



**WRJ Executive Committee Meeting
October 4, 2023
Social Justice Report – U.N. Report**

This report includes four reports from our U.N. team who represented WRJ at the September 2023 U.N. General Assembly.

1. [Overview of the September 2023 General Assembly – Focus: Water](#)
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**OVERVIEW OF THE SEPTEMBER 2023 GENERAL ASSEMBLY
FOCUS: WATER
By Leslie Brier**

The General Assembly's main goal was to review where the world is in reaching the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda. We are at the midpoint of 2030 agenda.

The focus was on climate change, technology and the war in the Ukraine.

Ukraine

Overwhelmingly, world leaders condemned Russia and the war on Ukraine. There were several leaders, however, who chose to remain silent.

Climate Change

The UN Global Compact is the world's largest corporate sustainability initiative and discussions were continued during the General Assembly.

The session I am sharing information from here is on water.

Access to water is a concern and water stewardship is vital. Water is the source of life and sustains intricate ecosystems. All countries should be sharing water resources and promoting water distribution. Mismanagement will affect all of us.

Ayisha Siddiqa, 24 years old and named Women of The Year in Time Magazine spoke how she personally felt the effect of climate change and how she witnessed the illness and death of her grandparents due to water pollution. Here is a link to read more about what she is doing about climate change and her experiences that led to her advocacy:

<https://time.com/6259119/ayisha-siddiqa/>.

During the week of the General Assembly, several leaders of government, UN entities and corporations weighed in and reported on their work in the climate change space.

There was also conversation regarding early warning systems for people to get to safety prior to a natural disaster. An early warning system is vital and the proposed target date is 2027.

Mam Mizutori, Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General for Disaster Risk Reduction and Head of UNDRR is starting a program with 30 vulnerable countries to find out what is the gap in early warning systems. There must be in place in all countries the ability to monitor, give warning and act to minimize loss of property and life. New Orleans (Katrina) and Libya are examples of failure of early warning systems and the need for improvement. Authorities were not aware of what amount of water could break the dams in both locations with devastating consequences.

Google is using AI technology and satellite to show when wildfires first ignite to activate an early warning. Google is also using AI to help communities learn the best place to plant trees to reduce the effect of global warming.

Time and again, several leaders pointed to fossil fuels as the biggest contributor to pollution. Regulations and Protections are needed and we as civil society must pressure leaders.

THE DIGITAL DIVIDE - AI THROUGH A GENDERED LENS

By Leslie Brier

António Guterres, Secretary-General of the United Nations, addressed the Commission on the Status of Women about the digital divide at its annual conference at the United Nations.

Here is an excerpt from his speech as well as from women political, corporate and civil society leaders:

Every country is charged with meeting the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030. (SDGs) as outlined in the Sustainable Development Goal Agenda. The 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which are an urgent call for action by all countries in a global partnership to be reached by 2030. The Sustainable Development Agenda was universally adopted in 2015. [SDG 5](#) is “Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls.”

Today, in every region of the world, women are still worse off than men. The food crisis disproportionately affects women and girls, women and children die at a higher rate in natural disasters, women and girls often pay the price of policy key decisions made in a male dominated world. Against this background of gender inequality there is a new source of bias - digital technology. With the fast moving technology of Artificial Intelligence, women face a new threat that is undoing decades of achievements for women's rights. For example:

- Medical algorithms are based on male data at the peril of women. Policies based on male data leave women further behind.
- Traffickers use technology to control and harm women. Social Media is used to specifically target women politicians. Influencers are filling social media platforms with misogyny.
- Cyberviolence makes women unsafe sometimes with deadly consequences.

AI will shape the future of our world. Teachers are harnessing technology to bring learning alive and deliver personalized instruction to students. Students are using technology to research subjects and connect with people and places around the world. Today's employers are increasingly looking for workers with digital skills — even in industries that aren't traditionally STEM-centric.

Research and innovation drive the knowledge economy, and are the backbone of future jobs, yet women globally hold less than a third of research positions. Without the creativity and insights of half the population technology will be diminished and skewed.

Women and men were equally represented in the STEM related careers at the beginning of the trajectory of this field, however, participation dropped off over several years, Women innovators tend not to get recognition for their work. Stereotypes strangle the careers of women scientists who receive less funding than men. Only 2 percent of venture capital goes towards women researchers and female scientists. One dollar per one hundred dollars goes toward women innovators startups compared to eighty-seven dollars per one hundred dollars for women.

We must take decisive and deliberate action.

Women and girls must be educated in the STEM areas and focus on digital competency.

There must be investment so that all have the opportunity to be connected to technology.

Policy makers must make policy to dismantle barriers.

There must be laws and accountability for women's safety online, including:

- cyberviolence must be defined so that there can be laws tackling cyber bullying, cyber harassment and cyber stalking. In the UK, for instance, disclosure of sexual photos or videos without consent is a legal offense
- legal and statistical definitions of cyber violence must include a gender component.

Note: Secretary-General António Guterres is committing 300 million dollars for human rights that will include investment in digital technology with the goal to have all connected.

More information I found regarding the digital divide:

- <https://www.usaid.gov/digital-strategy/implementation-tracks/track2-help-partners-navigate-opportunity-risk/closing-gender-digital-divide>
- <https://www.oecd.org/digital/bridging-the-digital-gender-divide.pdf>

The World Health Organization is also looking into global strategy on digital health but does not specifically look at it with a gendered lens.

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS (CLIMATE) SUMMIT

OPENING SESSION

September 18, 2023

By: Sandra Abramson

I attended, through Web TV, the opening session of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) Summit, as a representative to the UN from Women of Reform Judaism.

Several speakers made introductory statements, in effect setting the stage for the work to be done over the course of the week. The President of the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) described the state of the planet in no uncertain terms. He said that we have met only half of our 17 SDG goals. We have stalled and even regressed in our efforts due to the Covid-19 pandemic and climate change. There is more poverty and violence in the world than before. The growing digital divide, as well, undermines our progress, especially regarding women and girls.

The President of Qatar stated that we share one goal: to find effective solutions for climate

control through obeying the rules of international law, especially for the Palestinian people. We need to make investments in youth and girls, especially in education, which is the key to everything. First, we need to achieve international solidarity.

The President of Ireland, a country of only five million people, stated that their commitment to global change is strong. Even though we're not where we are supposed to be, he said, due to Covid and the Russian invasion of Ukraine, HIV/AIDS deaths have been cut in half, and electricity has been provided to 800 million people worldwide. He said, optimistically, that poverty, pollution, and gender inequality are not predestined. He said that the SDGs represent the best hope for humanity.

The President of Barbados discussed the need for international reform in the financial sphere. Long term money, not short-term financing is needed in order to reach the SDGs. The International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, and credit-rating agencies need to see the importance of the SDGs in helping the developing countries. A striking quote rang out: "We cannot continue to have an abundance of food while people are starving." Pace and scope are the order of the day. We need a mechanism for global public goods. His holistic vision for a livable planet was to invest in: people, education, and health; prosperity, jobs, micro-growth; the planet; physical infrastructure; digital services. All this can be measured through empowering women and young people. At the end of his statement, he urged the developed world to be more generous to the developing world by providing capital and lessening debt.

The President of Cuba, speaking on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, reminded everyone that the world had gone off track in trying to reach the SDGs even before Covid-19. 735 million people experience chronic hunger, a figure higher than in 2015. The priority of this group is to provide the necessary political impetus to achieve these goals. They have headed up a global appeal, supported by the Secretary General of the UN, who called for a correction of historical injustices. In part this means overhauling the debt of the global south and improving loan conditions. His closing statement reiterated that all must have the political will that "nobody is left behind."

Several leaders of small states made impassioned pleas to not be forgotten in the grand scheme of global poverty and need. The Republic of Dominque in the Caribbean (not to be confused with the Dominican Republic); Botswana, speaking on behalf of landlocked developing countries; Pacific Small Islands; Pathfinders for Peace, representing 46 member states; and the Southern African Community all reminded us of our commitment to reach the 17 SDGs and keep our promises.

**SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOAL
LEADER'S DIALOGUE #3
September 18, 2023
By Vivian Blumstein**

I attended the Web TV 2023 SDG Leader's Dialogue # 3, as a representative to the UN from Women of Reform Judaism.

This was a meeting of Heads of State and Governments, for the 2023 High-level political forum on sustainable development. This Summit marks the mid-point of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

The President of Kenya stated that they have made a lot of progress in implementing the SDGs. However, too many other countries have not. Many countries in the Global South struggle with climate shocks and staggering debt, so progress has been slow, due to the lack of funding.

The President of the Swiss Confederation stated that we need collaboration between politics and

science. Science can caution us, but also show us which direction to follow.

Prince Alois from Lichtenstein stated that we must respond to challenges that come with technology. Also, there is unequal access to technology. They have increased STEM in schools, but more education is needed.

Several countries mentioned that the conflict between Russia and Ukraine is slowing progress.

The Presidents of Estonia, Argentina and Latvia spoke about sharing their knowledge with least developed countries.

The representatives of several smaller countries mentioned the need for other countries to share their knowledge. Also, the infrastructure needed may not be in place, hindering progress.

For me, one of the take-aways from this session was from a representative from Major Groups for Children and Youth. "If we are looking for game changers, we need to look at our youth. We must provide children with access to STEM and work intergenerationally."

This was a very interesting session. All of the speakers were passionate about trying to accelerate progress to meet the 2030 goal.