

ANNUAL

AMERICAN YOUTH PRIORITIES REPORT

2023-
2024



UNITED NATIONS ASSOCIATION
OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

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INTRODUCTION

The 2023-2024 American Youth Priorities Report provides direct insight into the collective voices of America’s emerging leaders.

This document, crafted by the 12th UNA-USA Youth Observer, is a result of their nationwide listening tour and reflection on data submitted by United Nations Association of the USA members during the end-of-year chapter reports. This document serves as a poignant reflection of the diverse perspectives and urgent concerns voiced by over 16,000 American youth, hailing from UNA-USA student chapters across the country. As fervent advocates for global cooperation and progress, UNA-USA youth have passionately articulated their aspirations, challenges, and ambitions for a more just and sustainable world.

UNA-USA was founded in 1943 with a mission to inform, inspire, and mobilize Americans to support the ideals and vital work of the UN. UNA-USA played a pivotal role in the creation of the UN Charter and its ratification by the US Congress and currently empowers individuals and communities to take action on global issues. Through its nationwide network of chapters, UNA-USA provides a platform for youth to amplify their voices, engage in meaningful dialogue, and drive positive change at both local and international levels. As an organization deeply committed to promoting multilateralism, human rights, and sustainable development, UNA-USA plays a pivotal role in shaping the next generation of global leaders and advocates for a brighter, more inclusive future.

MESSAGE FROM OUR YOUTH OBSERVER

My journey with UNA-USA began at the age of 17 as a member of a collegiate campus chapter. Over the past six years, I have served both locally and nationally with UNA-USA, and I am immensely proud of our organization's focus on championing youth voices.



This year, I set out to challenge the notion that activism must look a specific way or be limited to a single industry or occupation. Young people are doing important work in every corner of America, and what works for one community might not need to be replicated in another. I aimed to empower our youth champions to understand that on every level—local, national, and international—we need a diverse collective of activists to achieve the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

Particularly in our digitally connected age, young people need to understand that activism does not have to look a certain way. You don't need a specific title, a large number of followers, or a certain level of education to make a difference in your community. I want students and young professionals engaged in grassroots organizing to see themselves represented and celebrated as we highlight the progress we've made toward achieving the Global Goals.

In college, I led protests and campus actions for Black Lives Matter in 2020, advocated for inclusive spaces for trans students, and dedicated time to learning as much as I could about public policy and global affairs. In high school, I gave speeches at school board meetings and pushed for equity in our district policies as a member of the superintendent's student advisory council.

MESSAGE FROM OUR YOUTH OBSERVER

Now, as a young professional, I lead an employee resource group that connects community organizers with corporate support and advocates for inclusion and belonging in our workplace. As I've grown, so has how I advocate for social change.

As young people, we can and should be trying all we can to make the world a better place, and I hope my story can inspire young people to dive in and figure out what their lifelong journeys as advocates for change will look like. It has been an honor to share mine as our 12th UNA-USA Youth Observer, and I hope this year's American Youth Priorities Report shines a light on what it looks like for some of the thousands of young people we uplift through UNA-USA.

I am entrusted with linking young change-makers with avenues to amplify their work while fostering connections between American diplomats and governmental figures with the youth driving change. This work has become increasingly essential as we live through such crucial moments in global affairs. There's a heightened curiosity among students about the intricacies of bodies like the Security Council and General Assembly, a thirst for comprehension regarding the implications of resolutions, and a desire to discern the mechanisms of global diplomacy. Young Americans are doing all they can to stay informed so they can make their voices heard, pushing for higher standards of accountability and transparency from institutions, and pushing for more open and honest governance.

My job is to help young people find the resources to educate their chapters, provide a space for these dialogues, and empower our youth leaders who are advocating for policy change. I hope this report showcases the prowess and passion our youth advocates bring to the table. Additionally, I implore our adult allies to see the zeal and expertise these youth champions have and continue to bring us into the fold.

UNA-USA YOUTH BY THE NUMBERS



16K

2024 marked an exciting milestone for UNA-USA Youth: our 16,000th member!



160+

Over 160 collegiate and high school chapters of UNA-USA operate across the United States and our territories.



40+

Over 40 chapters contributed via in-person, hybrid, or written contribution to the 2023/2024 report!

PRIORITY SDGS

There are 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and 169 targets in total. Across our hundreds of student chapters comprising a total of 16,000 youth members, there exists a profound acknowledgment of the interconnectedness inherent within all 17. However, amidst this comprehensive understanding, a striking emphasis has emerged on SDGs 4, 5, 13, and 16.



01. Priority SDG

As students themselves, it is only natural our youth members prioritize advocating for inclusive and equitable education. They strive to ensure that all people have access to quality learning opportunities, regardless of their background or circumstances.



02. Priority SDG

Our youth chapters have developed an emphasis on gender equality initiatives. By challenging gender stereotypes, and advocating for equal opportunities in education, employment, and leadership, they contribute to building a more just and equitable society.



03. Priority SDG

For our young leaders, climate action is a top priority because of the urgent need to address the escalating impacts of climate change. By raising awareness, promoting sustainable practices, and advocating for policies that reduce greenhouse gas emissions and enhance resilience, they aim to mitigate the worst effects of climate change and safeguard the planet for future generations.



16. Priority SDG

Student chapters are ardently championing SDG 16 with an emphasis on American diplomacy. Across the country, American youth are mobilizing their chapters to coordinate campaigns urging their congress people to support a full humanitarian ceasefire in the Gaza Strip and urge Congress to restore funding to UNRWA. Individual chapters have taken their advocacy one step further than coordinating local fundraising campaigns for the Palestinian Children's Fund.

4 QUALITY EDUCATION



5 GENDER EQUALITY



13 CLIMATE ACTION



16 PEACE, JUSTICE AND STRONG INSTITUTIONS





WHY IT MATTERS



According to the Pew Research Center's April 2024 report, “Fewer Americans view the United Nations favorably than in 2023,” it was noted that younger adults exhibit a notably more favorable view of the United Nations compared to older adults. This finding underscores the critical role of meaningful youth engagement within the UN ecosystem. As our present-day youth advocates shape their perspectives on global issues and take proactive roles in advocating for change, they are poised to become the next generation of world leaders. Embracing and empowering youth within the UN framework not only ensures a diverse range of voices but also fosters innovative solutions to pressing global challenges, securing a more inclusive and sustainable future.



CONNECTING OUR YOUTH TO WORLD LEADERS

UNA-OSU, The Ohio State University's student chapter, hosted the Youth Observer on-campus during the 2023 National Listening Tour. During the discussion, the chapter highlighted, among many points, challenges faced when attempting to provide resources to its members. It was an opportune moment, especially with a group of Ohio State's Environmental Studies students en route to COP28. With assistance from the Youth Observer, a direct link was established between these students and the US Special Envoy for Global Youth Issues, paving the way for a special meeting in Dubai.

The delegation representing The Ohio State University at COP28 in Dubai, which included 10 undergraduate students, two professors, and the director of Global Education, played a crucial role in representing the university's commitment to global issues. Among the 13-person delegation were Binta Nyassi, President of UNA-OSU, and Secretary Luke Hawes.



UNA-UOG (UNIVERSITY OF GUAM)

3 GOOD HEALTH
AND WELL-BEING



15 LIFE
ON LAND



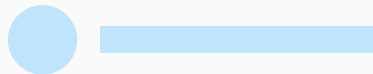
The University of Guam's UNA-USA chapter is one of many that has taken the steps to reactivate due to a renewed interest in the UN and Sustainable Development Goals on campus. Chapter President Danica Paige highlights that as a chapter on the Micronesian island of Guam, the students' relationship to sustainability and life on land is particularly important, and working towards advancing those SDGs through campus-wide initiatives has been a core focus.



UNA-USA Youth Members At the UN



“I recently had the remarkable opportunity to attend the 68th Commission on the Status of Women (CSW68), thanks to the program channel from the UNA-USA Youth Observer account. This experience was incredibly eye-opening, underscoring the vital importance of youth involvement in such platforms. Inspired, I am now dedicated to raising awareness about these opportunities, fostering greater youth participation which is critical for shaping our future at this pivotal moment in history.” Emma Sherbine, UNA-USA Soka University President



Emma brought her thesis research to CSW68 during a side event hosted by the African Women in Leadership Organisation (AWLO) where she shared her preliminary findings on avenues to create equity in higher education admissions in Uganda.



UNA-BU (BOSTON UNIVERSITY)

3 GOOD HEALTH
AND WELL-BEING



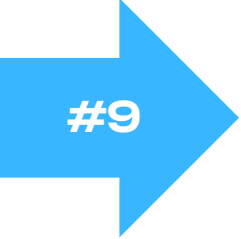


In addition to providing chapter members the opportunity to engage with the UN and UNA-USA at the national level at the annual Global Engagement Summit in NYC and Leadership Summit in DC, the chapter has a strong focus on tying the Sustainable Development Goals to local initiatives.

The chapter is currently learning about SDG 3 while supporting local nonprofit, Madhatter Knits, by crocheting baby hats to contribute to their mission of empowering pregnant individuals and supporting premature babies in the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU) as they navigate fragile beginnings.

“Boston University's UNA-USA Campus Chapter has contributed to my undergraduate experience quite extensively in that I've learned about what advocating for the UN SDGs can look like whether through hands-on volunteer work or government legislation.” -Fabian Salvador UNA-BU President

MAKING AN IMPACT

Institutions hosting UNA-USA campus chapters have achieved notable rankings on the University Impact Rankings list for their contributions to the Sustainable Development Goals according to Times Higher Education (2024 Index).

	<h2>Arizona State University</h2> <p>UNA-ASU strongly commits to SDGs 13 and 5 through educational initiatives and local park and beach cleanup efforts. They seek to encourage environmental sustainability and promote community engagement by preserving natural resources.</p>
	<h2>Michigan State University</h2> <p>UNA-MSU's current focus is on SDG 1: No Poverty. Their chapter actively engages in local initiatives by partnering with nearby women's shelters for semester-long advocacy projects that align with the Sustainable Development Goals.</p>
	<h2>Penn State University</h2> <p>UNA-PSU educates their campus community through weekly SDG deep dives bringing external speakers to facilitate conversations on each SDG.</p>

These rankings underscore academia's pivotal role in advancing the SDGs. College and university campuses are crucial in fostering inclusive and equitable educational opportunities. These environments educate students about the SDGs and empower them to take meaningful action beyond traditional academic settings.

THE YEAR IN REVIEW

The Youth Observer Listening Tour influenced the American Youth Priorities Report and the Youth Observer's representation of American Youth at UNGA 78, the 3rd World Food Forum, the 68th Commission on the Status of Women, and the 2024 ECOSOC Youth Forum. Proactive outreach ensured that American youth voices and concerns were integrated into the Observer's remarks and interventions at these significant global events, highlighting the importance of grassroots perspectives in shaping international discourse.



LISTENING TOUR

This year's listening tour provided a platform for students to share updates on their chapter's work while highlighting pitfalls that have arisen post-pandemic that have impacted youth engagement.

WORLD FOOD FORUM 3

As the World Food Forum expands and establishes itself as a flagship event for youth advocacy in the agrifood space, we were able to affirm American youth's commitment to sustainable practices and build partnerships with others in the space.

CSW 68

UNA-USA Youth continue to serve as meaningful participants in the UNA-Women delegation to CSW and the Youth Observer continues to amplify this opportunity to youth members and serve as a resource in side events to provide context into American youth initiatives gender equity space.

UNGA 78

UN General Assembly (UNGA) 78 provided the opportunity to build and expand relationships with UN Youth Delegates from countries outside the United States. Additionally, we prioritized side events where there would be an opportunity to highlight the work of our youth champions in the SDG space.

ECOSOC YOUTH FORUM 2024

The UNA-USA Youth Observer served as a member of the official American delegation to the ECOSOC Youth Forum alongside a number of youth-focused policy officials including the US Special Envoy for Global Youth Issues, and USAID Agency Youth Coordinator.

The American Youth Priorities report was soft-launched and formally presented to the American delegation as part of a briefing on the state of youth engagement in the US.



DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS BY AMERICAN YOUTH

In commemoration of the 75th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), UNA-USA presented the Declaration of Human Rights by American Youth. Using the framework of the UDHR and findings from listening tours, American Youth Priority Reports, and development sessions hosted by UNA-USA Youth Observers to the UN, this Declaration captured the voices, feedback, and leadership of youth from across the U.S. on the human rights issues most important to them. This Declaration can be used as a guiding document for understanding and acting on youth priorities for organizations and institutions that are working to meaningfully include youth in their global human rights advocacy efforts.

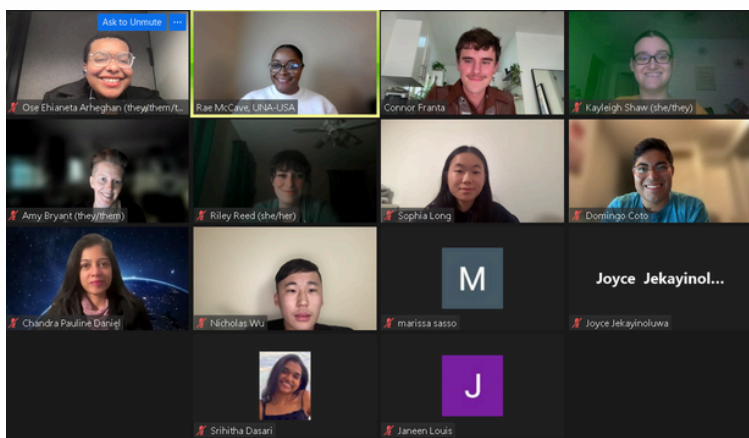
YOUTH DECLARATION DEVELOPMENT PROCESS



Throughout 2023, UNA-USA hosted a series of virtual consultation-style workshops called Development Sessions. During these sessions, the 11th and 12th UNA-USA Youth Observers moderated panel discussions featuring an intergenerational group of youth leaders, grassroots advocates, and experts from the UN. The online consultations garnered 500+ registrants and 40 speakers for the Development Sessions. These discussions gave participants an overview of various topics and sparked conversations on how youth advocates could engage with these issues in their local communities. The sessions concluded with a moderated group discussion, allowing youth members to share their recommendations, ideas, and experiences, which were used to inform the drafting of the Youth Declaration.

These Development Sessions enabled UNA-USA youth members and other American youth to directly participate in the creation of the UNA-USA Declaration of Human Rights by American Youth.

In total, 10 Development Sessions were held on the following topics: Health & Well-being, Peace, Security & Law, Education, Information & Advancement, Civic Engagement, Participation & Expression, Housing & Migration, Climate & Environment, Diversity, Equality & Inclusion, Climate & Environment (Part 2), Gender Equality, and LGBTQIA+ Human Rights.



SUMMARY OF THE DECLARATION'S FINAL RECOMMENDATIONS

THE FULL TEXT OF THE DECLARATION INCLUDING ALL 25 POINTS OF AFFIRMATION AND THE NAMES OF EACH MEMBER OF THE DRAFTING COMMITTEE CAN BE VIEWED AT UNAUSA.ORG/HUMAN-RIGHTS/YOUTHDECLARATION/

Support Youth-Led Initiatives and Projects:

Allocate resources and support for youth-led projects and initiatives that address human rights issues at local, national, and international levels. By providing funding, mentorship, and logistical assistance, the UN, organizations and institutions can empower young activists to take the lead in advocating for and implementing human rights solutions in their local communities.



Integrate Youth Representatives in Decision-Making Processes:

Actively involve youth representatives in relevant decision-making processes in global human rights advocacy. This includes providing opportunities for young people to participate as observers, contributors, and speakers in discussions related to human rights. By integrating youth perspectives, the UN, organizations and institutions can benefit from fresh insights, innovative ideas, and a more comprehensive understanding of contemporary challenges.



Establish Youth Forums and Consultative Mechanisms:

Create regular forums and consultative mechanisms that bring together youth leaders, activists, and representatives to engage in direct dialogue with UN officials, member states and high-level decision-makers. These forums can serve as platforms for sharing experiences, raising concerns, and collaboratively developing strategies to address human rights issues affecting youth. Additionally, the UN, organizations and institutions should actively seek input from youth consultations when formulating policies and action plans related to human rights.



Stay in touch!



@USYouthObserver



youthobserver@unausa.org



unausa.org/programs/students/youth-observer/

Ose Ehianeta Arheghan (they/them) is the 12th UNA-USA Youth Observer to the United Nations. Holding Bachelor's degrees in Chinese and Political Science with a specialization in International Relations from The Ohio State University, Arheghan is also recognized as a Harry S. Truman Scholar, GLAAD Rising Star, Matthew Shepard Foundation Spirit of Matthew awardee, and One Young World Ambassador.

The UNA-USA Youth Observer is your connection to the UN. Appointed annually by UNA-USA, the Youth Observer elevates young American voices in the global policy dialogue around international issues. For a one-year term starting on annually on International Youth Day, an American between the ages of 18-25 is selected to engage and connect young people in the U.S. to the work of the United Nations.



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