

World Engineering Day: Interview with Dr Marlene Kanga



WFEO President Dr Marlene Kanga

*"If you want to change the world for the better,
become an engineer."*

UNESCO's recent decision that 4 March will henceforth be celebrated as World Engineering Day for Sustainable Development was a significant moment for both early-career and established engineers alike. Starting in 2020, the annual celebration will present a global opportunity to celebrate the profession and encourage the next generation of engineers to solve the challenges of the future. Our previous article on the announcement can be found [here](#). We sat down with WFEO President Dr Marlene Kanga, who led the initiative, to hear her response to the announcement:

Congratulations on getting the proposal approved by UNESCO! How did that feel?

This is a tremendous achievement for both the profession and WFEO, and I am immensely proud to have led and facilitated the initiative. I hadn't done something like this before, so I didn't know at the outset whether we'd ever get there, but I hoped. It's been a remarkable journey with many twists and turns, and I am enormously grateful to the various member states for their support – especially Namibia and China, who agreed to lead the proposal.

What inspired the proposal?

The United Nations General Assembly adopted its Resolution 70/1 in September 2015 announcing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). We (WFEO) immediately recognised the global importance of engineers in achieving these SDGs. Shortly after on 4 March 2018, we then signed a declaration with UNESCO committing to advance the Sustainable Development Goals through engineering.

4 March is the founding Day of WFEO. In 2018, as part of our 50th-anniversary celebrations, we also decided to get recognition of engineers and engineering on 4 March. The role of engineers and engineering will be widely recognised through the World Engineering Day for Sustainable Development.

Did you get much support?

Succinctly put: we got a lot.

When we announced the proposal for World Engineering Day, we received around 80 letters of support from institutions and academies around the world, as well as national commissions to UNESCO. The support of these groups represented an **additional 23 million engineers** around the world. The numbers are astonishing. Member states of UNESCO from every continent backed the resolution. We had support from more than 40 countries, including: Namibia, China, Tanzania, Mozambique, Gambia, Equatorial Guinea, Zimbabwe, Palestine, Egypt, Tunisia, Uruguay, Senegal, Liberia, Nigeria, Turkey, Madagascar, Dominican Republic, Guatemala, Mali, Iraq, Gabon, Coite d'Voire, Ethiopia, Serbia, Saudi Arabia, Islamic Republic of Pakistan, Russian Federation, Poland, Kenya, Iran, Nicaragua, Oman, Bangladesh, France, Comoros Islands, Liberia, Jordan, Philippines, and the UK.

What do you think this will mean to graduate engineers just starting their careers?

In my experience, engineers aren't great at articulating the impact that they have on society. That's a problem when starting your career; you don't see public recognition for your profession. World Engineering Day provides an invaluable opportunity to talk about these aspects and engage the community in the work that we do.

Do you have any thoughts for students who might be interested in studying engineering?

World Engineering Day is all about promoting engineering as a career and exploring how it provides an opportunity to change the world for better. There is a great deal we need to do for the world, especially to achieve the UN Sustainable Development Goals and ensure that everyone has access to clean water, sanitation, reliable energy, and other basic human needs. We also need to deal with the impacts of climate change, environmental issues, our growing cities, and the challenges of new technologies such as artificial intelligence. There's so much scope for engineers to solve these problems; if you want to change the world for the better, become an engineer.

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