



Buzzing with energy, the UN Envoy on Youth, Jayathma Wickramanayake, joined the UN stand at this year's [European Development Days](#) (EDDs) on her mini scooter to highlight one important message: young people have the power to change the world.

The Youth Envoy is very much aware of the weight her role carries globally. Young people all over the world look to her for guidance and inspiration and she's determined to live up to this, paving the way for young people to make the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) a reality.

One of Ms Wickramanayake's priorities as a UN Envoy is to ensure that digital tools are readily available to more young people around the world in order to further empower them to create positive change. The stereotype of young people being lazy or glued to their smart phones can be transformed through highlighting, in the mainstream media, the endless list of positive stories that showcase young people changing the lives of their communities with fresh ideas and concrete action.

Empowering young people can change society for the better. The quest of achieving the

Sustainable Development Goals will fail unless the young generation takes charge and is encouraged to do so. Young people are the SDG Generation.



Recent events have highlighted the transformative power of young people joining forces and calling for change. By utilizing the digital tools at their disposal and creating networks they made their voices heard around the world. Young people have enforced change and made history using alternative forms of participation and communication.

“Young people are finding alternative ways to participate in public life. Just look at the women’s marches all across the globe, or at how the Arab Spring unfolded. Look at any contemporary

social movement, from Black Lives Matter to #MeToo, and you will find one constant: it's driven by the young, using the digital tools available to them. That is how our generation has chosen to participate politically in life.”

As well as catching up with active Young Leaders on the EU stand, doing a Facebook live interview on the importance of empowering young girls and ending gender-based violence, contributing to a radio series on SDGs with a major Greek radio station, the UN Envoy primarily engaged in discussions with both high-level actors at the decision-making level and grassroots activists. Discussions ranged from a recent UN resolution on young people and peace and security with European Commissioners Mimica and Stylianides to peace and vulnerable populations with Mary, Crown Princess of Denmark and the importance of access to education for young girls and attention to the mental health of teenagers with HM Queen Mathilde of the Belgians.

Ms Wickramanayake ended her visit to Brussels by speaking at the EDD high-level closing ceremony alongside Nidhi Goyal, Denis Mukwege and Mary, Crown Princess of Denmark.

With 3.5 billion young people on the planet Ms Wickramanayake knows first-hand how important the challenge is. This is why she is asking all possible partners and stakeholders to not only 'talk the talk' but 'walk the walk', to turn words into action. And she's doing so through her unwavering determination to showcase young people for who they really are, to put the marginalized and most vulnerable young people at the forefront of politics across the globe.

One step at a time, setting in motion a chain reaction, the UN Envoy on Youth echoes the message of the EDDs that change happens one small step at a time. Shopping at female-owned businesses, ditching single-use plastic, eating and shopping responsibly, the list of small actions is endless. It's through these small actions that we all become champions of the SDGs.

Ms Wickramanayake has returned to New York with more inspiration than ever from the people she met and the topics she discussed. There, together with her team, she will resume her mission in Uzbekistan to mobilize the pro-active engagement of young people in today's world.

Facebook live event: <https://www.facebook.com/europeaid/videos/1695967203812176>



