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Scientific report

Building Hope: Psychology Day at the United Nations in 2022 Focused on Climate Action*

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Abstract. In 2022, the Psychology Coalition at the United Nations (PCUN) marked its tenth year, with a mission to apply psychological science to global issues at the UN. Since March of 2020, PCUN activities have not declined, but have increased despite disruptive global COVID lockdowns. This two-part report offers a concise overview of: (a) the dramatic growth of PCUN activities since 2020, and (b) PCUN's 15th annual Psychology Day at the UN on April 21, 2022, which focused on "Building Hope: Psychological Contributions to a Roadmap for Climate Action."

Key words: climate, United Nations, Psychology Day, international, COVID, NGOs

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Introduction

Since the United Nations was formed by 51 nations on June 26, 1945, Article 71 of the UN Charter has welcomed the active participation of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to promote the UN agenda (Congress et al., 2020). Among the 6,100 NGOs currently registered with the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), only 20 of these are psychology NGOs. These 20 autonomous NGOs are concentrated in three cities with UN headquarters – Geneva, Vienna, and New York – each with its own distinct history and culture (Kuriansky

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et al., 2020). New York is not only the largest of these three nodes, but also the only one where these independent NGOs have long met and closely collaborated with one another. In 2012, this informal collaboration segued into a Psychology Coalition at the UN, when several NGOs entered into a formal structure, including officers and bylaws on September 20, 2012[1] (Takooshian, 2020).

Psychology Coalition at the United Nations

On March 11, 2020, after weeks of hesitation, the UN World Health Organization in Geneva declared the novel COVID-19 virus a "global pandemic".[2] Like the UN itself, almost all institutions world-wide suddenly "locked-down" to minimize in-person contact. New York in particular became the epicenter of this pandemic in the USA, with refrigerated trucks placed near overwhelmed hospitals, to hold the bodies of some of the estimated 18,679 New Yorkers who died in spring of 2020.

At what became its final in-person meeting on February 27, 2020, PCUN organizers were planning the 13th Psychology Day, tentatively set for May 27 at the UN headquarters. When the City lockdown forced the cancellation of the monthly meeting in March, PCUN officers decided to continue with virtual monthly meetings. The first all-Zoom meeting on April 2, 2020 discussed and confirmed the resolve to proceed with Psychology Day on May 27, pivoting from live to online, thus allowing expansion to global participation for the first time.

Ironically, the COVID lockdowns of 2020–2022 did not impair PCUN operations, but led to a clear and dramatic expansion of PCUN activities in several ways described below. Though PCUN and its members are highly active, little has been written to chronicle this increase in past and current activities.

Monthly meetings. Since 2012, PCUN has held about 10 monthly meetings per year at or near the United Nations building in Manhattan – typically at CUNY Graduate Center, Fordham University, or the Salvation Army. Each 90-minute meeting had about 20–40 participants – almost all of them New York-area representatives or student interns from its ten psychology NGOs (Takooshian, 2017). When COVID struck in March of 2020, PCUN members opted to continue meeting monthly online by zoom. Since these were open meetings, there was no reason to exclude interested colleagues in distant cities. Indeed, a growing number of distant colleagues and students found and dropped into these monthly zoom meetings, and some from other cities or nations became actively involved in PCUN activities. Under the steady leadership of PCUN Presidents Leslie Popoff (2019–2021) and David Marcotte (2021–2022), the PCUN continued as best it could with its elected officers, and its various committees,[3] which now included non-New Yorkers in other regions or nations. For example, as of 2022, about 20 percent of monthly participants are from distant cities, and two of the six elected officers in 2021

[1] Okorodudu, C. (n.d.) *The formation of the Psychology Coalition at the U.N.* Retrieved from: www.psychologycoalitionun.org

[2] McNeil, D.G. (2020, March 11). Coronavirus has become a pandemic, WHO says. *The New York Times.* Retrieved from https://www.nytimes.com/2020/03/11/health/coronavirus-pandemic-who.html

[3] PCUN committees: Advocacy, bylaws, executive, finance, global webinars, outreach, program, Psychology Day, publications, social media.

were from other nations (Israel and Netherlands). Similar findings have been observed in other such international collaborations – specifically among psychology students from across the globe, which were also able to take place via Zoom and provide more accessible opportunities for international engagement (Balva et al., 2022).

Public forums/webinars. To share its work more widely, PCUN occasionally offered public forums on timely topics prior to March of 2020, such as: the growing roles of psychologists at the UN on March 9, 2017 (Takooshian, Cronin, 2017), International Day of Happiness on March 20, 2017 (Olatunde, Kalayjian, 2017), publishing international work (on September 24, 2017), climate change (with Danny Wedding on March 5, 2018), and World Habitat Day (on October 2, 2018). In August of 2019, based on these lively forums, some PCUN officers connected with presidents of six divisions of the American Psychological Association (APA), about a possible series of public forums in New York City in spring of 2020, to involve APA members more directly in international issues. Though APA actively supported this plan, COVID lockdowns made this series of NYC forums impossible. But once again, technology allowed PCUN to pivot to webinars, most of which were recorded for later viewing. In calendar year 2021, PCUN hosted a total of 12 lively webinars on diverse global topics, from January 27 (a joyous salute to Florence Denmark on her 90th birthday)[4] through October 28 (students at the United Nations).[5] By far, the largest of these global webinars was on March 16, when an estimated 1,000 participants from 29 nations heard Philip Zimbardo of Stanford University discuss the fiftieth anniversary of his 1971 Stanford Prison Experiment.[6]

Psychology Day. In March of 2020, rather than cancel its plans for the 13th annual Psychology Day that May 27, PCUN members chose to shift to a webinar format that could involve participants in other nations – with unprecedented results (below).

New book. In May of 2020, the work of several PCUN members appeared in a new volume on "Behavioral science in the global arena" (Congress et al., 2020). This was designed as a possible textbook, with 16 concise yet data-based chapters, co-authored by 26 contributors from four nations--both seasoned professionals and "rising star" student interns. This was an historic first volume on behavioral science at the UN, covering diverse topics within the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) – including aging, education, gender, health, crime, and climate change.

Book series. In December of 2020, the PCUN board voted unanimously to launch a new book series on "international psychology" at the UN and beyond, with Elaine Congress and Harold Takooshian as series editors.[7] The series aims to achieve several complementary goals: to offer PCUN experts a platform to share their on-going research and insights with UN policy makers and the public; to have these experts mentor student co-authors. PCUN co-signed an agreement with vene-

[4] January 27, 2021. Retrieved from: https://tinyurl.com/y4rqwbhf
[5] October 28, 2021. Retrieved from: https://div52.net/students/students/
[6] March 16, 2021. Retrieved from: https://tinyurl.com/jbhva7e2
[7] PCUN book series. Retrieved from: www.infoagepub.com/series/International-Psychology

rable publisher George F. Johnson of Information Age Publishing (IAP). As of 2022, the series commissioned two more highly focused 14-chapter volumes: (1) *Global mental, spiritual, and social health,* with 36 co-authors from 3 nations (Congress et al., 2022), and (2) *Global health trends and issues,* with 37 co-authors from 8 nations (Congress et al., in press). Based on sales, this IAP book series will seek authors to expand well beyond health to address all 17 SDGs.

Social media. To better publicize its activities, PCUN formed a new social media committee in November of 2021, enlisting technology-savvy UN student interns from diverse institutions: Taylor Mulligan Stark (Pace), Olivia Friedman (Adelphi), Matthew Giblin (Fordham), and Zsuzsanna M. Feher (Chicago School of Professional Psychology). This team has established several exciting ways for individuals across the globe to connect with one another, all of which can be found on the PCUN website.[8]

Figure 1. The revised seal incorporating the precise name of the Psychology Coalition at the UN, designed by graphic artist Arianna Gualario

New logo. In December of 2020, UN Legal Officer Andreas Vaagt advised PCUN to use a more detailed name, consistent with UN guidelines: "The Psychology Coalition of NGOs having Consultative Status with the UN Economic and Social Council." How precise. As a result, PCUN integrated this wording into a new PCUN logo, designed by graphic artist Arianna Gualario (Figure 1.)

Psychology Day at the United Nations

Psychology Day at the UN debuted on Wednesday, October 10, 2007. It was arranged by the American Psychological Association, in cooperation with several other psychology NGOs. Almost 300 participants filled the Dag Hammarskjold Auditorium in the UN Headquarters to hear a series of over 15 panelists, and a keynote address by Professor Gerard Jacobs presenting his research on "Psychology and disaster response."

Since 2007, UN Psychology Day has become an annual event, designed to apply psychological science to diverse issues. For 12 years, these Days drew colleagues and students from around the USA to spend the day at the UN building in Manhattan, to immerse in international psychology for the afternoon, followed by a spirited reception nearby in a New York restaurant that evening. It was common for the President or Executive Officer of APA to participate (Marcotte, 2015).

Though there is no systematic publication of the full presentations in these annual forums, a series of summaries across the past decade are available, thanks to a series of volunteer rapporteurs. This includes the Psychology Days on "Global violence" (Sonmez, 2013), "Sustainable development" (Martinez, 2014), "Re-

[8] PCUN Website: https://psychologycoalitionun.org; PCUN Twitter: https://twitter.com/PCUN_NGOs

ducing health inequities" (Marcotte, 2015), "Global migration crisis" (Marcotte, 2016), "Promoting well-being" (Feher, 2017), "Climate change mitigation" (Richa, Idahosa-Erese, 2018), "Multilateralism" (Sandanapitchai, Takooshian, 2020), and "Post-pandemic building back better" (Sandanapitchai, Takooshian, 2021). Many of these years are also available online as videos before 2020,[9] as well as 2020,[10] 2021,[11] and 2022.[12] APA staff hosted Psychology Day from 2007 until 2020, when it transferred responsibility to PCUN. Much information on Psychology Day appears on its webpage, which continues to be hosted with the APA Office of International Affairs.[13]

Until 2019, these Psychology Days varied in size, from 160 people in the UN Church Center in 2013 up to 400 in massive UN Conference Room 4 in 2019. Starting with the first virtual UNPD in 2020, the number and geographic diversity of participants rose dramatically. On May 27, 2020, the 13th UNPD had 2,763 registrants and over 1,271 participants from 104 nations. On April 15, 2021, the 14th UNPD had 1,941 registrants and over 750 participants from 97 nations. On April 21, 2022, the 15th UNPD had 2,677 registrants and over 640 participants from 107 nations. (Of course these figures are approximate, since more than one individual may be viewing the webinar, and many individuals across different time zones naturally drop in and out during the three hours.)

The theme of the 15th Psychology Day at the UN on April 21, 2022, was "Building hope: Psychological contributions to a roadmap for climate action." This webinar was 180 minutes in four parts: (a) Opening messages from four psychologists and two UN diplomats; (b) Six presentations by psychologists from different regions; (c) an open dialog and Q+A between the experts and participants; (d) a concluding statement.

The Day opened with welcome messages by Dr. David Marcotte in New York City, the President of PCUN, and three Co-Chairs for this Day: Drs. Kalyani Gopal in Indiana, USA, Efrat Neter in Haifa, Israel, and Vera Araújo-Soares in Twente, Netherlands. They thanked the many people who made this Day possible: the organizing and program committees, cosponsor organizations, and the two UN missions that kindly hosted this Day – the Dominican Republic and Mexico.

The diplomatic community was represented by two ambassadors. First, H.E. Abdulla Shahid, who is the President of the 76th session of the UN General Assembly (UNGA), and the Permanent Representative of the Maldives to the UN. He noted his own UNGA Presidential theme of "Building hope," and the importance of optimism to work with psychologists to pursue effective climate action. Second, H.E. Juan Ramon de la Fuente is a psychiatrist, educator, and the Permanent Representative of Mexico to the UN. Dr. de la Fuente noted the recent UN Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change in February of 2022,[14] and the importance of diplomats cooperating with psychologists to address mental

[9] UNPD pre-2020. Retrieved from: http://webtv.un.org/search/11th-annual-psychology-day-at-the-unitednations/5769788009001/?term=psychology%20day&sort=date

[10] UNPD 2020. Retrieved from: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AwZrUpbnZ8c

[11] UNPD 2021. Retrieved from: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z9xR-99IvEs&t=1329s

[12] UNPD 2022. Retrieved from: www.UNPsychologyDay.com

[13] UNPD website. Retrieved from: www.UNPsychologyDay.com

[14] Report. Retrieved from: https://www.ipcc.ch/

health risks due to climate change. Dr. Neter also thanked H.E. Jose A. Blanco, the Permanent Representative of the Dominican Republic to the UN, for his mission's support.

This was followed by five messages by experts in different regions of the globe, and a discussant to tie these together (Figure 2).

Figure 2. UNPD organizers and speakers for 2022: Efrat Neter (Israel), Vera Araujo-Soares (Netherlands), Taylor Mulligan-Stark (USA), Olivia Friedman (USA), Matthew Hornsey (Australia), Ann DeSmet (Belgium), Anju Sara Abraham (India), Wendy Greenspun (USA), Brendon Barnes (South Africa). Missing: Kalyani Gopal (USA), David Marcotte (USA), H.E. Abdulla Shahid (Maldives), H.E. Juan Ramon de la Fuente (Mexico)

1. From Tears to Hope and Courage. *Wendy Greenspun, PhD (USA)* is a clinical psychologist and psychoanalyst who serves on the board of directors of the Climate Psychology Alliance – North America. She is on faculty at Adelphi University and has presented papers and workshops nationally and internationally on climate psychology. Dr. Greenspun discussed the importance of working with emotions to help transform climate grief and distress into meaningful ways to engage and build psychological resilience. Ecological destruction and social injustices, as described by Dr. Greenspun, have similar roots, and have the greatest impact on those who "contribute the least and who have fewest resources to cope." With this recognition, Dr. Greenspun emphasized the importance of listening to historically marginalized voices to build equitable ways forward. She additionally recommended listening to experts and changemakers, listening to young people who will be most at-risk for climate related concerns, and listening to the numerous mental health impacts of climate change and ecological destruction. She outlined psychological obstacles and defenses against facing the enormity of the climate crisis, as well as the various forms of traumatic stress that can emerge. She described the importance of building sustainability of the emotional ecosystem though practices that foster psychological resilience. Resilience strategies can include identifying and processing the difficult emotions, calming and regulating

the nervous system, finding a sense of purpose and meaning, joining with others in connection and community, cultivating sources of replenishment, fostering interconnection with other species and groups of people, and learning from the wisdom and resilience practices of those who have suffered.

2. Psychology and Climate Action In the Global South. *Brendon Barnes, PhD (South Africa)* is a professor at the University of Johannesburg, whose research focuses on psychology, environment, and health in the Global South. He has worked on studies of air pollution, urban housing, lead poisoning, mercury, as well as water and sanitation. Dr. Barnes posed how one might be able to find hope in psychology and climate action, and more specifically, how we can encourage people to change behaviors from destruction as it relates to climate action. To do so, Dr. Barnes indicated that psychology must work with youth involved in climate activism and must engage in greater understanding and respect of local realities and on-the-ground work within climate change movements. Marginalized youth, as shared by Dr. Barnes, have been claiming and reclaiming their voices when excluded, and psychologists would be wise to "reimagine" psychology, specifically by joining with youth and breaking down the misperception that youth, particularly youth in the Global South, are not interested in climate activism. This is where "hope can be found in the margins," as stated by Dr. Barnes. Through his talk, Dr. Barnes shared the undermining and online abuse that activists experience, especially as it relates to gender, age, race, and location. Not only do these activists face such concerns, but they must also fight to ensure their voices are heard within the climate movement. One such activist, whom Dr. Barnes referred to by means of having experienced digital erasure, is Vanessa Nakate. While activists such as Nakate have experienced erasure and digital erasure, they continue to use their agency to use their voices – especially through the lens of intersectional justice. As such, youth activists are engaging in climate intersectional justice that brings together climate justice with social justice, decolonization, gender struggles, and ableism. Dr. Barnes highlighted that although psychologists are delayed in participating in activism on the digital sphere, they can partake in such advocacy by working in an interdisciplinary manner and alongside communities and on-the-ground movements. "Allyship, accompaniment, and stewardship" will be essential to engage in intersectional justice, as indicated by Dr. Barnes. This, in addition to making psychological research and knowledge more "user friendly" to help activists and grass roots movements address misinformation, can allow psychology to be more engaged and responsive.

3. Using Architecture and Design to Promote Mental Health and Enhance Positive Climate Action. *Anju Sara Abraham, MSc, BArch (India)* in an Assistant Professor at SRM Institute of Science and Technology who is trained in Architecture and Environmental Psychology. Ms. Abraham discussed the interdisciplinary approach to architecture and environmental psychology, and highlighted ways in which architecture and design can be used to promote mental health and enhance positive climate psychology. Socially conscious design ideas were shared, which included key themes such as place attachment, sense of place, and place identity. Ms. Abraham observed how architecture and health have received minimal attention and outlined the impact that poor designs (e.g., on housing and transporta-

tion) can have on wellbeing and sense of efficacy. Ms. Abraham indicated the impact that nature restoration can have on health outcomes (e.g., a view of nature from a hospital room vs. a room facing a brick wall) and denoted that architecture and interior design can alter the psychology of humans by affecting wellbeing, job satisfaction, and productivity. As such, she encouraged that the five senses be utilized to ensure sustainable architecture and behavior. Ms. Abraham further described how environmental psychology is crucial within and outside of household settings and encompasses numerous facets – all of which can have significant psychological impacts.

4. Understanding (and Reducing) Climate Change Skepticism. *Matthew Hornsey, PhD (Australia)* is a social psychologist who has published over 170 papers, mostly on themes of intergroup communications, trust, trust repair, sustainability, and climate change. He is the director of the business sustainability initiatives at the University of Queensland in Australia. Dr. Hornsey discussed ways to understand and reduce climate change skepticism by means of looking at what drives climate skeptics and what can draw them into the fight against climate change. He indicated that rather than posing the question of why people may reject science, the question should be framed as why would people want to reject science? By asking the latter question, Dr. Hornsey shared that doing so allows for a focus on what is underneath the surface (attitude roots) – specifically, what may go "unsaid." He described individual preferences for free market ideologies and shared research indicating a correlation between individual preferences for markets to operate in unregulated manners and a lessened likelihood of believing climate change is real. While Dr. Hornsey shared additional variables that predict climate skepticism (e.g., individualism, hierarchies, levels of science literacy, etc.), he indicated that a conservative orientation is the biggest predictor, especially within countries with higher carbon emissions. To address climate skepticism, Dr. Hornsey recommended working with individual perspectives, and used the analogy of Jiu Jitsu by means of creating change through aligning with attitude roots rather than competing with them. He suggested identifying individuals' underlying motivations and finding messages that align with such motivations, which can ultimately result in decreased resistance.

5. Promoting Planetary Health Behaviors by Addressing Spill-over and Shared Underlying Determinants. *Ann DeSmet, PhD (Belgium)* is a psychologist and behavior change researcher with an interest in multi-behavioral interventions. She discussed the correlation between climate change and health, including ways in which climate change affects health outcomes and health behaviors, and ways in which health behaviors can also be utilized to help mitigate climate change. Dr. DeSmet shared the direct impact climate change can have on health (e.g., increased risk of diseases and mental health outcomes based on rising temperatures and air pollution), in addition to indirect impacts on health (e.g., when rising sea levels cause population migration and reduce availability of food, thus leading to an increased risk of conflicts). Dr. DeSmet also indicated a variety of impacts that climate change can have on health behaviors (e.g., decreased availability of nutritious food, sleep, and engagement in outdoor physical activity, and increased risk of alcohol consumption). Through her discussion, Dr. DeSmet highlighted ways

in which changes in lifestyle behaviors can impact both individual and environmental health, and how joint interventions can be created by identifying which health promoting and pro-environmental behaviors tend to co-occur and can be targeted together. Opportunities to address behaviors in interventions to adopt beneficial behaviors were also addressed, which included increasing personal and collective self-efficacy, and using messaging about the consequences on behaviors, which could ultimately result in changing behaviors. For example, framing consequences as being good for one's health may result in change when individuals feel a sense of confidence that they could adopt new behaviors. Similarly, framing consequences as being good for the environment may result in change when individuals feel as though they can make a change as a community through collective efficacy. Incorporating personal values in such messaging was also encouraged.

Following these five speakers, ***Vera Araujo-Soares, PhD (Netherlands),*** Vice President of PCUN, served as a discussant. She spoke about *Bridging Intersectionality Between Psychology and Climate Action*, to highlight key themes from each of the five speakers. The webinar concluded with a moving message of hope and peace shared by ***David Marcotte, SJ, PhD (USA)***.

Conclusion

This UN Psychology Day 2022 was orchestrated by a six-person organizing committee,[15] and sedulous program committee,[16] which conducted a post-event survey of participants. It was hosted by the diplomatic missions of two nations – Mexico and Dominican Republic – and financially cosponsored by 11 psychology organizations.[17] This annual UNPD reached new heights in 2022, in at least a few ways: (a) it offered a welcome message and a four-minute preview to registrants;[18] (b) by popular demand, it offered a certificate of attendance to registrants; (c) for the first time, UNPD offered participants an option for psychology CEUs (continuing education units) through the APA Division of Clinical Psychology, where Kalyani Gopal, PhD, serves as President.[19]

Looking back on 2020–2022, it is clear that the dire two-year global pandemic proved to be a time of unprecedented growth in both the ten-year history of PCUN and the 15-year history of its Psychology Day at the UN.

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[15] UNPD organizing committee: Kalyani Gopal, Efrat Neter, Vera Araujo-Soares, Olivia Friedman, Taylor Mulligan, Josephine Juanamarga.

[16] PCUN program committee: Dorothy Addae, Comfort Asanbe, Vera Araujo-Soares, Kim Baranowski, Michelle Bell, Irina Feygina, Roseanne Flores, Olivia Friedman, Ayorkor Gaba, Matthew Giblin, Kalyani Gopal, Cynthia Grguric, Rashmi Jaipal, Elizabeth Kloner, Sheri Levi, Taylor Mulligan, Efrat Neter, Viviane Pecanha, Leslie Popoff, Nelida Quintero, Mrugal Shinde, Sonia Suchday, Victoria Sharpe, Janet Sigal, Walter Reichman, Joanke van Helden, Carmen I. Vazquez.

[17] UNPD cosponsors: The American Psychological Association, and its five divisions of psychoanalysis (39), clinical (12), international (52), social issues (9), and general psychology (1); European Health Psychology Society (EHPS), International Association of Applied Psychology (IAAP), International Council of Psychologists (ICP), and OrgVitality, Psi Chi.

[18] UNPD preview. Retrieved from: https://www.unpsychologyday.com/

[19] CEUs. Retrieved from: https://div12.org/live-webinars/

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Научный репортаж

Возрождение надежды: День психологии – 2021 в ООН, посвященный борьбе с изменением климата*[20]

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Аннотация. В 2022 г. Коалиция психологов в Организации Объединенных Наций (Psychology Coalition at the United Nations, PCUN) отметила свое десятилетие, поставив перед собой задачу применить психологическую науку к решению глобальных проблем. Несмотря на глобальные ограничения в связи с пандемией COVID-19, с марта 2020 г. деятельность PCUN в этом направлении не прекратилась, а, скорее, активизировалась. Данный репортаж состоит из двух частей, в которых представлены краткие обзоры: 1) резкого роста активности PCUN с 2020 г.; 2) 15-го Ежегодного Дня психологии в ООН 21 апреля 2022 г., посвященного теме «Возрождение надежды: вклад психологии в борьбу с изменением климата».

Ключевые слова: климат, Организация Объединенных Наций, День психологии, пандемия COVID-19, неправительственные организации

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