



feature



Opposite page: The author (at center) connected with 13 like-minded young people from around the globe who care about climate action, marine conservation, and nation-building in the “Youth for Sustainable Development Goals” Programme.
Above: The “Peace Boat,” shown here off the shores of Costa Rica, voyaged from Jamaica to Mexico championing the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

The Summer of Peace

Thirteen voices, one planet.

Story & Photos By Oshin Whyte

In April 2025, I attended the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) Youth Forum with a simple intention: to connect with like-minded young people who care about climate action, marine conservation, and most importantly, nation-building. What I did not expect was to meet the Director of Peace Boat US, Ms. Emilie McGlone. And I certainly did not expect that, just a few short weeks later, I would be selected to join a Caribbean and Latin America voyage from Jamaica to Mexico alongside vibrant, brilliant young changemakers championing the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals.

Well over 100 people applied for the Youth for SDGs Programme. Only 13 of us were selected. We came from everywhere. Jamaica. Romania. Kenya. The United States. We came from different disciplines too, from tech to fashion, law to marine science. But one thing unified us: a shared passion for the planet and the natural environment, especially life below water.

Last year, SDG 13 and SDG 14, Climate Action and Life Below Water, were under review at the 80th Session of the United Nations General Assembly. Peace Boat US, through its Youth for SDGs programme, exists at the intersection of advocacy, education, and lived experience, working alongside global partners such as Blue Planet Alliance, Restore Coral, Sustainable Ocean Alliance, and the Khaled bin Sultan Living Oceans Foundation to strengthen youth leadership in ocean science and conservation. The Youth for the SDGs programme brings together young ocean and SDGs leaders, civil society, academics, and policymakers to explore peace, sustainability, and global cooperation through direct cultural exchange. Learning occurs on Japan-based NGO Peace Boat, a floating classroom and a diplomatic space.

For the first time, the Turks & Caicos Islands were represented in this programme, made possible with support from the Irish Government through the "Our Shared Ocean" grant. That alone felt historic.

The voyage began in Montego Bay, Jamaica, where we connected with the Discovery Bay Marine Laboratory (DBML), the Jamaican Forestry Department, and a number of conservation organisations working on the ground. We were immersed in Jamaica's environmental efforts, from mangrove restoration under the Mangroves Plus project to Queen conch research spearheaded by DBML, seeing first-hand how science and community intersect.

Each day was packed with copious amounts of knowledge, but also with doing. We planted mangrove propagules in wetlands, our hands in the mud, participating in restoration rather than merely discussing it. Much of this hands-on ocean literacy work was supported through the wider network of Peace Boat partners, including Dr. Camilo Trench, mangrove expert from the University of the West Indies, and members of the Forestry Department.

One of the most profound moments for me came through our visit to the Rastafari Indigenous Village in Montego Bay. It touched me on a spiritual level. It was a reminder that while borders, politics, and inherited biases divide us, at the core of it all we are kinfolk, having a shared human experience and sharing the planet with



Above: One of the Peace Boat activities was wetland exploration in Costa Rica, followed by hands-on in the mud (opposite page) as the author planted mangrove propagules as part of a restoration project there.

each other and with wildlife. There is something profoundly grounding and beautiful about that perspective.

We concluded the Jamaican leg of the journey with a Blue Economy Forum aboard Peace Boat, bringing together representatives from government, NGOs, and local communities. The Youth for SDGs scholars also had the opportunity to present on their research and activism. I presented on the sea turtle research I am currently conducting in East Caicos, one of the last true wildernesses in the insular Caribbean. To speak about that place, that work, and that responsibility in an international space felt both humbling and urgent.

From there, the journey continued across open water. At sea, learning took on a different rhythm. Lectures unfolded slowly, deliberately, with nowhere to rush off to and no distractions to hide behind. We met



Guest Educators onboard and explored neutrality with human rights attorney and peace activist Mr. Roberto Zamora, through Costa Rica as a case study. Together we unpacked how a nation chooses peace as policy. We also attended Ms. Ritsuko Kudo's lectures which examined the realities faced by street children in Mexico, conversations that were as thought-provoking as they were heartbreaking.

These were topics I had seen discussed countless times in headlines and soundbites. But here, they were humanised. People I once thought of as distant figures in far-off places became very real. Real children. Real families. Real people with homes, dreams, and aspirations. Dreams that may never be realised simply because of where they were born and the geopolitics that shape their lives.

I wept thinking about children as young as my nieces and nephews enduring such hardship. If anything, the experience radicalised me. It sharpened my insistence



Yolande Robinson

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Yolande is an educator with over 20 years of experience. She is driven to support individuals in obtaining 3 intentional outcomes: learning, skills development and positive behavioral change. These three outcomes are also at the core of all services provided at Learn and Lead Ltd.

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The Youth for the SDGs scholars disembark from the Peace Boat and are welcomed in Costa Rica.

that we must demand more from our politicians, our policymakers, and ourselves.

The Panama leg of the journey offered a grounding moment in the machinery of global environmental governance. We visited the Latin American and Caribbean regional headquarters of the United Nations Environment Programme in Panama City, where policy meets practice and ideas are translated into action. There is something quietly powerful about standing in a space where decisions affecting ecosystems far beyond those walls are shaped. The visit was made even sweeter, quite literally, by some of the best Panamanian coffee I have ever tasted, a small but memorable reminder that sustainability is also about livelihoods, culture, and care.

From there, we visited the Smithsonian Tropical Research Institute (STRI), immersing ourselves in Panama's extraordinary biodiversity. Learning about endemic species, forest systems, and ecological connectivity reframed the country not just as a canal or trade route, but as a biological corridor of global importance. We also conducted hands-on water quality monitoring, stepping out of theory and into practice, collecting data and engaging directly with the health of the aquatic systems we so often speak about in abstract terms.

During our time in Panama, we also connected with youth networks and organisations working across ocean innovation and climate action spaces supported by

partners such as Sustainable Ocean Alliance and Innova-Nation, reinforcing the importance of cross-border youth leadership in ocean sustainability.

Costa Rica unfolded slowly and deliberately. We visited the Parque Marino Del Pacifico, a marine conservation and educational center located in Puntarenas. There, we learned about the park's environmental restoration efforts and how they engage local communities in marine stewardship.

While exploring Costa Rica's conservation landscape, we spent time at the Monteverde Cloud Forest Reserve. We hiked through the forest surrounded by mist, epiphytes, and the quiet hum of life thriving in balance. The forest felt alive in a way that demanded reverence. One of the most impactful moments of the Costa Rica leg came through a film titled "Mujeres del Manglar" which focuses on women working in mangrove ecosystems. Women whose labour, knowledge, and stewardship often go unseen. Hearing their stories reinforced the truth that environmental protection is deeply gendered, and that women are frequently the backbone of coastal resilience and ecotourism.

Mexico was vibrant, generous, and full of movement. We explored its rich culture, food, and history, but also its innovation. We learned how Mexico is using Korallysis technology for coral reef regeneration, blending science and creativity to heal damaged marine ecosystems. We

visited the Regional Centre for Aquaculture and Fisheries Research, where we toured their shrimp and fish farms to gain a deeper understanding of aquaculture practices. Later, we snorkelled over coral reefs aboard a solar-powered catamaran, a quiet yet powerful example of how renewable energy and tourism can successfully coexist.

We also visited the Cuyutlán Turtle Conservation Center, a grassroots NGO dedicated to sea turtle conservation. Touring the mangrove wetlands there, we spotted river crocodiles resting quietly among the roots, a reminder that these ecosystems are not just protective buffers but living, breathing habitats. Planting mangrove propagules in that landscape felt both symbolic and tangible, an act of hope rooted quite literally in the mud.

Later in Mexico, we joined coastal restoration and community action efforts alongside Peace Boat partner Restore Coral, reinforcing how local action and global partnerships must work together to protect marine ecosystems.

As the journey drew toward its end, the tone shifted. Two survivors of the Hiroshima and Nagasaki atomic bombs joined our group to share their hibakusha (atomic bomb survivor) testimonies. Peace Boat, an NGO founded in Japan with the mission of promoting peace, has long



supported hibakusha and their tireless advocacy for nuclear disarmament. Listening to their stories brought me to tears. There are moments when history stops being something you read and becomes something you feel in your chest. This was one of those moments.

I asked one of the survivors a question. In response, they gifted me a small paper crane. In Japanese culture, the paper crane symbolises hope, peace, and healing. I still have it. A fragile thing, folded with care, carrying the weight of memory and the insistence that the future can be different.

The Peace Boat US Youth for the SDGs program was, above all, an exercise in cultural exchange. With many nationalities on board, connection came easily. Conversations happened over meals, on deck at sunrise, in quiet corridors late at night. I have made memories I will carry with me for the rest of my life, and friendships I am deeply committed to nurturing.

This was a summer defined by conservation, climate action, community, and, most importantly, peace. And once you see the world with this level of clarity, you cannot unsee it. ✿

Oshin Whyte has a BSc (Hons) in Environmental Sciences and a Masters in Coastal Cultural Values. She is well versed in environmental sustainability, environmental impact assessments, and marine conservation.



Oshin Whyte shared her research on East Caicos with the Peace Boat US audience.