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YEF | YOUTH EMPOWERMENT FORUM 2026 | GENEVA, SWITZERLAND

Event Highlights Report

Geneva, Switzerland | 3–6 September 2026

Organized by the Center for Global Dialogue & Leadership (CGDL)

Executive Summary

The Youth Empowerment Forum (YEF) 2026, organized by the Center for Global Dialogue & Leadership (CGDL), brought together more than 100 young leaders and changemakers from around the world for four days of learning, dialogue, and international exchange in Geneva, Switzerland (3–6 September 2026, Mövenpick Hotel Geneva) – the second, larger edition of the Forum following its 2025 debut.

The program combined structured policy dialogue, expert-led workshops, and institutional visits to the World Trade Organization (WTO) and the International Labour Organization (ILO).

Delegates heard from keynote speakers and ambassadors, joined a high-level panel and hands-on leadership workshops, and competed in a UN SDGs Grant Pitch Competition, before closing with a Cultural Showcase and Graduation Ceremony. Master of Ceremonies Silia Taider guided the program throughout.



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Day 01 – Arrival & Global Connections

3 September 2026 | Orientation, Registration & Opening Ceremony

Delegates arrived from around the world and checked in, followed by registration and merchandise distribution. The Grand Opening Ceremony welcomed delegates to Geneva and introduced the Forum's objectives, followed by a networking session and Welcome Dinner.

The Opening Ceremony featured keynote remarks from two ambassadors, setting the tone for the Forum's focus on multilateral cooperation and youth engagement in diplomacy:

Geraldo Gonçalves Miguel Saranga – Permanent Representative of Mozambique to the UN

Shared perspectives on Mozambique's engagement with the multilateral system and the role of youth in advancing sustainable development and international cooperation.

Pratana Disyatat – Ambassador and Deputy Permanent Representative of Thailand to the UN

Addressed the importance of international partnerships and the role emerging leaders play in shaping inclusive, forward-looking policy.





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Day 02 – Global Institutions, International Cooperation & Cultural Exchange

4 September 2026 | Institutional Visits & Briefings

Day Two gave delegates first-hand exposure to international organizations through institutional visits and briefings in Geneva, a global center of diplomacy and multilateral cooperation.

World Trade Organization (WTO) Study Visit & Briefing

Delegates visited WTO headquarters for a briefing led by Timothy Adamson, External Relations Officer, and Maryna Katiukha of the Information and External Relations Division, both at the World Trade Organization. They explained how the multilateral trading system works – how trade rules are negotiated, how disputes are settled, and how WTO's work connects to sustainable, inclusive growth. The session highlighted current opportunities for young people to engage with the WTO, including its internship and Young Professionals Programme, research and fellowship routes into trade policy, and ways to follow WTO negotiations after the Forum, closing with an open Q&A.

International Labour Organization (ILO) Study Visit & Briefing

In the afternoon, delegates visited ILO Headquarters for a guided tour and briefing led by Sara Elder, Head of the Employment Analysis and Economic Policy Unit, and Esha Moitra, Youth Employment and Engagement Officer, both at the International Labour Organization (ILO) Headquarters. Their session focused on youth employment as a distinct policy area: the scale of global youth unemployment and informality, the school-to-work transition, the ILO's Global Initiative on Decent Jobs for Youth, and how labour standards reach young workers. They also shared their own career paths at the ILO and encouraged delegates to consider internships and traineeships, closing with a Q&A on youth unemployment in delegates' own countries.

The day concluded with dinner at the Mövenpick Hotel Geneva.





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Day 03 – Dialogue, Skills & Collaboration

5 September 2026 | Panels, Workshops & the SDG Grant Pitch Competition



Day Three was the Forum's full conference day: a high-level panel, a keynote address, two leadership workshops, the UN SDGs Grant Pitch Competition, and the Cultural Showcase and Graduation Ceremony.

High-Level Panel Discussion: "Global Minds in Conversation"

Held on 5 September, the High-Level Panel Discussion was moderated by Festina Kurteshi and brought together four experts in international relations, international law, diplomacy, negotiations, global governance, and youth engagement. Each panelist was given approximately ten minutes to respond to a question from the moderator, followed by an open Q&A with delegates.



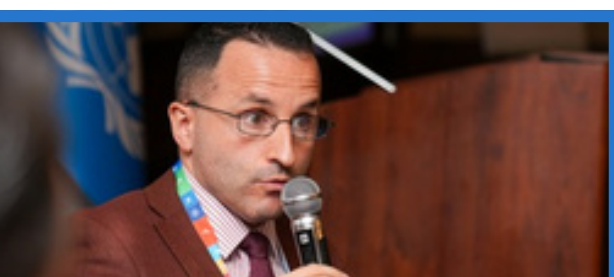
Prof. Adnan Beqiri – Professor of International Relations, Academic Writing, and Critical Thinking, formerly Senior Academic Manager at the Geneva School of Diplomacy and International Relations and a US Army Linguist and Political Advisor, now Head of Academics at the Geneva-based Statecraft Institute. He addressed the principles that should guide international decision-making amid geopolitical tensions and competing interests, focusing on international ethics and the role of critical thinking in international relations.



Prof. Alfred de Zayas – former senior lawyer at the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights and former UN Independent Expert on the International Order, author of 12 books including Building a Just World Order, and Professor at the Geneva School of Diplomacy. He examined whether the UN system can adapt to the realities of the 21st century, and what changes would make it more effective, legitimate, and representative.



Prof. Octavia Cercez – professor, researcher, diplomat, and international policy expert with more than 20 years of experience, having served as a negotiator and chairperson of high-level committees within the United Nations, the World Trade Organization, and the European Union, and advised the Romanian Government during EU accession. She reflected on the power of meaningful dialogue in international relations and how conversation can turn differences into cooperation.



Dr. Blerim Mustafa – expert in post-Cold War self-determination with over a decade of experience across more than 20 countries, including work with UNHCR and IOM, holder of a Ph.D. in International Relations and Politics from the University of Leicester, and currently Advisory Vice Rector at the Geneva Nations Institute. He discussed the evolving role of young people in global governance, the structural barriers limiting their meaningful engagement, and their contribution to more peaceful and sustainable societies.

The session closed with a Q&A in which delegates put questions directly to the panelists, and with the moderator's reflection on curiosity, dialogue, and translating ideas into action beyond the Forum.

Day 03 – Dialogue, Skills & Collaboration

5 September 2026 | Panels, Workshops & the SDG Grant Pitch Competition

Keynote Address

Ambassador Phaswana Cleopus Sello Moloto, Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Republic of South Africa, delivered the Day Three keynote following the panel and a coffee break.



Workshop: "Bilateral, Multilateral, or Both? Humanitarian Diplomacy in International Geneva"

Facilitator: Magdalena Mactus

Delegates explored three channels for moving influence in diplomacy – Bilateral (direct, fast, leverage-dependent), Multilateral (pooled, rules-based, slower), and Hybrid (a bloc pooling its own power outside the multilateral system) – grounded in the 2021 COVID-19 vaccine case (bilateral deals by China, Russia, and India; the multilateral COVAX mechanism; and the hybrid African Vaccine Acquisition Trust). Delegates worked in pods on each track and reported back their findings.



Workshop: "From Ideas to Impact: Be a Change Maker"

Speaker: Fiorina Mugione

Fiorina Mugione shared her own journey from Salerno, Italy, to an international career, then guided delegates through five core leadership skills – self-awareness, critical thinking, communication, collaboration, and courage to act. Delegates applied these in a simulated crisis exercise (allocating emergency funds after flooding and drought), closing with a self-assessment and case studies of young changemakers Marcus Rashford and Memory Banda.



UN SDGs Grant Pitch Competition – \$1,000 USD

Delegates pitched community projects aligned with the SDGs before an evaluation panel, judged on innovation, feasibility, sustainability, impact, scalability, and leadership potential.

Grant Winner – Gábor Henry Raschberger, "Safe Solar Nigeria"

Gábor Henry Raschberger won the USD 1,000 grant for Safe Solar Nigeria: Improving Solar Safety through Practical Education in Northern Nigeria. The project responds to a research gap – most households and businesses in the region rely on private solar home systems with little access to safe installation and maintenance guidance – through 12 professional videos in English and Hausa, shared free on social media under #safesolarnigeria. The grant will fund production and distribution, aiming to prevent accidents, extend system lifespan, and improve the reliability and equity of solar energy use.

Cultural Showcase & Graduation Ceremony

The day closed with the Cultural Showcase – celebrating the delegation's diversity through traditional attire, music, and performances – combined with the Graduation Ceremony, where delegates received their Certificates of Participation. Silia Taider served as Master of Ceremonies throughout the four days.



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Day 4 – Closing & Departure

6 September 2026 | Closing & Farewells

The final day began with breakfast, followed by check-out and departures. Delegates reflected on the relationships and ideas built over the four-day program as they prepared to return home.



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Forum Outcomes

Through four days of intensive learning, dialogue, and collaboration, delegates:

- Strengthened leadership and communication skills
- Gained first-hand exposure to international institutions, including the WTO and ILO
- Engaged directly with ambassadors and senior diplomats from South Africa, Mozambique, and Thailand
- Explored frameworks for bilateral, multilateral, and hybrid humanitarian diplomacy
- Developed practical solutions to global challenges through the UN SDGs Grant Pitch Competition
- Expanded international professional networks and formed lasting connections