



# FALL 2020 YOUTH ESSAY WINNERS



**SKYE LAM** is currently a high-achieving student at the Bronx High School of Science. He has a passion for saving the environment, whether it be performing research projects or leading youth activism events around his community. He is also the Policy Director of Cleaner Oceans Institute, a student-run organization that is focused on solving the world's environmental crisis, and the Chief Communications Officer of Project MEER:ReflEction, a solar geoengineering initiative aimed towards the restoration of our Earth's ecosystems. In addition to ending climate change, Skye also takes part in high school debate, programming, and bowling. In the near future, Skye plans to pursue a degree in a STEM-related field and continue his experiences with environmental science.

## Solar Geoengineering: The Need for Governance

Climate change is one of the biggest threats to our world today and its impacts are already taking place. Over the past century, the release of greenhouse gases into the atmosphere has caused over a one degree Celsius increase in Earth's temperature. More and more extreme weather events are occurring each year. Even the spread of the global pandemic can be related back to climate change.

Climate change is not a problem that is caused by just one individual, just one community, or just one country. Humanity as a whole is responsible for both the toxic particles we have emitted into our environment and our failure to adequately address this issue in the first place. As the world recovers from the pandemic, the United Nations must prioritize fighting back against this major climate emergency. Thankfully, scientific researchers have come up with innovative solutions to secure a livable future. Their proposals are collectively known as solar geoengineering, or the modification of our climate systems by reflecting sunlight back into space. As a result, less incoming radiation is able to heat up the Earth's surface, bringing down global temperature levels and

creating sustainable environments for biodiversity to thrive. Examples of these initiatives include stratospheric aerosol injection, marine cloud brightening, cirrus cloud thinning, microbubbles, and mirror arrays.

Governance has a strikingly large impact on how solar geoengineering research and implementation will be conducted in the future, if at all. This is because solar geoengineering is associated with many social, physical, and political challenges that policymakers have to first consider. However, there is currently no international governing body that addresses how these projects are coordinated and monitored. As a result, it is of utmost importance that the United Nations places a stronger emphasis on the advancements of solar geoengineering and similar climate solutions.

A governing body is integral because solar geoengineering will have a global impact, not just a regional one. In other words, a decision made by one party has the potential to substantially impact another party. Furthermore, without international cooperation, disagreements between countries may arise. One nation may want to implement geoengineering on an extremely large scale, while others might not want to implement geoengineering at all. In order to successfully deploy these technologies and avoid any conflicts, there must be a way for agreements to be made in regards to geoengineering policies. Even for those who oppose the implementation of solar geoengineering, a governing body is still needed to enforce rules and regulations.

All in all, the governance of solar geoengineering is a topic that needs to be addressed quickly by the United Nations. As mentioned earlier, global temperature levels and greenhouse gas emissions are continuing to rise and the entire world desperately needs a solution to reverse the severe effects of climate change. In order to avoid a complete climate disaster, scientists are urging governments to take action now. The global pandemic has taught us the lesson to plan ahead for disaster, and we must not make the same mistake again of failing to sufficiently prepare for our future. Thus, it is critical that the United Nations leads the way in overseeing the development and implementation of solar geoengineering initiatives. Without governance for solar geoengineering, the future could potentially be a very dark place.



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**AVA HANADEL**

**SECOND PLACE  
2020 UN75 YOUTH ESSAY**

**AVA HANADEL** is a senior at the Institute for Collaborative Education, a small public high school in New York City. She wants to study neuroscience, and hopes to get an MD/PhD following college. In her free time, Ava likes to play soccer, paint, and take photographs. She is very interested in public health and vaccination efforts.

## Looking Toward the Future: Crucial Next Steps of the United Nations

**T**he world has faced incredible economic and social disruption since the outbreak of the novel coronavirus. Although great strides have been made in terms of worldwide scientific cooperation, a large effort will be needed in order to globally recover from the pandemic, and to focus on prevention of another pandemic. In order to successfully facilitate this recovery, the UN needs to focus on three main efforts.

To start, the immediate focus of the UN should be vaccine distribution, especially in countries with a low gross domestic product per capita that may struggle to distribute the vaccine effectively. Once a vaccine is successfully produced, it is imperative that it is distributed as quickly and effectively as possible. It is also imperative that public trust in the vaccine be high. I believe that the UN needs to provide a plan for vaccine distribution in a few main countries: India, which was the focus of a recent polio vaccination effort, Brazil, Colombia, and Peru. These countries are among the hardest hit by COVID-19, and have historically struggled with vaccine distribution. The UN should begin allocating funding for these efforts now, as well as continuing its campaign against vaccination hesitation and refusal.

Following the production and distribution of a vaccine, it is imperative that the UN create a resolution surrounding guidelines and standards for pandemic preparedness that

countries can sign, and follow, in an effort to prepare for the next outbreak of a highly contagious virus. The standards laid out in this resolution should not be limited to just PPE and citizen-based action, but should also include a complete analysis of the timeline for international communication of information and shutdowns during the initial detection and spread of COVID-19. The spread of this pandemic was partially facilitated by a lack of international communication and cooperation. The UN should establish a set of guidelines that each country can adapt to its individual population, needs, and resources if and when another major outbreak occurs.

Finally, although current efforts to detect novel coronavirus strains before spillover into humans occurs are already strong, these efforts should be a focus of the UN. These scientific initiatives are our first line of defense against another possible outbreak, and their success is absolutely key to ensuring future global safety. There are two parts to the enhancement of these programs. First, an effort should be made to recruit more top diseases specialists. Given their obvious importance, dedicating as many of the top scientific minds as is possible is imperative. Second, the dedication of financial resources is also very important in order to ensure that these programs are able to cover as much ground and document as many disease strains as possible. If these critical programs go unfunded, we are leaving ourselves exposed to another outbreak.

This pandemic caught the world by surprise. Due to our lack of preparation, we have lost over a million lives. The UN needs to invest time and money into vaccinations, preparation, and the scientific efforts that will help defend us against the prospect of something like this ever happening again. We need to learn from our mistakes this past year, and these three efforts are a way to ensure we are better protected both from COVID-19, and from an outbreak of the future.



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**GULSHAN ASHAQUE**

**THIRD PLACE  
2020 UN75 YOUTH ESSAY**

**GULSHAN ASHAQUE** is currently attending Columbia University and is studying Biology on the premedical track. She has a high interest in human rights and health, particularly focusing on minority groups. She aims to encourage cross-cultural dialogue and emphasize spreading global perspectives in order to promote critical discussions across all countries. She also has a strong passion for speaking up on women's rights and shedding light on areas where their rights may be neglected. In her free time, she enjoys playing badminton, reading science articles, and writing on a plethora of topics.

## Shattering the Facade: Taking Steps towards Improvement

The COVID-19 pandemic has affected our world in ways we have never witnessed before. Not only has it exposed some of the underlying problems prevalent in the foundation of our nations, but it has also presented us with an opportunity: a chance to improve. People all around the world have come to recognize the flaws in our economic, medical, and legal systems that have been amplified by the pandemic. Moving forward, it is imperative that we tackle such problems, particularly pressing on widespread access to healthcare, addressing inequalities and human rights, and ensuring that the global climate crisis is handled with urgency.

Our plans must involve confronting international organizations and proposing policy changes across major sectors of healthcare. We have seen firsthand the consequences of having a system where not every individual has equal opportunity when it comes to receiving treatment or testing. This inequality makes it clear how and why certain groups of people are being infected more than others. This does not exclusively apply to COVID-19; we have seen this same trend in other diseases such as malaria, HIV/AIDS, and hepatitis C. A push for universal access to healthcare should not only strive to improve treatments and testing,

but should also aim for equity amongst marginalized groups. This can be done via better access to hospitals and clinics, potentially universalizing Medicare, and providing better education to groups at risk on how to prevent such diseases.

The pandemic has also shown us the connected nature of our world. We see it in slogans all around the world that have been trying to unite us during these troubling times: "Together Alone," "Hum Andar Corona Bahar," and "Andrà Tutto Bene." Yet, despite all the advances we have made towards globalization and ensuring that all of us are treated equally, we still have a long way to go. There continues to exist a divide between different races, genders, income levels, people of different faiths, and so on. We have seen in recent times that there are still flaws in judicial systems and ideologies all around the world that discriminate and sideline large groups of people. We must address at all times incidents where basic human rights are violated. Potential resolutions can aspire towards ensuring inclusive legislations, training the youth in a manner that emphasizes the importance of equality, and facilitating areas that require help, such as providing resources for a group of people who need it, promoting free speech, and ensuring that everyone has equal access to food and clean water.

Finally, we must focus on tackling the global climate crisis. This year, we have witnessed temperatures rising, cities on fire, rainforests burning, large bodies of water drying up, and sea levels rising. If we wish to work towards a better world, it is crucial that we stop neglecting the health of our planet. Placing our focus on this matter with urgency is the best way to safeguard it and it will benefit all aspects of our lives. This may call for lifestyle changes, modifications to our energy sources, and a redesign of our factories and infrastructures. This long-term goal will not only help our planet, but it will also greatly help us.

In the coming months, it is vital that the United Nations prioritize these issues that have been deepened and exposed by the COVID-19 pandemic. As we recover from this virus, we should also aim to be the best version of what we can be and always continue to improve ourselves.