

APA AT THE UNITED NATIONS – 2023 ANNUAL REPORT

Background

Accreditation

APA is an accredited nongovernmental organization (NGO) at the United Nations (UN) where it holds special consultative status with the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) and is associated with the UN Department of Global Communications (DGC).

Representatives

APA supports representatives in New York and Geneva:

New York <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Irina Feygina, PhD (Lead Representative)• Natalie Rykiel, MSc, MA (Graduate Intern)• Comfort Asanbe, PhD (term ends 2024)• Kim Baranowski, PhD (2029)• Michelle Bell, PsyD (2025)• Roseanne Flores, PhD (2023)• Ayorkor Gaba, PsyD (2024)• Rashmi Jaipal, PhD (2023)• Heidi Kar, PhD (2029)• Moshood Olanrewaju, PhD (2029)• Nelida Quintero, PhD (2023)	Geneva (co-organized with the European Federation of Psychologists' Associations and the Federation of Swiss Psychologists) <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Tobias Brosch, PhD (term ends 2028)• Odile Frank, ScD (2029)• Yeniffer Rosas, MA (2023)
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Structure within APA

APA staff in Washington, D.C. are also engaged at the UN, particularly Senior Director for International Affairs, Amanda Clinton, PhD, and Senior International Affairs Officer, Gabriel Twose, PhD, who serves as the Association's Main Representative to the UN. Staff aid in creating a UN advocacy strategy and coordinate the representatives in New York and Geneva, ensuring they are linked to the rest of APA to benefit from available resources.

The UN teams report through the Committee for Global Psychology (CGP). Irina Feygina, Lead UN Representative in New York, attends CGP meetings and Elizabeth Louis, PhD, served as the 2023 CGP liaison to the UN: New York team, attending all meetings.

Engagement and Accomplishments on Strategic Priorities

APA's representatives and staff bring psychological science to bear on the work of the UN through fostering dialogue and information exchange among APA, UN staff, and member state representatives. The team educates and raises awareness on the value of psychological science, and works toward concrete, measurable outcomes, such as the passage of psychologically-informed resolutions, reports, and outcome documents.

APA's work at the UN primarily promotes [Strategic Goals](#): 1) *Utilize psychology to make a positive impact on critical societal issues*, and 2) *Elevate the public's understanding of, regard for, and use of psychology*, as well as the Operating Principle to *Embrace a global perspective*.

This annual report will briefly summarize some of APA's major accomplishments at the UN in 2023 broken up by the priority areas of global mental health, climate change, and stigma and discrimination.

Global Mental Health

APA's UN Representatives collaborated with the Global Psychology Alliance (GPA) and the Psychology Coalition at the UN (PCUN) to play a crucial role in the historic June 26 passage of the UN General Assembly Resolution on mental health and psychosocial support (A/77/L.77, attached separately)

Introduced by the Permanent Mission of Mexico to the UN, the Resolution is a vital step forward in recognizing the global importance of mental health. For example, the Resolution:

- Frames mental health as a human rights issue, acknowledging that, "good mental health and well-being cannot be defined by the absence of a mental health condition but rather by an environment that enables persons to live a life in which their inherent dignity is respected, with full enjoyment of their rights."
- Incorporates social determinants of health, urging Member States to "address the underlying social, economic and environmental determinants of health, including mental health and to address holistically the range of barriers arising from underdevelopment, the lack of economic opportunities, and inadequate investment, poverty and inequalities and discrimination that impede the full enjoyment of human rights in the context of mental health."
- Encourages Member States to, "strengthen national health systems to...address...mental health and well-being, through the provision of mental health services and psychosocial support, for achieving universal health coverage, including in their response to and recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic, and ensure adequate response to future health emergencies."

APA and GPA provided input to the Mexican Mission as the Resolution was being developed in 2022, and then joined together with the Psychology Coalition at the United Nations (PCUN) to advocate for the Resolution's passage after it was introduced in 2023. Eighteen members of the GPA assigned high-level leaders of their Associations to partner with an APA or PCUN member in requesting a meeting with the UN Missions from their countries. For example, representatives of the Association of Psychologists of Nepal met with the Nepalese Mission to the UN, accompanied by UN experts from APA.

The 18 invitations led to 10 virtual meetings – with the UN Missions from Canada, Hungary, Mexico, Nepal, Nigeria, the Philippines, the Republic of Ireland, Trinidad and Tobago, the United States, and Uruguay. This success rate of more than 50% is extremely high in the UN context where many governments are reluctant to meet with civil society organizations, reflecting the fruitful strategy of partnering with national psychology associations and leveraging local expertise specific to each country. GPA members who were unable to secure meetings sent letters to their Missions advocating for their support of the Resolution.

The meetings were extremely productive in educating UN Missions about the relevance of mental health in their countries and the importance of voting for the General Assembly Resolution. All Missions supported the Resolution and seven (Canada, Hungary, Mexico, Philippines, Ireland, USA, Uruguay) cosponsored.

The passage of the Resolution was a vital step for the advancement of mental health around the world. Moreover, APA, GPA, and PCUN laid the groundwork for strong relationships and future collaboration

with UN Missions. For example, the Nigerian Mission requested support in implementing the Resolution at the national level and the Uruguayan Mission asked for assistance promoting mental health at the UN more generally.

The APA UN team has also begun to build partnerships with UNICEF and United for Global Mental Health to support Member State implementation of the resolution.

Climate Change

In January, Representatives from APA's UN teams in New York and Geneva collaborated to draft a [document on best practices in risk communication](#). Grounded in psychological science, the document advised governments to: Create communications that are clear, concise, and relevant; identify and address barriers to engagement; provide solutions, motivate, and empower action; and tell compelling stories through trusted messengers. The document was conveyed to the Risk Knowledge Team at the UN [Office for Disaster Risk Reduction](#).

In February, APA responded to a UN [Committee on the Rights of the Child](#) call for input into their [draft general comment on children's rights and the environment](#) with a special focus on climate change. [APA's letter](#) commended the Committee on the general comment and recommended additional examples of the mental health harms of climate change (which the committee incorporated), as well as more detail on early childhood, data collection, and family stress.

In March, a Representative from the UN team in Geneva acted as an APA observer at the 58th session of the Intergovernmental Panel for Climate Change (IPCC), in which member states finalized the IPCC 6th Assessment Report summary for policymakers. Of special interest for the psychological community were the elements of the report that discussed the importance of addressing the impacts of climate change on mental health and the elements that highlighted the importance of using behavior change interventions to promote climate mitigation.

In November, APA partnered with the UN's [SDG Lab](#), the [European Federation of Psychologists Associations](#), the [Federation of Swiss Psychologists](#), and the [Swiss Center for Affective Sciences](#) to organize an event at the Palais des Nations in Geneva on [Emotions: A missing link towards long-term sustainability?](#) Part of the SDG Lab's *So What's Next* series, the event investigated the role of emotions in promoting sustainable behaviors. Speakers included psychologists and policymakers, who addressed three overarching questions: (1) How can we better understand what motivates action; (2) Which emotions are most likely to trigger pro-sustainability behaviors? And (3) How can this knowledge be applied to practical policymaking?

Stigma and Discrimination

In February, APA partnered with the Society for the Psychological Study of Social Issues (Division 9 of APA) to [provide feedback](#) to the UN [Expert Mechanism to Advance Racial Justice and Equality in the Context of Law Enforcement](#) on policing in the US. The feedback explained how psychological dynamics underlie racism, and how these dynamics contribute to and result from disproportionate use of force by police officers against people of African descent. The letter concluded with policy recommendations regarding training, community policing, mental health, data collection, reporting procedures, organizational partnerships, and oversight.

In June, [APA sent a letter](#) to the Ugandan Ambassador to the UN in New York opposing Uganda's recent Anti-Homosexuality Bill. Drawing on the International Psychology Network for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Intersex Issues (IPsyNet) Statement and Commitment, the letter makes clear that decades of research demonstrates that LGBTIQ+ identities and expressions are normal and healthy variations of human functioning and relationships and condemns discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation or gender identity. It states that homosexuality is a normal expression of human sexuality, is generally not chosen, is highly resistant to change, and that the human rights of sexual and gender minority people should be respected in order to protect their mental and physical health.

In August, APA [submitted comments](#) to the [Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination's call for feedback](#) into their draft General Recommendation no. 37 on racial discrimination in the enjoyment of the right to health. The comments supported the draft document and made a number of suggestions. For example, the letter explained the importance of including a psychologically-informed multilevel definition of racism, suggested expanding on the underlying psychological dynamics and consequences of racism, and called for the adoption of more culturally responsive health systems.

In May, APA partnered with the Permanent Mission of South Africa to the UN and the US Department of State to host a virtual side event at the [Permanent Forum on People of African Descent](#) entitled [Leaving no-one behind: Advancing the health and well-being of people of African descent](#). Speakers included APA President Thema Bryant, PhD, South African Ambassador Mathu Joyini, Commissioner of the U.S. Administration on Children, Youth and Families Rebecca Jones Gaston and South African researcher Neziswa Titi, PhD. They argued that people of African descent disproportionately experience systematic barriers in a variety of domains, hindering achievement of the SDGs and requiring interventions at policy and psychological levels.

In February, a Representative from the UN team in Geneva responded to a request from the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) to provide OHCHR staff an overview of the ways in which behavioral science can enhance public policy making. The subsequent discussion explored the potential for concrete collaborations and further interactions.

Additional Initiatives

Work at the UN requires a balance between being strategic and opportunistic. Accordingly, although it was not a priority area, members of APA's team at the United Nations and staff at the Office of Applied Psychology facilitated a January brainstorming session between members of Division 14: [The Society for Industrial Organizational Psychology \(SIOP\)](#) and staff at UN [#NewWork](#), which is a grass-roots campaign to transform workplace culture at the UN. SIOP members provided advice to #New Work on what psychological science tells us about how to: measure culture change, inspire innovation and flexibility, and connect silos within the UN system.

Additionally, APA was delighted to welcome Fernando de la Mora Salcedo (then Team Leader for Human Rights and Humanitarian Affairs at the Office of the President of the United Nations General Assembly) to the APA Convention, where he participated in the annual symposium on APA's work at the UN and a roundtable discussion on global psychology. He also met with global psychology leaders from around the world to speak about the relevance of the UN for psychology and psychology for the UN.

APA UN Representatives attended numerous in-person engagements at the UN and Missions including, Civil Society Townhall meetings and the US Mission to the UN’s NGO briefing on October 5th.

In May, APA produced a cross-cutting [booklet to explain psychology’s relevance to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals \(SDGs\)](#). The SDGs were adopted by all 193 Member States in 2015 as a blueprint for human progress in the 21st century. The goals are typically conceptualized as international development issues, with scientific input occasionally being drawn from the “hard” sciences. However, as the science of the mind and behavior, psychology is relevant to virtually all of the goals. Envisioning how to improve the lives of everyone, everywhere requires an understanding of how human behavior, policy, and environmental factors interact to contribute to or hold back progress. The booklet explains key psychological research and provides science-based recommendations to the UN community to address these issues.

NGO Committees

Some of APA’s work at the UN in New York takes place through [NGO Committees](#). APA Representatives are active in the following committees:

Name	UN/NGO affiliation
Comfort Asanbe, PhD	Department of Global Communications
Kim Baranowski, PhD	Psychology Coalition at the United Nations
Michelle Bell, PsyD	NGO Committee on Migration
Roseanne Flores, PhD	NGO Committee on Children’s Rights NGO Committee on the Status of Women
Ayorkor Gaba, PsyD	NGO Committee on the Family UN Office on Drugs and Crime
Rashmi Jaipal, PhD	NGO Committee on Migration, Subcommittee on combating xenophobia and racism NGO Committee on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, Health Subcommittee NGO Committee on Sustainable Development
Heidi Kar, PhD	
Nelida Quintero, PhD	NGO Committee on Aging Habitat Civil Society Working Group
Moshood Olanrewaju, PhD	NGO Committee on Migration, Subcommittee on Migrants in Vulnerable Situations / Mixed Migration

For more details, please contact Gabriel Twose at gtwose@apa.org.