

Psychology Day at the United Nations discussing climate actions and the role of the EHPS at the Psychology Coalition of the United Nations

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The Psychology Coalition of NGOs at the United Nations having Consultative Status with ECOSOC held the 15th Annual Psychology Day at the United Nations, dedicated to the theme:



Psychology Coalition of NGOs at the United Nations, University of Twente, Netherlands) and Efrat Neter (Secretary at the Psychology Coalition at the United Nations, Ruppin Academic Center, Emeq Hefer, Israel) are representatives of the EHPS UN committee.

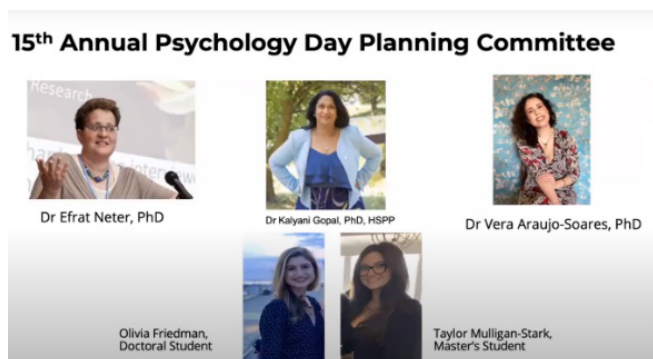
"Building Hope: Psychological Contributions to a Roadmap for Climate Action".

The 2022 UN Psychology Day was organized by a 25-person committee and led by Kalyani Gopal, Efrat Neter, Vera Araujo-Soares, Olivia Friedman, Taylor Mulligan, and Josephine Juanamarga. Vera Araujo-Soares (Regional Vice President at the

The Psychology Coalition at the United Nations (PCUN) and the role of the EHPS UN committee

The Psychology Coalition at the United Nations (PCUN) is composed of representatives of psychology and psychology-related organizations that have an official NGO status with the UN. Members of the PCUN collaborate in the application of psychological principles, science, and practice to global challenges of the UN agenda.

Since 2011 the EHPS has been associated with the United Nations, 'Department of Global Communication' / NGO section of the UN. This was the initiative of Irina Todorova, the then EHPS president. The EHPS advanced to a special consultative status in the Economic and Social Council at the UN (ECOSOC) in 2015. The goal of the EHPS UN Committee is to support the EHPS to collaborate in the application of health psychology to meet the global challenges of the UN agenda, and in particular those detailed in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).



The 2022 UN Psychology Day organizational committee.

The EHPS is the only health psychology organization represented at the PCUN. Prior to joining the meetings, the coalition primarily included clinical, social and organizational psychologists located in the US / NYC area. The pandemic turned PCUN monthly meetings from hybrid to fully online, which facilitated the participation of the committee members.

After Irina Todorova and Nihal Mohamad attended some of the face-to-face meetings in New York, Efrat Neter and then Vera Araujo-Soares were the first representatives of the EHPS UN committee to join the monthly meetings of the PCUN in a hybrid format. Since the pandemic, more EHPS members and also early career researchers joined the EHPS UN committee and PCUN activity (for an overview of all EHPS UN committee members please see the committee's [webpage](#)). Vera Araujo-Soares is now Regional Vice President and Efrat Neter is Secretary at the PCUN. In 2020, the EHPS UN committee achieved - for the first time - that health psychology representation among the speakers at the UN Psychology Day. Susan Michie, Ph.D. (UCL, London) represented us. In 2021 Molly Byrne, Ph.D. (National University of Ireland Galway) presented, and this year at the UN Psychology day, a health psychology perspective on climate action was given by Ann DeSmet, Ph.D. (Université Libre de Bruxelles, Belgium). Vera Araujo-Soares, Efrat Neter and Kalyani Gopal moderated the ensuing speakers of the 2022 psychology day at the United Nations.

The 2022 Psychology Day at the United Nations

This year's theme "Building Hope: Psychological Contributions to a Roadmap for Climate Action" was dedicated to climate change and focused on how psychology can contribute and support countries in implementing their climate pledges. 2677 people registered and 640 from 107 countries attended virtually via zoom.

During his opening speech, David Marcotte, Ph.D., President of the Psychology Coalition of



Left: David S. Marcotte, Ph.D., President of the Psychology Coalition of NGOs at the United Nations. Right: Kalyani Gopal, Ph.D., President of Division 12 of the American Psychological Association (APA).

NGOs at the United Nations, emphasized the importance of the PCUN network of NGOs to contribute to the fight against climate change and all contemporary challenges with transdisciplinary, international effort.

Further opening remarks were shared by Kalyani Gopal, Ph.D., President of Division 12 of the American Psychological Association (APA). Dr. Gopal stated that psychologists need to provide their knowledge on reducing environmental stress and fighting ecoharmful strategies to collectively reduce our carbon print.

Mr. Abdulla Shahid, President of the United Nations General Assembly, addressed the audience and emphasized the importance of hope, the central theme of his presidency, in addressing climate change, as hope is a common denominator for human collective action. He stated that psychological solutions are needed today more than ever and warmly welcomed PCUN's commitment to sharing how can psychological science contribute to tackle climate change.

Afterwards Ambassador J. R. de la Fuente, Permanent Representative of Mexico to the United Nations and founder of the Clinical Research Unit of the Mexican Institute of Psychiatry reaffirmed the view that combating climate change requires an international and coordinated response, including addressing the mental health consequences that may arise.

Following these remarks, a panel of six psychologists from five different continents and



Some of the Presenters on the Psychology Day.

varied psychological disciplines, emphasized the potential contributions of psychological perspectives to actionable solutions to the climate change.

As the first presenter, Wendy Greenspun, Ph.D., (Manhattan Institute for Psychoanalysis and the Adelphi University, USA) in *From Tears to Hope and Courage* described multiple forms of climate distress and trauma being experienced by individuals and communities worldwide. Dr. Greenspun particularly highlighted that young people face a foreshortened future and historically marginalized communities suffer layers of environmental harm and injustice. Building on this, Dr. Greenspun presented multiple ways of building emotional resilience such as calming, finding purpose and living connection and solidarity. In addressing the psychological needs of those in distress, traumatic impacts could be transformed into sources of hope and courage to face and engage with the unfolding climate crisis.

Talking about *Psychology and Climate Action* in the Global South, Brendon Barnes, Ph.D., (University of Johannesburg, South Africa) emphasized that psychology needs a clearer focus on the local realities of marginalized people in order to have increased global significance. In order to mitigate intersectional climate injustice and to allow climate movements to decentralize, he suggested the use of digital platforms. These could enable marginalized groups typically excluded from

democratic processes to participate, share information, and mobilize contestation and advocacy in a safe space. To support this, he points out four areas worthy of psychologists' attention in the global South: making climate and psychology evidence digitally accessible, developing digital technologies for interventions, actively changing digital media representations, and using psychology to enhance digital climate mobilization.

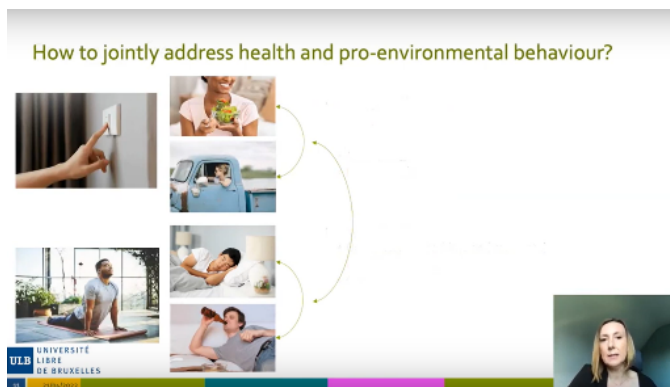
Anju Sara Abraham, MSc, BArch., (Council of Architecture and the Indian Institute of Architects) spoke about *"Using Architecture and Design to promote Mental Health and Enhance Positive Climate Action"* focusing on the relationship of architecture, health and sustainable development. She explained that sustainable architecture may not only respond to environmental characteristics such as overcrowding, noise, air quality and light and thus promote physical and mental health, but may 'nudge' users into positive behaviours and making better decisions. She explained that architecture can provide a range of incentives for behavioural change to be active and behave in a sustainable way, e.g. by incorporating 'walkability' within the city resulting in greater proximity to facilities and destinations or by designing indoors improving the air quality, temperature, and good daylight within the building structure in order to facilitate responsible use of resources.

Matthew Hornsey, Ph.D., (University of Queensland, Australia) talked about *Understanding (and reducing) Climate Change Skepticism*. He gave an insight on the psychological profile of climate skeptics, i.e. people who deny climate change and its causal relation with human behavior. Raising the concept of motivated reasoning he claimed that humans base their decisions on perceived desirability rather than an accurate reflection of climate evidence. Following this concept, he called for promoting climate-friendly behaviour by aligning with skeptics' underlying ideologies, anxieties, and identity needs instead of competing

with them by presenting 'the evidence'.

Finally, Ann DeSmet, Ph.D. (Université Libre de Bruxelles, Belgium) spoke about *Changing Health Behaviours by Addressing Spill-over and Shared Underlying Determinants*, pointing out how health and environmentally friendly behaviour can complement each other and promote the health of the planet. However, negative spillover effects (when one behaviour reduces the likelihood of adopting another behaviour) or positive spillover effects (when increased skills increase the likelihood of adopting an additional behaviour) must be considered. Building on this, she highlights the need for interventions integrating the insights from social, health and environmental psychology. Dr. De Smet pointed out that targeting a change in multiple behaviours is essential to create a planetary health impact. She emphasized that the most promising predictor across health and pro-environmental behaviours is promoting self-efficacy. Self-efficacy can be increased by helping people monitor their behaviour, increase their belief that they can do it by emphasizing the achievements they've already made, and by giving them a possibility for guided practice.

In response to these presentations, Dr. Vera Araújo-Soares integrated the contributions in *Bridging Intersectionality between Psychology and Climate Action*, highlighting inequities emerging as a central theme. Dr Araújo-Soares also presented



Dr. Ann De Smet shared a health psychology perspective on this year's theme of climate action

extensive evidence on the positive and negative role that health-related behaviors can play in climate change mitigation and adaptation. She called for behavioral interventions to specifically target health equity, use scientifically proven mechanisms of action, engage with users and stakeholders to ensure uptake, and consider contextual constraints. Finally, there was a Q & A session, moderated by Dr. Efrat Neter, with the audience either commenting or asking questions and getting responses from the speakers.

The United Nations Psychology Day was sponsored by the Psychology Coalition of NGOs at the United Nations having Consultative Status with ECOSOC and the Permanent Missions of the Dominican Republic and Mexico to the United Nations. Details on the Day appear at <https://www.unpsychologyday.com/> and the whole record of the event can be found online: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NQwXPQ8mz4U>. Find out more about the EHPS UN committee and its members at: <https://ehps.net/ehps-un-committee/>.



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