

## **The role of youth for a sustainable future**

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### ***Break the ice***

This is kind of the first time I am here on the other side. I usually sit there where you are now, and I listen to very inspiring speeches that influence my thoughts when I come back home and I reflect on what I have learned. So, I hope today I will not disappoint you and I will be able to leave you with something important to think about, just like other people did with me.

### ***Introduction***

I don't know how many of you are Italians or have lived in Rome long enough to experience what I am about to tell you, but this is a story of change, change that I am sure each one of us in this room has somehow experienced personally, in his or her country.

I remember when I was younger than this, I was looking forward to April, because in April, if you live in Rome, you can finally go to the seaside and spend Easter Holidays there enjoying the first rays of sun after a winter lasting from October to the end of March. In April, you finally wear a pullover with no jacket on top of it, at least in early afternoon, then of course you needed to cover up as it was still a bit windy. But... look at us today, here, in Rome, in this room. If you go have a walk outside now, do you think you will be cold? Well now we are almost in April, but it looks like it has been April since this January. Except when, in Rome, experienced snow. Perhaps many of you are very used to see snow, but trust me, here in Rome it is very rare.

You may be asking now, are we really experiencing global warming? Should we take into account the story of the warmest April or the story of the sudden snow in Rome? Well, the answer is both. Yes, global warming in here, and yes, sometimes global warming means that it may be snowing in places where usually it does not. This is because sudden heat waves in the Arctic (that have never existed before) are pushing the cold winds towards us.

Some of us can say: "Great! It is warm! Let's have a walk and let's hope it stays so warm on the weekend". But, I can not be happy if it is so warm at this point of the year, mostly if I remember that it was not like this 5 years ago. And I am telling you why I can not be that happy, why I am actually worried, and why I choose to work and learn on how to be less worried.

I work in the Climate Change Unit of the United Nations World Food Programme. But I am not here today to tell you about my job. I want to tell you what I have learned on this topic and, mostly, how can we all be a solution for it, no matter the job we do. It is about our efforts in our daily life, since we wake up in the morning and go to sleep at night. Every single minute of our life, can be a step forward to complete the puzzle to get closer and closer to a Sustainable Development. It is you all. You form the population of this Planet that can make a difference.

### ***The problem***

Now, are you ready to get worried with me? I promise you the bright side will not take too long. Let's start to mention the main problem of everything "GHGs". Some greenhouse gases are necessary for us to stay warm: this is what has enabled us to live in this Planet without experiencing another ice age. However, since the industrial revolution, human activities have led to an increasing burning of fossil fuels: indeed, this has contributed to make our society prosper.

However, this has also led to increasing GHG emissions, which have in part been absorbed by the ocean and forests, and in part contributed to the increase of CO2 concentration in the atmosphere, which has ultimately led to the so called global warming: 16 out of the 17 hottest years ever recorded since 1880, were all registered since 2000.

Today, we have less tree that can absorb CO2 because we keep building cities, shopping malls and cutting down forests, so the ocean is doing all the work. And this is what is happening, right now, when we talk:

- The ice is melting leading to sea level rise.
- Sea level rise impacts small islands, coastal regions, forcing people to live their homes because flooded.
- People leaving their homes not only lose assets (like the home itself, their properties) but they also lose money, stability, safety. They have less resources to spend on feeding the family.
- In addition, the salted water of the ocean also reaches the soils of islands and coastal regions, burning the crops, destroying the harvest and leading to poverty and food insecurity.
- As this was not enough, the huge quantity of emissions absorbed by the ocean are making its waters more acid, literally eroding the coral reefs, killing thousands of species. I am telling you this: unfortunately, it is 100% irreversible that in few years' time the coral reef in Australia will not exist anymore.

This increasing in temperature is affecting all SDGs making it impossible for us to reach them if we don't take actions. This was a very small example of how climate change can impact food security (SDG2). But the main issue here is that socially and economically disadvantaged people are disproportionately affected by climate change impacts, because they often have the weakest buffer to climate-related disasters. They don't live in fancy and strong houses, they don't have paved roads. They are the most affected from our actions.

This what is happening to developing countries unable to cope with climate change impacts because of poverty/lack of access to the right means: climate-related disasters are increasing in frequency and intensity. They have almost doubled in the last decade (335 events on average annually) compared to the previous decade 1985- 1994, seriously hampering sustainable development.

In 2017 alone Hurricane Irma and Maria have caused significant damage along their path in the Caribbean region and U.S., especially to houses, schools, hospitals, supermarkets, roads, bridges, power grids and telecommunications, ports and airports, and resulted in urgent food needs for vulnerable populations.

Heavy rains and sea surge caused flooding in many areas including the coast of Cuba. In Haiti, more than 10,000 people were evacuated to 59 temporary shelters. The hurricanes reduced food availability and access, and deteriorated the food security and nutrition of people who were already vulnerable across Latin America and in the Caribbean.

The drought in the Horn of Africa is driving a humanitarian crisis of alarming proportions. Consecutive droughts and one of the worst El Niños in 50 years has pushed more than 11 million people into severe food insecurity in Ethiopia, Kenya and Somalia. More than 3 million people across Somalia face dangerous levels of hunger, while the number of those on the brink of famine has doubled to 800,000 since February 2017. Between 2016 and 2017, three consecutive droughts afflicted the country and with the risk of a La Niña in 2017-2018, there is significant concern for a fourth and perhaps even a fifth consecutive drought.

Flooding in Nepal and Bangladesh has severely impacted people's food security. Bangladesh has had more than 8 million people affected by the country's worst flooding in 40 years. A total of 700,000 homes were destroyed or partially destroyed, and 580,000 hectares of cropland submerged. In Nepal, more than 1.7 million people have been affected, with nearly half a million-people displaced from their homes and in desperate need of assistance.

Let's get worried a bit more:

- Findings from the IPCC's 5th assessment report indicates that climate change could increase the risk of hunger and malnutrition by up to 20 percent by 2050.
- Economic losses from disasters are rising rapidly, with more than 141 billion USD in damages a year on average for the last decade (nearly double the previous decade).
- The effects of extreme weather events force some 26 million people into poverty every year.
- In Zambia, children born in drought conditions are up to 12 percent more likely to have below-average height and weight than children born in non-crisis years.
- In the Philippines over the last two decades, 15 times as many infants died in the 2 years after typhoons as died in the typhoons themselves; 80 percent were infant girls.
- In Ethiopia, children born in an area affected by disaster are 35.5 percent more likely to be malnourished and 41 percent more likely to be stunted.

And this is what is happening to our Planet:

- From 1880 to 2012 global average land and ocean surface temperature increased by 0.85 Celsius degrees.
- The oceanic uptake of CO<sub>2</sub> has resulted in 26% increase of ocean acidification
- From 1979 to 2012 arctic sea-ice extent decreased of 3.5% to 4.1% per decade
- From 1901 to 2010 sea level rose by 0.19 millimeters.

Some projections in the future:

- GHGs have long life in the atmosphere (up to 100 years). So even if GHG were cut to zero, there would still be further climate change in the future
- Time for sea level to respond to temperature change: 10,000 years
- If we don't take action:
  - Global glacier volume decreases by 15-85 % by 2100
  - Sea ice extent reduces by 0.6 – 0.32 by 20100

***The solution – why I consider that people could be an active protagonist of the improvement of the well-being of the person in his entirety***

Each one of us has a role:

- **Internationally:** Paris Agreement, historical agreement, almost all countries signed

- **Local:** Cities are mobilizing to give a contribution which includes non-governmental actors, cities are becoming resilience.

What about us? I am not here to tell you things like “turn off the light, don’t waste energy, don’t use your car!”, also because I honestly came here with my car. But what I would like to tell you today, is to do things responsibly. Ensure that climate change is a political priority for yourself and your country. Small actions in your daily life that can be of significant impact. For example: use the energy responsibly (renewable sources providers), save running water, don’t waste the food (1/3 of food produced globally is wasted), move responsibly, spread the news (talk with your friends and family).

This can be subject of your work. Climate change is not only a challenge, it is an opportunity for us to change this world for the best. You don’t have to be necessary a scientist to do something. The fight against Climate change can be done everywhere, anytime, in any job you do.

### ***Why I decided to advocate for this***

Raising awareness of what is happening to our Planet, trying to change the public opinion, understanding that we are responsible for something bad that may happen so far away from us to somebody way weaker and poorer than us, are among the reasons why I dedicated to work in the field of Sustainable Development and advocate for all this. At the beginning I was an interpreter/translator. While working translating policy documents for COP, worried about food security I felt I had to do more.

You will spend the majority of your life in the workplace. You need to feel that you made the right choice and you are doing something that you like. No matter what you do, try to make your work, your life, a mission for shaping this world the way you would like it to be.