



Sam Loni - UN SDSN Youth

My name is Sam Loni and I am the Global Coordinator of SDSN Youth, an initiative of the UN Sustainable Development Solutions Network, which Professor Jeffrey Sachs leads and it was launched by UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon in 2012 to mobilise expertise and find solutions for Sustainable Development Goals.

Can I just say what an honour it is to be here at the Casina Pio IV, the home of the Pontifical Academy of Sciences. I would like to take this opportunity to thank Monsignor Sánchez for hosting us in this beautiful and historic building.

I have been walking around since yesterday and just staring at the walls. There is a story within every staircase, there is a story within every stone, every tile and it is amazing being here. In fact, yesterday I was out there and there was a series of mosaics and I was told they were from ancient Roman times. The stones that you walk on, just out there, were made in the 1600s. Isn't that amazing? And, it just shows what a historic venue we are at and nothing inspires people like a beautiful and inviting venue such as this. So once again thank you Monsignor Sánchez for having us here!

A special thank you also to Gabriella Marino and our wonderful partners at the Academy. It would have not been possible without Gabriella's countless efforts. Thank you Gabriella and also to Federica, Alba, Leonardo and all the other colleagues and friends at PAS who have been helping us. Thank you for your dedication. If you do see them around please thank them and have a conversation with them.

We are also incredibly lucky to have the presence of Professor Angelo Riccaboni, Chair of SDSN Mediterranean, Professor Virgilio Viana Chair of SDSN Amazonia, Serena Kao from SDSN Singapore, Professor Sabina Ratti and also Antony Annett for being with us here today.

I would also like to recognize Dr Betsee Parker, without whose generous contribution and support this conference would not have taken place. Thank you, Dr Parker, mostly for believing in the power of young people. Your support is the lifeline of our future generations and we will continue to rely on it.

It also goes without saying, thank you Professor Sachs, we are so honoured to have you here, and you've just heard from him, he has been a pioneer of youth empowerment and SDSN Youth. His vision, expertise and tireless – and I mean tireless – efforts not only inspire millions of people around the world but they are an inspiration to me personally in the SDSN Youth team. We have a lot to learn from him. So a big thank you to Professor Sachs.

And of course our team at SDSN Youth, John Farrugia from SDSN Australia/Pacific, Gabriella Sampaio from SDSN Amazonia, Fabrizio Saladini from SDSN Mediterranean, Andrea Zucca from SDSN Italy and Isabel Pérez from SDSN Spain and New York.

Finally, a huge thank you to all of you delegates, fifty of you, who have travelled from more than thirty different countries, all here with us at the Symposium. And we saw last night, at the Global Village Dinner, with different attires, different clothing, and different cultural symbols, we all gathered and took beautiful photos with the SDG squares – I think one of them is actually missing, so if you do find it please report that one in – I believe it is Goal 16, Peace and Justice, so if you see it walking around please hand it back! So, that was so beautiful to see and that was part of the idea, bringing from different cultures, I think that is where the magic happens.

I have had the honour and pleasure of reading through your 50 solutions. It has been truly inspiring to see your solutions evolve. And, over the next 2 days you will be working here to bring these to life. SDSN Youth is here to support you and provide assistance with your leadership. And I hope that we can make some of these solutions come to life once we leave here. And if they do I think we will be making true changes in local communities and around the world.

As you all know the theme of this conference is human trafficking – the world's fastest growing global crime.

- 1.2 million children are trafficked every year
- Human trafficking is the second largest source of illegal income worldwide.
- 800,000 men, women and children are trafficked across international borders each year. Approximately 80% are women and girls. Up to 50% are minors.
- The majority of trafficked victims come from the poorest countries and poorest strata of the national populations.

You don't need to be an expert in human trafficking to know that these numbers are astronomical and more importantly, they are unacceptable. We cannot sit aside and watch the most vulnerable human beings suffer like this... but too often we do.

But if we want to end human trafficking and its horrific impacts on society, we must look at its root causes. Human trafficking does not occur in a vacuum. It is a symptom of other larger problems in society, which come in many shapes and forms and, as Pope Francis refers to them in his Encyclical, they are hunger, gender inequality, poverty, indecent living conditions, discrimination, conflict, corruption... these are the real problems, which create a fertile market for human traffickers, a system in which innocent human beings are being exploited. How do I know this? Well, I am not an expert, but I will share a very short personal story on this.

I am an Australian but I was born in Tehran, Iran into a middle class family. Both my parents were imprisoned when they were in their twenties: my father for five years and my mother for roughly two years, in the notorious Evin prison in Tehran. They were tortured, they were beaten and their loved ones and friends were executed tragically in the summer of 1988, the mass executions. Why did they deserve this? Because they dared question the government. Simple. They were human rights activists who raised awareness about human rights abuses that were happening to other people and for this they were tortured and they suffered. But they chose to be brave instead of looking the other way...

So when I was 9 we realised that it was too dangerous for us to stay in Iran so we had to think about running away, but to flee we only had one choice, human traffickers. We were forced to flee the country because it was no longer safe for us to stay there. My parents were left with difficult choices: stay and face imprisonment, torture and possibly execution, or flee the country and set on a dangerous journey to Pakistan in order to apply for refugee status at UNHCR. Because of this we had to enter that dark and dangerous world and I remember it, I remember all of it, the first time I met the traffickers, their faces, their actions, their weapons, their cars... I remember the fear I experienced as a child, the dangers we faced and the consequences of the actions we were taking, I remember it all like it was yesterday, the horror. Fortunately, our story did not end tragically, but too often it does. Stories of people who are the victims of trafficking do. Too often, these are women and children, as I say and too often societies look away. We suffered, but we did not suffer as many others do.

Why do ordinary human beings enter this dark and terrible world? Why? Because our societies breed such circumstances, because we have no choices left in life, because we are forced to take actions, either due to poverty, hunger, insecurity and so on. Human trafficking must be viewed in the wider context of a globalising and complex world. Not in a vacuum. My parents chose this because they did not have a choice, because they did not want me and my brother to come up as orphans, they wanted us to have good lives, so we were forced to enter that world.

And this brings me to the Sustainable Development Goals. The theme of this conference revolves around SDG 8 and Target 8.7 specifically, but if you look around the conditions that lead to human trafficking are with every goal, every single one of them somehow has an impact. Again, we cannot solve human trafficking without looking at all of these. This is the exact thinking that made us focus this conference around the SDGs and its wider framework. People are less likely to be victims or perpetrators of human trafficking and other such horrendous crimes, if they and their families are well fed, healthy, educated, live in decent, peaceful and inclusive societies, within healthy environments. That is the truth.

So, let me ask you, as delegates, if there was an agenda for the future of humanity, what are the three characteristics you would attribute to it? I would want it to be ambitious, the most important thing, I would want it to be revolutionary and transformative, and I would want it to leave no one behind, no women, no children, no men, no indigenous people, no older citizens and that's what the SDGs are, they are referred to as the most ambitious agreement of the 21st century. They are officially referred to as a "Transformative Agenda", they are revolutionary. If they are achieved they will lead to true transformation. Finally, the official motto of the SDGs is "leave no one behind". Think about that, what a wonderful world that would be. And I was there with Professor Sachs at the SDG conference in New York in September, when 193 world leaders came and adopted the Goals. Some of them reluctantly, but they did in the end adopt them. And we were there when Malala Yousefzai spoke from the podium and initially nobody listened. Diplomats started walking around, they were networking and preparing for the next sessions. This is after Pope Francis spoke. And Malala turned around and said, "Look up, the young generation is speaking to you, look up at us", and that was a beautiful moment to see.

So, what are the 3 characteristics we can attribute to young people? I would say young people are idealistic, they are creative and they are big in numbers – we are half the world's population, three and a half billion people under the age of 30!

And if we want to achieve the SDGs, the ambitious agenda, we need to be optimistic and we need to be idealistic. If we want to achieve this transformative agenda of the SDGs we need to be creative, we need to

look at new ways of solving things. And finally, if we want to leave no one behind we have to make sure that three and a half billion young people are on board and that they are active agents of this agenda. You can only look back to some of the greatest men and women in history to see what they achieved when they were young:

Albert Einstein – He came up with the Theory of Relativity in his 20s

Charles Darwin – Theory of Natural Selection, in his 20s

Martin Luther King Jr – His Montgomery Bus Bycott and his major campaigns all started in his 20s

Marie Curie – Most of her ground-breaking research, in her 20s

Mark Zuckerberg – Facebook

Elon Musk – A lot of the work he has done and continues to do

Malala Yousefzai – When she was 16

King Wangchuck of Bhutan – He made happiness the indicator of national progress when he was 17

And finally Professor Jeffrey Sachs – who was 27 as a Professor of Harvard and continues to do amazing things.

Creativity is the essence of what young people do and I think that if we can marry this creativity to the experiences, to the knowledge and the power and the influence of all the generations, that is when we will have true magic. Intergenerational effort to achieve the SDGs.

In his Encyclical, Pope Francis has a section referred to Justice Between the Generations:

“What kind of world do we want to leave those who come after us? To children now growing up? Intergenerational solidarity is not optional but rather a basic question of justice, since the world we have received also belongs to those who will follow us”

That is the essence of sustainable development, it is as simple as that.

So let me finish off with an ancient poem from a famous Persian poet, Saadi, who said:

“Human being are part of a whole, in creation of one essence and soul. If one member is afflicted with pain, uneasy the rest will remain. If you have no sympathy for human pain, the name of human you cannot retain”.

Finally, Don't underestimate your creativity, your idealism and your numbers... because the world relies on them. It relies on you today as you gather here and tomorrow as you leave here. History, and Galileo, is watching you from these buildings, let's make it count.

Thank you very much.