmental challenges facing young people today.

They challenged the Prime Minister of Sweden and President of Costa Rica to think about how they could implement the proposals in this report and better deliver on the priorities of young people in their countries.

Both Heads of State were incredibly receptive and supportive, and committed to doing even more to listen to and empower the young people in their countries. Hopefully, this was just the first of many conversations with national leaders!



**Carlos Alvarado
Quesada**
President, Costa Rica



Stefan Löfven
Prime Minister,
Sweden



Ramazan Nanayev
Global Shaper, World
Economic Forum



Inés Yábar
Senior Global Campaigns
Coordinator, Restless
Development, Peru



Valeria Colunga
Next Generation Fellow,
UN Foundation, Mexico

"We need to step up and the best way of doing that is to listen to young people. It's their future. It's their planet that they will inherit."

H.E. Stefan Löfven

"We need support, belief, and trust to actually contribute to the great work and the great vision that they have."

Ramazan Nanayev

"I truly think that the idea that young people are not interested is actually a myth and not a reality. I think the actual question is what can governments and institutions do to be more open and interesting for young people?"

Valeria Colunga

"Age is not an obstacle to make change happen. Get involved and don't ask for permission. You will surprise yourselves."

H.E. Carlos Alvarado Quesada

"I would like to see this going beyond these two countries and the conversations that we had. This is seen as an unusual interaction right now. But it shouldn't be. I would like this to inspire other leaders to have genuine conversations and interactions with young people and then obviously take action!"

Inés Yábar

Stories of the Past, Present, and Future

This segment brought together activists from two generations to tell their stories. UN Foundation Next Generation Fellow, Jevanic Henry sat down with Nobel Peace Prize winner, Professor Muhammad Yunus to learn more about his experiences.

When asked by Jevanic about what motivated him to found his pioneering [microfinance bank](#), Professor Yunus spoke about the sad reality that conventional banks are not designed to benefit the poorest in society. Though he and his students faced opposition from such institutions, he worked with conviction to set up Grameen Bank.

Professor Yunus went on to share his hopes for the future. He called for a fairer and greener world and reminded us that intergenerational cooperation is vital if we want to achieve our shared goals. The conversation provided us with a snapshot of how young people mobilized in the past and how they continue to do so today; they are consistently driven, innovative and resilient.



**Professor
Muhammad Yunus**
Founder of Grameen
Bank, Bangladesh



Jevanic Henry
Next Generation Fellow,
UN Foundation, St Lucia

"Old roads always end up in old destinations. If you want to go to a new destination you have to build new roads. And new roads have to be built by new people."

"We have to create a world of 3 zeros: zero net carbon emission will stop global warming; zero wealth concentration to end poverty once for all; and zero unemployment by unleashing the power of entrepreneurship amongst young people."

**Professor
Muhammad Yunus**

"It was such a privilege to speak to Professor Yunus. Even though we were connecting from different parts of the world, it felt like a real conversation. He basically offered a formula for a more just, equitable and sustainable world".

Jevanic Henry

A New Agenda for Young People

Next, we heard from the Secretary-General's Envoy on Youth, Jayathma Wickramanayake.

In conversation with Amélie Mariage, the Envoy on Youth reflected on the Secretary-General's report, [*Our Common Agenda*](#) – his vision for the future of global cooperation. She highlighted proposals for young people and future generations, such as plans for a Transforming Education Summit in 2022 and a UN Youth office.

Amélie asked the Envoy on Youth how young people could play their part to turn these proposals into reality. The answer: young people should not wait for an invitation to start campaigning for change.

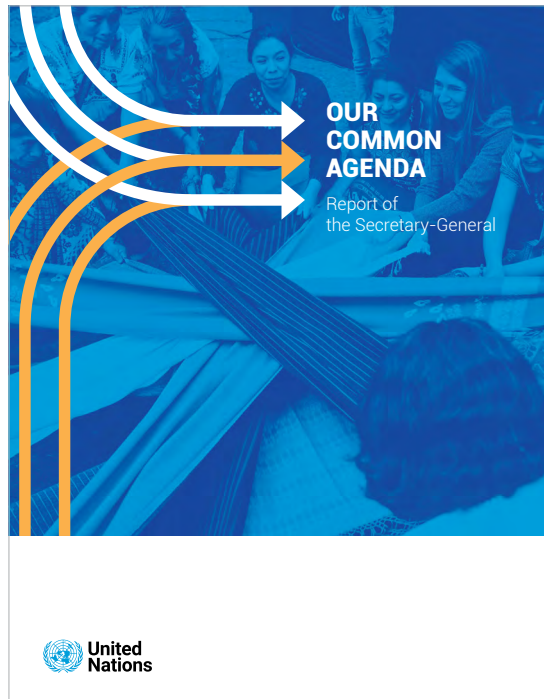


Jayathma Wickramanayake
Secretary-General's Envoy on
Youth, United Nations, Sri Lanka



Amélie J Mariage
Next Generation Fellow,
UN Foundation, Spain

In *Our Common Agenda* the UN committed to renewing solidarity with young people and future generations. This gives us an opportunity to push for a new global agenda for young people.



Our Common Agenda is the Secretary-General's vision on the future of global cooperation. Looking ahead to the next 25 years, the report calls for reinvigorated, inclusive, networked, and effective multilateralism.



The Secretary-General asked young leaders and thinkers to contribute to Our Common Agenda, and to set out their own vision, ideas and proposals in *Our Future Agenda*. This work was led by the Next Generation Fellows.

"I have 3 tips for all the young people watching us today.

Continue to advocate at the international level for the implementation, the budgeting, the funding and the resource allocation for the youth agenda.

Don't wait for the UN or your governments to deliver. Implement your own solutions.

Make sure your advocacy goes beyond the United Nations into the parliaments, the congresses, and the municipal councils of your own countries."

Jayathma Wickramanayake

"I think it is clear that we must all work together to build a better future and to take forward these proposals."

Amélie J. Mariage

Confronting the Obstacles

Vera Syrokvash explored the obstacles facing young people with Assistant Secretary-General of the United Nations – Volker Türk, the Maldives’ Special Envoy for Climate Change – Sabra Ibrahim Noordeen, and co-chair of the Global Shapers Community – Rumaitha Al-Busaidi.

The panellists discussed how a lack of resourcing and representation, as well as shifting political priorities, have prevented young people from fully taking up their role as designers of the future.

They also offered, however, some concrete ways in which leaders could harness the energy of young people. There was consensus that, at a time when the world faces a stark choice between breakthrough and breakdown, partnering with young people, and drawing on their optimism and innovation, is the only way forward.



Vera Syrokvash
Eastern Europe Regional
Co-ordinator, World YWCA,
Belgium



Volker Türk
Assistant Secretary-General
for Strategic Coordination,
United Nations, Austria



Rumaitha Al-Busaidi
Co-Chair, The Davos Lab,
Oman



Sabra Ibrahim Noordeen
Special Envoy for Climate
Change, The Maldives

"We've seen the world make ambitious promises to young people and largely fail to keep those promises. Why are these unkept promises still happening?"

Vera Syrokvash

"Quite often, young people's views are dismissed as being impractical or idealistic. But the youth aren't necessarily talking about idealism. They're talking about survival."

Sabra Ibrahim Noordeen

"I think Our Common Agenda is a real opportunity for transformation when it comes to engagement with young people."

Volker Türk

"What would it mean for us to be a good ancestor? Practising inclusivity and promoting intergenerational partnerships. This is how we can get ourselves out of the current crisis and ensure that future generations can avoid such crises."

Rumaitha Al-Busaidi

The Unlock Declaration

After a packed program, the hosts of the Unlock the Future event came together to announce the Unlock Declaration.

First Lady of the Maldives, H.E. Fazna Ahmed set the scene by welcoming the coalition's commitment to working together. She encouraged other countries and leaders to join the Maldives in empowering young people.

Secretary-General of World YMCA, Carlos Sanvee, presented the Declaration on behalf of the partners. He highlighted our determination to deliver on the priorities of young people and to put them at the heart of political systems. And he explained that the coalition plans to develop its vision and strategy with partners from across the world and, of course, young people.

Finally, on behalf of the youth networks of the coalition, Fairooz Faizah Beether—an activist at BRAC Youth Platform – welcomed leaders' resolve to fulfil often-forgotten promises made to young people. She also, however, reminded them that a Declaration can only be the start and urged them to start making concrete proposals.



Carlos Sanvee
Secretary General for
World YMCA, Togo



H.E. Fazna Ahmed
First Lady of the
Maldives



Fairooz Faizah Beether
Co-Founder, Moner
School, Bangladesh

A statement for the 76th session of the UN General Assembly

The Unlock Declaration



Building the Coalition with and for Young People and Future Generations

At a time when children and young people face challenges and crises not of their making, we – leaders and partners of the world's most far-reaching youth-focused and youth-led movements, networks, and organizations – are committed to unlocking a better future with and for young people and future generations.

Half of the world's population is under 30 and more than a quarter are under 18 years of age, but the priorities and perspectives of young people – and our accountability to them – are too often absent from decisions that determine their futures.

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a dramatic impact on education and employment, worsening the learning crisis and further starving young people of the opportunities they need.

Our societies struggle with poverty, inequality, division, and violence, especially against girls and young women. Many institutions are outdated, broken, or closed to young people and their needs. Future generations are threatened by the planetary emergency and our collective failure to think and act for the long term.

But young people are mobilizing in the face of these threats, offering us the opportunity to support them through tough choices and bold decisions.

We now have a chance to rejuvenate our societies and institutions by drawing on their ideas, insights, and energy.

The Unlock Declaration has been signed by leaders of youth-led and youth-focused organizations with almost half a billion members worldwide, and has the potential to be an incredibly exciting moment for how the needs and priorities of young people are represented to and within the international system. The leaders committed to building a high-ambition coalition with and for young people.

"As partners, we are bound together by four principles.

First, we will champion a platform for diverse young people to explore, create, lead, and participate.

Second, we will increase representation for countries with young populations.

Third, we will commit to co-operating in ways that change young people's lives.

And fourth, we will increase accountability to young people at all levels from the grassroots to the global."

Carlos Sanvee

"The Maldives is a young country. We know that youth voices are vital as we work to build a more resilient and sustainable planet."

H.E. Fazna Ahmed

"You have invited us to hold you accountable for these commitments and we will do so."

Fairooz Faizah Beether

As they launched the Unlock Declaration, partners promised that this is the beginning of a journey.

We are eager to seize this opportunity to put young people at the top of the political agenda and to renew our efforts to secure the future of humanity and of the planet.

Over the coming months, we will work to strengthen the coalition. We will identify how we can advance shared goals, foster more opportunities for children and young people and collectively increase funding for child, youth-led, and youth-focused networks.

Young people will be at the heart of this process and will have a seat at the decision-making table.

As we work for a transformation in the capacity of the international system to deliver with and for young people.

We invite you to join us.

How can you get involved?

If you want to find out more, search #UnlocktheFuture on Twitter or watch the full event [here](#).

If you are a young person and want to work with us, then use the 'contact us' form at the bottom of this [page](#).

If you are part of a youth-led or youth-focused organization that would like to collaborate with the Unlock Coalition, please email amachani@unfoundation.org.

We look forward to hearing from you!

