Connecting youth with the SDGs onboard Peace Boat
Peace Boat US gives individuals the opportunity to learn about ongoing global issues such as climate change, poverty, gender inequality and sustainable development. The non-profit organization works to build a culture of peace by connecting people across borders and creating opportunities for learning, activism, and cooperation. Individuals from around the world participate in Global Voyages onboard the Peace Boat ship, traveling to more than 100 countries per year.

The 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the United Nations provide a clear vision of what is needed to achieve the world we yearn for, and as an NGO in Special Consultative Status with the UN, Peace Boat is committed to helping achieve this vision. This year, Peace Boat conducted its 94th Global Voyage, with 15 students serving as SDGs youth advocates joining 1,000 other participants onboard. This “Peace Education and the UN Sustainable Development Goals in Latin America” summer program was held from June 20 – July 3, 2017. It enabled participants to learn firsthand about global topics such as conflict prevention, environmental degradation, indigenous culture, refugee issues and gender equality. Participants experienced grassroots peacebuilding efforts aimed at finding non-violent, creative, and constructive solutions, both locally and globally.

Part of the program was held on land in Panama, Nicaragua and El Salvador, and another part was held on Peace Boat’s passenger ship as it sailed through the Panama Canal. Throughout the program, participants exchanged ideas, discussed collaborative initiatives for sustainable development, learned about diverse cultural heritages, and met with United Nations officials and local communities to discuss the SDGs.

Learn more about the Peace Boat US summer program through this 2017 report, and join future efforts with the organization to help achieve the UN Sustainable Development Goals by 2030.
Lecture and Debriefing on the SDGs in Latin America at United Nations Development Program Regional Office in Panama City

The United Nations Development Program’s regional office in Latin America is located in the “City of Knowledge” in Panama. Peace Boat US participants visited the office to listen to presentations given by representatives from the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), the United Nations Environment Program (UNEP) and United Nations Volunteer Program (UNV). Speakers introduced the Sustainable Development Goals, the UN environment program for sustainability that contributes to the understanding of the importance of the goals in different regions, as well as of challenges such as data gathering and measurement of nationwide progress. A specialist on Peace and Citizen Security, Ms. Romeral Ortiz, introduced the UN Volunteer program to the participants and talked about youth empowerment through volunteering opportunities with the United Nations worldwide.
Exchange with Youth from the Relief & Resilience, Education, Transition (RET) Council

In Panama, Peace Boat US participants met with a diverse group of young people from the non-profit organization Relief & Resilience, Education, Transition (RET). As a non-governmental organization, RET works towards the protection of vulnerable youth and refugees through education. Although there was a language barrier, the youth were able to connect through their shared values and dedication to the Sustainable Development Goals. Together, the groups participated in various activities embodying the values of the SDGs.

The exchange was an invaluable way for both groups to gain exposure to other cultures and languages, and empathize with the struggles and experiences of others. Peace Boat donated a soccer ball from the One World Play project to foster friendship through sports. Peace Boat often supports local communities through their sports program Peace Ball, which donates soccer balls to communities in need and encourages youth to exchange through soccer games held in various countries around the world.

The group visited San Miguelito, an area with high rates of youth violence and crime. Thanks to workshops and open air activities, the groups interacted and learned about actions and problems facing the SDGs, practiced teamwork, and shared ideas for personal actions to achieve the SDGs.

RET is composed of young refugees and asylum seekers who come mainly from Panama’s neighboring countries such as Colombia. Many seek asylum from dangers in their home country, only to come to Panama and experience new hardships: insufficient access to quality education (Goal 4), equality (Goal 10), and interaction with strong institutions (Goal 17). Refugees in Panama may enter educational institutions that lack awareness about the lives and conditions of refugees. With lack of insight into an individual’s previous background, it’s harder for these institutions to help refugees assimilate to their environment. Consequently, refugees are more often criminalized and discriminated against by police, teachers, and citizens. Organizing and educating are important tools to overcome this.
During the Peace Boat US stay in Panama, participants had the opportunity to visit governmental institutions such as the Mayor’s office. The group met Lorena Gomez, vice director of civil security, who touched on issues of maintaining peace within communities through SDG 17 for Partnerships. Panama has established a program called “Youth to Youth”, a violence prevention program established with the goal of helping young people and their families realize their full potential. Participants learned about specific initiatives, youth campaigns, and activities. The establishment of peace must begin with peacebuilding efforts at a young age to promote a safe and healthy society. This program emphasizes the importance of preventing violence and conflict before it emerges, in alignment with SDG 16 (Peace and Security). Another program called “Live with Purpose”, also includes about 120 students ranging from ages 15-16 years old. The program works with parents and other family members to establish a supportive environment where students are encouraged and recognized as leaders by loved ones. The Panama City Mayor’s office works on SDG 9 through SDG 11, demonstrating the impact of infrastructure on the safety of the community and its sustainability.
Study program on Sustainable Development with the Embera Quera indigenous community in Panama

Peace Boat US participants visited the Embera Quera indigenous community and supported their educational programs by collecting school supplies in New York and donating them to the local elementary school in the village. Members of the community spoke about the value of receiving an education both within the community and beyond it. Their stories represented the necessity of implementing SDG 4 for quality education.

Donations were made upon the request from the community, as Peace Boat maintains a policy of delivering aid only in close consultation with local partners about their precise needs. Peace Boat US also donated soccer balls from the One World Play Project to contribute to the children’s wellbeing. SDG 3 promotes health and wellbeing. For children all over the world, being able to go outdoors, play, and learn is a part of development from the early stages of growth into adulthood for a healthy mind and body.

Participants gained a true understanding the meaning of SDG 11 for sustainable cities and communities after volunteering to help rebuild one of the community houses destroyed by a recent forest fire. Peace Boat youth worked together as a team to gather sand for construction of new houses.

http://www.emberaquera.net
ONBOARD ACTIVITIES

Traveling on Peace Boat, sailing for SDG 17 focused on Partnerships for the Goals

Peace Boat participants embarked the ship on June 25th. While sailing, Peace Boat provides various educational programs on human rights, gender equality, peacebuilding, and sustainable development. Guest speakers give lectures and organize workshops onboard; thus, the Peace Boat becomes a vehicle for both partnerships and education, bringing diverse cultures and ages together. Through such educational programs, participants learn more about various social, cultural, and political issues in the countries that Peace Boat visits. Promotion of SDG 4 for quality education, and SDG number 17, partnerships for the goals, is an important part of Peace Boat’s mission.

Crossing the Panama Canal from the Atlantic to Pacific Ocean

After embarking on Peace Boat, the ship passed through the Panama Canal. The original canal was constructed one hundred years ago as a gateway connecting the Pacific and Atlantic oceans and opening the Americas up for international trade. There are three lock gates for the canal, each taking a significant amount of time to pass through. Participants watched the first opening of the Panama Canal gates and reflected on the role of the canal in international trade. The canal is the opening point of importance for infrastructure within society – SDG 9.
Onboard presentation about the UN Sustainable Development Goals and Ocean Conference

To raise awareness amongst the civil society members traveling on the Peace Boat, participants gave a one-hour presentation onboard the ship about the SDGs called “Peace Education and the Sustainable Development Goals in Latin America,” exemplifying SDG 4 for quality education. The seventeen goals were divided among Peace Boat US interns and participants according to their areas of interest. Each person made a brief introduction of the chosen goal, elaborating on the idea of how it relates to sustainable development. Spreading awareness of the SDGs is important because citizens of all UN Member States are stakeholders in the implementation of the goals, and should take part in the transformation of the world for a better future. By participating in the presentation, the youth set an example for the current generation of how to work towards the implementation of the SDGs. Youth also presented on the 2017 UN Ocean Conference, which focused on SDG 14- Life Below Water and Marine Conservation. Every person makes a difference and can contribute to the transformation of the world by raising awareness and sharing information with others. Peace Boat was the first international NGO to make a voluntary commitment at the UN Ocean Conference to build the Ecoship, a project to create the world’s first sustainable cruise ship that will reduce its CO2 emissions by 40% and support marine conservation and education while sailing as a flagship for the SDGs.

The Hibakusha Project for a Nuclear Free World Testimony session with survivors from Hiroshima and Nagasaki

In support of SDG 16- Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions, Peace Boat invites Hibakusha to travel with the ship to share their testimony around the world. Hibakusha are survivors of the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in Japan. During the session, the SDG youth listened to the testimony of Toshiko Tanaka, who was on her way to school one morning in Hiroshima when the bomb hit 500 meters from where she was. All of her classmates were killed by the impact, but she survived with severe burns on her arms and face. Following her testimony, a Q & A session with the Hibakusha was held. Topics included differing perspectives on history and nuclear developments occurring around the world today. Peace Boat continuously educates youth about war and postwar issues to work towards a nuclear-free future. Peace Boat participated in a historic conference to negotiate a nuclear-ban treaty at the United Nations in June of 2017 and invited Hibakusha from Hiroshima and Nagasaki to give their testimonies to UN delegates and Member States.
At the port of Corinto, Nicaragua, Peace Boat passengers were welcomed with music and smiles from community. The SDG youth went on an eco-cycling tour around town, viewing the sights and interacting with local people from the country. The tour stopped by a beach, where the participants sampled the local cuisine and watched a beautiful sunset by the ocean. In the evening, Peace Boat participants enjoyed the marketplace and participated in a cultural exchange with locals through music and dance.
Learning about Indigenous Culture and Education in El Salvador

The Peace Boat youth scholars visited a primary school in Santo Domingo de Guzmán in Sonsonete, El Salvador and learned about a program to support the use of the indigenous language Pipil (natively Nawat) and the efforts to provide quality education in rural areas, supported by the University of Don Bosco.

In 1932, people of different backgrounds, including the indigenous, were killed after protests against unequal wealth distribution. This led many indigenous people to reject their native tongue out of fear of being killed. As a result, few people today know the culture of Nawat—fewer than one hundred people can speak it fluently. The government hopes to preserve the language by having older native speakers teach young children how to speak the language. Many of the lessons the children are taught rely heavily on songs and visuals.

Participants were given the opportunity to observe two classes before participating in a children’s game with the students. Participants learned the value of maintaining cultural diversity and indigenous traditions. Reduced inequalities is one of the aims of SDG 10. After interacting with children, participants visited the waterfall in Santo Domingo de Guzman with community members and a group of young reporters from Canal 10 TVES.
A visit to the University of Don Bosco, San Salvador

Participants visited the University of Don Bosco in San Salvador and attended a lecture on the role of youth in El Salvadorian politics. During this lecture, they learned about the civil war and history of El Salvador, as well as about SDG 16, which focuses on peace, justice and strong institutions. The University of Don Bosco has been partnering with Peace Boat US since 2013 to create educational programs in El Salvador with students from the United States and other countries.

Onboard Forum: Youth, Development, and Leadership to achieve the SDGs

Peace Boat US invited members from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs along with professors from the University of Don Bosco and USAM to participate in an onboard Peace Forum to discuss the role of government and civil society in achieving the SDGs in Latin America. Students from the institutions participated and reflected on their own personal actions to achieve the SDGs and peace in El Salvador.

Youth Scholar Milka Rodriguez, who was one of the SDGs Youth Scholarship recipients this year, gave a presentation about her experience learning about the SDGs on Peace Boat. During Ms. Rodriguez’s presentation on SDG 6, the audience learned that by 2050, it is projected that at least one in four people will be affected by recurring water shortages. Ensuring universal access to safe and affordable drinking water for all by 2030 requires we invest in adequate infrastructure, provide sanitation facilities, and encourage hygiene at every level. Ms. Rodriguez also presented on SDG 15 for Life on Land. During this presentation, students learned how promoting the sustainable management of forests and halting deforestation is also vital to mitigate water scarcity. More international cooperation is needed to encourage restoration of terrestrial ecosystems in developing countries. Urgent action must be taken to reduce the loss of natural habitats and biodiversity that are part of our common heritage.
Visit to Panchimalco

Participants met the mayor of Panchimalco, Mr. Mario Melendez, who is developing the town through programs that include painting and sculpture with youth. He led the group on a tour around the town to visit a sculpture park, teach the participants about local history, and explain the important role that art plays in building peace and strengthening community ties. Through presentations, various youth groups also introduced their local folklore and the use of art as a violence prevention tool at the town’s cultural center. Panchimalco, participants discovered, is a beautiful colonial town where art and history meet to build a peaceful future.

Visit to USAM and learning about the traditions in El Salvador

Participants visited the Alberto Masferrer Salvadorian University (USAM) in San Salvador and attended presentations by students about the civil war, and the past conflict between the government and the left wing guerrilla group Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front (FMLN), a civil war that lasted for more than 12 years and saw extreme violence from both sides with more than 75,000 killed. They also learned about the country’s 1992 peace agreement and ongoing efforts to sustain this peace. Students presented about Salvadorian culture and traditions, with dance and music performances and an art exhibition from students and the different environmental projects developed at the university.
The Ojushte project in San Isidro to preserve the Mayan Nut

After participating in a ritual to learn about the local indigenous cosmovision and connection with nature, the group visited the Maya Nut Institute—a nonprofit organization founded in 2001 with the aim of finding balance between people, food and forests. The institute teaches rural communities about the value of the Maya Nut (the seed of a tropical rainforest tree, Brosimum alicastrum) for food, fodder, ecosystems and income. Women are the primary beneficiaries of the programs. The institute works with women because they are a critical link between the family and the environment, and because they are primarily responsible for the health of the family. The institute carries out programs focusing on healthy kids, healthy forests, green ranching, reforestation, education and product certification.

Visit to Jewel of Cerén archaeological site

The group visited the archaeological site Joya de Cerén in La Libertad, El Salvador. Because of the exceptional condition of the remains, they provide an insight into the daily lives of the Central American indigenous populations who worked the land at that time, and the site has been maintained due to layers of ash after a volcanic eruption.

Merliot Market and Santa Tecla

The group later went on to explore the local markets of El Salvador where hand crafted bracelets, clothing, blankets and more are made by the people of the barrio. Youth went to different stands while also getting the change to view unique El Salvadorian street art. Santa Tecla is a small city with opportunity for development and expansion. In industry, innovation, and infrastructure, Santa Tecla has been growing with new cafes, restaurants, and mercaditos all over for people to create economic growth within the community.

Gender Equality project to support women

Participants listened to the testimony of Ana Francis, a notable human rights activist of El Salvador, a Peace Boat guest speaker, and their host while in El Salvador. Ms Francis was a leader for women’s rights against the military dictatorship during the Salvadoran Civil War of the 1980s. Following the conflict, she committed her life to advocating for women’s equality in El Salvador while working with mothers to reunite them with their children who disappeared during the war. In 1992, she founded the Women’s Training Center, an organization that works to promote women’s rights in education and health and hosts programs to address gender-related violence and promote civil engagement and labor rights. The hotel the participants stayed at is part of this organization, supporting women’s rights and gender equality in San Salvador. Today, along with running the Women’s Training Center, Ms Francis continues her efforts as an activist not only for women’s rights in El Salvador but also for LGBT+ rights.
Participating in the UN High Level Political Forum (HLPF) on Sustainable Development

Youth working towards the SDGs from Peace Boat US’ Summer program on the 94th Global Voyage participated in the UN High Level Political Forum (HLPF) on Sustainable Development from July 11th-20th, which consisted of both the main events at the UN Headquarters in New York City and multiple side events. The HLPF is the central platform for United Nations representatives from all over the world to gather in order to follow-up on and review the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the UN Sustainable Development Goals. The 2017 theme for the HLPF was “Eradicating poverty and promoting prosperity in a changing world”. As an NGO in Consultative Status with the Economic and Social Council of the UN, the Youth for the SDGs participants were able to present about their experience onboard Peace Boat learning about the SDGs in Latin America, introduce the Peace Boat Ecoship project for 2020 at multiple side events, and learn from various speakers about the implementation of the SDGs at the international level.
More about the Sustainable Development Goals:
www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/
www.globalgoals.org/
www.urbanmgd.org/
www.latinamerica.undp.org/content/rbl/en/home/post-2015/

More about the Ecoship Project:
www.ecoship-pb.com

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