Before taking part in the opening ceremony for the 2014 Nanjing Summer Youth Olympic Games in China, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon (second from right) participated in a panel discussion on youth volunteering for development, co-organized by the All-China Youth Federation and the UN System in China. Shown here from left to right: Mr. Chen Jun, President of Nanjing University, Mr. Qin Yizhi, First Secretary of the All-China Youth Federation, the UNSG, and Mr. Xu Ming, Vice-Governor of Jiangsu Province. (Paolo Figueiras/UNHQ, 2014)

UN Secretary-General emphasizes power of youth volunteers at 2014 Nanjing Summer Youth Olympic Games

United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon and the UNSG’s Envoy for Youth, Ahmad Alhendawi, visited Nanjing, China to attend the opening ceremony of the Nanjing 2014 2nd Summer Youth Olympic Games. During an interactive panel discussion at Nanjing University with 200 Chinese youth volunteers and representatives of youth organizations from other countries, the UNSG called on youth to recognize the power they had to reduce world poverty and make further advances in sustainable development.
On Saturday 16 August 2014, United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon and the UNSG’s Envoy for Youth, Ahmad Alhendawi, visited Nanjing, China to attend the opening ceremony of the Nanjing 2014 2nd Summer Youth Olympic Games. Representatives of the UNV China Field Unit, including UNV Programme Officer Eirene Chen and national UN Volunteer Wang He (Amy), joined the UN China team to accompany the Secretary-General’s delegation.

Prior to attending the Games’ opening ceremony with Chinese President Xi Jinping, International Olympics Committee President Thomas Bach and several other heads of state, the Secretary-General participated in an interactive panel discussion at Nanjing University with around 200 Chinese youth volunteers and representatives of youth organizations from other countries. The discussion focused on youth participation in the Millennium Development Goals 500 Momentum campaign and was co-organised by the All-China Youth Federation and the UN Country Team in China, with substantive input from UNV China.

Noting the 20,000-strong complement of youth volunteers who were working behind the scenes to coordinate the Games, Mr. Ban said,

“As the United Nations strongly believes in the power of sport to promote global cooperation, understanding, health and friendship – especially for youth. I feel very inspired by your energy. It reminds me of the many outstanding young volunteers who worked with the United Nations, particularly through UN Volunteers, to make the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games a great success for China and the world.”

He and the Youth Envoy joined Chinese government dignitaries and Olympic speed-skating medalist Ms. Yang Yang in calling for the world’s young people to participate actively in creating sustainable development priorities after the MDGs expire in 2015. Mr. Ban also praised China’s remarkable progress in contributing to global MDG results but reminded participants that millions of people still live in degrading conditions and die from preventable causes.

“As Secretary-General of the United Nations, I deal with the worst problems in our world – war, hunger, poverty and disease,” Mr. Ban said. "It is easy to lose hope but I feel encouraged by the energy of youth. People like Malala Yousefzai, the Pakistani teenager who survived a terrorist attack to become a global advocate for education – especially for the world’s girls. The reason I am meeting you right now is because we are at a critical moment in history. We have just 500 days before the deadline for the Millennium Development Goals, the greatest anti-poverty campaign ever.”

The Secretary-General recounted how early intercultural exchange experiences inspired him to embark upon a career in international diplomacy. He cited one of China’s first democratic political philosophers, Liang Qichao, before answering questions from audience members about the role of youth in contributing to equitable sustainable development,
within China and globally.

“If the youth are wise, society will be wise; if the youth are rich, society will be rich; if the youth are strong, society will be strong; if the youth are independent, society will be independent; if the youth are free, society will be free; if the youth progress, society will progress.

"Now is the time for youth to drive global action. That is why I have asked my Youth Envoy, Ahmad Alhendawi, to mobilize the world’s young people. China makes up the largest share of the largest generation of youth in history. We need you to succeed," Mr. Ban stated.