

Paola Cervantes
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UN International Day of Families Remark

It is an honor to be speaking here today, on behalf of not only New York Harbor School, but on behalf of my fellow youth and future generations. I would like to give a sincere thanks to, Rinor Jani, the Youth Coordinator who has brought all of us here today, as well as the UN Foundation; all to discuss the importance of *international climate change* and *intergenerational sustainability*.

This is an incredibly important time for this Civil Society Briefing to be held. However, uniform progress on the implementation of the 17 SDGs has not met the expectations and may not reach the lofty 2030 time limit. More so than ever, we face the ever looming certainty that life, as we know it on Earth, will cease to exist in a few decades if nothing substantial is done to prevent climate change, poor waste management, and the other myriad damages. Planet Earth will inevitably face irreversible damage such as being pulled closer to the sun. Yet, this inevitable outer space event won't have the chance to happen if humanity destroys the earth before the sun can get to it. There is a natural order to things after all, and humanity is directly getting in the way of said order. Instead, we should turn our focus to the present and aid each other in attempting to prevent further environmental destruction on Earth.

I want to remind those here today that there are attainable solutions to the challenges that currently face humanity. We should not simply cower and avoid dealing with the problems that we have caused throughout human history, but muster our determination and intergenerational cooperation to solve these problems in this current generation before future generations have to fix a compounding problem that was not their fault, to begin with. Past generations have done enough of passing the baton of responsibility to upcoming generations. Although we have been given the broken up baton.

Climate change as I am sure we are all aware, is very intertwined with every single SDG, not just SDGs 6, 13, 14, and 15. As H.E. Ambassador Inga Rhonda King said in her *Remarks on the Climate and SDGs linkage* held on March 11 of this year, "None of the SDGs can be realized if we let climate change endanger our planet and future generations. Vice versa, realizing the SDGs will contribute to halting climate change."

Families too, play a large role in climate change, though not in the way that one may think. Families have a big part in this fight against climate change, as what we teach our children regarding things like recycling, composting and sustainability are what they will likely take into adulthood and pass onto their children.

I am proud to say my parents are immigrants from Mexico. They experienced a less ideal upbringing, being raised in impoverished conditions. Conditions such as not knowing when their next meal, if any, would be. Sustaining for not only themselves, but siblings at a young age. Their parents never took the time to educate them on the importance of climate change on the environment. As a matter of fact, compost and recycling were foreign concepts to my grandparents and parents, prior to coming to

America. For this reason, I wasn't made aware of how my everyday actions would affect the environment until I began attending public school.

Education is and has always been the mark of societally cultured and intelligent cooperation of peoples towards a civil society. In this day and age, especially in developed nations, a college degree is a necessity to achieve many things in life. Even as high schoolers, myself and many of my peers are required to have certain grades and skills learned in school to get internships and summer jobs. There have been many efforts to implement long-term education improvement solutions in terms of math, science and reading. To provide an example, SDG - 4 is tackling the issue of inclusive and quality education for adolescents around the world. However, as a New York Harbor School student, I believe that educating youth and communities on not just those subjects but also, on sustainability and the environment, is an important facet of education that should be recognized.

Moreover, even families trying to be sustainable and impart good environmental lessons to their children struggle with the high cost to do so. Trying to be sustainable in this day and age is an expensive and sacrificial path that people walk. Packageless grocery stores, fair trade clothes, and organic sustainably grown food is a big drain on personal finances, especially when you have other people under your care to think about. Families who try to manage their food spending often have to resort to extreme couponing, a industry that mainly offers coupons for cheap, not organic, and not fair trade food. The intergenerational sustainability goal of this briefing is an unattainable goal for most lower class families unless significant government aid programs are given a higher budget, improved, and expanded.

I truly believe that achieving the amazing goal of sustainable family farming practices in third world countries is not only doable, but crucial. Living in New York City, we purchase our food and produce from big supermarkets or overly expensive farmers markets. This creates a wide gap between us and our food. We don't get to see how the food is grown, or what kind of feed they're feeding the farm animals. Are these eggs really cage free? Are my potatoes being sprayed with mass amounts of dangerous chemicals to ward off bugs? These are questions that people have to ask themselves when they are, as a consumer, removed from the raising and growing of their food. I'm positive we would all love to believe the commercial ads that attempt to make us believe potatoes have a magical way of fixing all of our problems, but the ugly reality is hidden away from the general uninformed consumer. By neglecting to question how our food is produced, we begin to blindly accept the current utilized methods to obtain our food.

Yet in third world countries, they have not necessarily industrialized yet. The relative lack of infrastructure and high demand of goods in these places means that they can live simpler and less economic driven lives. This can extend to food production, and oftentimes, some people living in less developed countries can't just hop on the I-95 and hit up a local Walmart for their produce. From a indigenous perspective, this is a great thing, as it means that people can grow and be responsible for their own food. They realize where its being grown, whos growing it, and can share their fruits of labor with neighbors. Thus, creating a system of self dependency and organic (mind the pun) sustainability. Developed countries are assets in stepping in to broaden and improve the system.

From observation, I have noticed that many New Yorkers are interested in sustainable farming practices. Governors Island has experienced families flocking to the Grow NYC Teaching Garden. With the growing popularity of outdoor farmers markets and an increased public interest in sustainable and fair trade food practices, it's evident that many people regardless of class status, are open and interested in these sorts of ideas. Whether it be for the sake of their health, the environment, or the lives and rights of foreign workers. SDGs 2, 12, 14, and 15 are related to these ideas, and judging by the recent progress of the Equator Initiative, the Green Commodities Programme, and the UNDP- UNEP Poverty-Environment Initiative, these issues and ones similar to it are already being tackled in governments around the world.

To sum this all up, families play a major role in the achievement of the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals, and the combating of climate change and intergenerational sustainability. I would like to acknowledge and give thanks to my mother, Antonia Rodriguez, for being here to support me, New York Harbor School's principal, Jeff Chetirko for allowing me to represent not only my Marine Policy and Environmental Advocacy CTE, but my fellow youth in this event. Furthermore, I would like to thank Robert Markuske for helping me throughout my years at Harbor School to gain a passion and appreciation for the conservation and protection of the environment.

Thank you for your time, and have a wonderful rest of your day.