August 12th, 2020

WORLD YOUTH DAY 2020: JOINT CALL FOR CLIMATE ACTION BY MORE THAN 30 ATHLETES OF ALL ABILITIES

On the occasion of World Youth Day, less than one year prior to the opening of the Tokyo 2020 Olympic and Paralympic Games in July 2021, and in the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic:

We’re calling on all young athletes within the sports community to take further action to protect human health and our environment in the face of climate change!

GET INVOLVED!

Are you an athlete under 30 years old? Team up with Lucy and Alex and become a signatory of their joint call for climate action here! The list of signatories as of August 12th is available below.

All persons: Sign the HEY Campaign’s Global Children and Youth Appeal on Climate Change and Health here! An animated, accessible version is available here!

Background Information: Sports Community and Climate Change

As of early August 2020, 143 local, national and international sports organizations have signed the UN Sports for Climate Action Framework*, including the International Olympic Committee, the Tokyo 2020 Organizing Committee and the International Paralympic Committee.

* The Framework’s Five Principles are: Principle 1 - Undertake systematic efforts to promote greater environmental responsibility; Principle 2 - Reduce overall climate impact; Principle 3 - Educate for climate action; Principle 4 - Promote sustainable and responsible consumption; and Principle 5 - Advocate for climate action through communication.
THE STORY

Lucy Meyer is a five-time Special Olympics Gold Medalist, the Official Spokesperson for the Special Olympics – UNICEF USA Partnership and a Champion for Generation Unlimited from the United States of America. Alex Sobers is an Olympic athlete from Barbados. Both are aged 21 and swimmers. They are launching this joint call at the address of all athletes from their generation as part of the HEY Campaign, which is a global youth-led campaign on Climate Change and Health, for which they are Special Envoys. “Athletes can’t all be perfect role models and climate ambassadors. However, we all need to walk the talk, run it, jump it, swim it! We’re very excited to be part of the HEY Campaign and join forces with young people from around the world and committed to protecting human health and our environment in the face of climate change”, they declared in a joint statement.

THE CALL

We’re calling on all athletes under 30 years of age to share our pledge to adopt lifestyles that are both healthy and environmentally friendly and support the sports community in playing a lead role in advocacy efforts towards the acceleration of climate action at local, national, regional and international levels. We’re also calling on all athletes to help to build inclusive societies where priority is given to life and dignity, rather than economic growth alone.

By: Lucy & Alex

STATEMENT BY ALEX

Throughout my years of being involved in the sporting arena, it has always taught me how to operate in a team setting working towards a common goal of giving our best and achieving the required results.

Sports is that unifier that brings people with different backgrounds together, all over the world. Despite the barriers each of us may face, we are all involved in a holistic bond, which provides us with unique opportunities to carry out a positive change in the world.

As powerfully said by Thomas Bach, President of the International Olympic Committee since 2013, “sport is not just physical activity; it promotes health and helps prevent, or even cure, the diseases of modern civilization. It also is an educational tool that fosters cognitive development; teaches social behavior; and helps to integrate communities.”

Applied to the fight against climate change, these values have much in common to those of the HEY Campaign. As HEY Special Envoys, Lucy and I are committed to educate and bring awareness about the threat that climate change causes to our health and environment, with hundreds of millions of people already suffering from its impacts every day. Children and young people living with disabilities are amongst the most vulnerable.

I personally see education as a core pillar of this fight. In particular, the more we bring the issue of climate change to the fore, the more buy-in there will be for powerful action, at all levels. Coming from Barbados, a small island located in the Eastern part of the Caribbean, I have witnessed some of the already visible impacts of climate change. Let me list some of the those I may directly relate to, as a swimmer: damage to building and other sports infrastructure due to seasonal hurricanes; coastal erosion, sea level rise and algal blooms - locally known as
sargassum - which may all complicate access to water sports. As a young adult who has had a close relation to the ocean world from an early age, I would not like future generations of children and athletes to be barred from accessing their natural environment due to wrongful human activities!

Of course, the impacts of climate change are complex, multifaceted and can be difficult to measure. However, in disciplines connected to the marine environment, like mine, it can be seen instantly. As a result, any gain can be very rewarding! For instance, reducing plastic dumping at sea will contribute to protecting the fish and the reefs, or help turtles naturally reproduce without fear. Simple acts such as leaving no trace on the beach after a walk or social event show that everyone may actually play their part. Like me and hundreds of athletes and sports fans, make your Big Plastic Pledge as initiated by Olympic champion and British Sailor Hannah Mills!

Stay safe,
Alex Sobers

| STATEMENT BY LUCY |

I have cerebral palsy. I did not receive oxygen for five minutes at birth. The doctors told my parents that I would never sit up or swallow.

I am happy to report: the doctors were wrong! As a young woman with intellectual and physical disabilities growing up in Los Angeles, my friends and I always wanted to be included. I finally experienced this when I began participating in Special Olympics and it changed my life. I got to play with people with and without disabilities, wear a uniform, be part of a team, and feel a sense of belonging I never felt before. I became a five-time Special Olympic gold medal swimmer and played on my high school’s Special Olympics Unified Sports basketball team.

When I first began swimming, I fell in love with the water. My disability can make walking or doing things a little harder because my right side doesn’t work as well as my left. When I’m in the water, none of that matters as much and everything feels right. Like Alex, I grew up near the ocean and I also love to surf, kayak and spend time by the water. I do not want climate change to take the world’s beauty away.

I have already seen some of the impacts of climate change in my own life. There have been fires near my home in Southern California and while my family and I have been lucky that our home hasn’t been affected, these fires continue to happen more often and are much worse. We have the power to make change around the world that will keep our planet healthy and safe for everyone.

I also care about climate change because unfortunately, when climate related emergencies happen, people with disabilities, like me, are the most vulnerable. For example, climate change can cause droughts, flooding and even disease outbreaks, similar to what we are all experiencing with the COVID-19 pandemic. While I know that I need to wear a mask and gloves, I can’t put them on by myself and need help. We need to act now so to stop climate disasters and we also need to make sure governments and decision makers include plans for people with disabilities. We need to be part of that planning. Our voices make a true difference.

To find out how I’ve been helping children with disabilities, visit my website www.teamlucymeyer.org and follow me on Instagram, Facebook and Twitter. Together, we can all make a difference for a healthy and eco-friendly planet so that we can all continue to play for generations to come!

Love,
Lucy Meyer
Nb: The names are followed by the age, country, sport, and whether the athlete is a member of Special Olympics

Lucy Meyer, 21, United States of America, Swimming, Special Olympics

Alex Sobers, 21, Barbados, Swimming

Jumar, 19, Barbados, Swimming
Niel, 17, Barbados, Swimming
Kayla, 16, Barbados, Swimming/Triathlon
Nkosi, 17, Barbados, Swimming
Aren Spencer, 17, Barbados, Track and Field
Jabari, 17, Barbados
Stephen, 17, Barbados, Lawn Tennis
Mia, 15, Barbados, Track and Field
Hailey, 16, Barbados, Synchronized swimming
Bri Nesbitt, 20, The Bahamas, Swimming
Jasmine, 35, Pakistan, Swimming - Special Olympics
Amelie, 14, Barbados, Swimming
Katie, 15, Canada, Swimming
Akeem, 23, Barbados, Swimming/Water Polo
Jake, 15, Barbados, Swimming
Chris, 16, Barbados, Swimming/Water Polo/Triathlon
Haseeb Abbasi, 22, Pakistan, Bocce/Cycling - Special Olympics
Austin, 23, The Bahamas, Basketball - Special Olympics
Renee Manfredi, 34, United States of America, Basketball/Softball/Swimming/Soccer - Special Olympics
Rosie Murray, 29, Barbados, Track and Field - Special Olympics
Tristazia Williams, 13, Jamaica, Track and Field - Special Olympics
Tijhaun Crosdale, 13, Jamaica, Bocce/Basketball - Special Olympics
Nastascia Picart, 16, Jamaica, Track and Field
Nathaniel Picart, 13, Jamaica, Athletics/Basketball/Bocce
Treshorna, 32, Jamaica, Track and Field
Candy Wong, 20, Hong Kong, Speed skating - Special Olympics
Mai Wai Shing, 27, Hong Kong, Basketball/Bowling/Athletics/Lawn bowls - Special Olympics
Amoy Kirlew, 15, Jamaica, Volleyball - Special Olympics
Dionté Foster, 26, Saint Kitts & Nevis, Tennis - Special Olympics