Finding Purpose, Hope, and Community at the 2013 Qatar Leadership Conference

By Ryan Villanueva

Each year, the Qatar Leadership Conference gives members the opportunity to share their stories with students and teachers in the region. This time for talking about my growth, so please excuse me this time for talking about my personal MUN development, and how O-MUN ties into it. In the span of 18 months, I have gone from having only the slightest clue of how MUN procedure works, to being a lowly Admin Team member at a middle school conference, to being the Secretary General of a wholly student-run and independent MUN conference. From the outside, my progress may seem somewhat miraculous, but I assure you that there’s a lot more to it than it seems. Straight up, I can tell you that there was nothing miraculous, no short cuts or cheat codes involved. The fact is that throughout these past 18 months, there’s been a MUN experience accelerator of sorts working in the background, O-MUN, of course.

As many new to MUN quickly find out, there are no short cuts in MUN. The only thing that begets experience is experience. The problem is though, since MUN experience mostly comes through attending MUN conferences, it usually comes in large chunks with periods of (mostly) inactivity knowledge and information. The QLC is really about the people who presented and the opportunity that this conference gives them to share their stories.

18 Months of Model UN

By Shukri Ahmad Shahizan

MY FIRST, and so far only, article that’s been posted from last year was about O-MUN’s growth, so please excuse me this time for talking about my personal MUN development, and how O-MUN ties into it. In the span of 18 months, I have gone from having only the slightest clue of how MUN procedure works, to being a lowly Admin Team member at a middle school conference, to being EAO of Singapore for O-MUN, to being the Secretary General of a wholly student-run and independent MUN conference. From the outside, my progress may seem somewhat miraculous, but I assure you that there’s a lot more to it than it seems. Straight up, I can tell you that there was nothing miraculous, no short cuts or cheat codes involved. The fact is that throughout these past 18 months, there’s been a MUN experience accelerator of sorts working in the background, O-MUN, of course.

As many new to MUN quickly find out, there are no short cuts in MUN. The only thing that begets experience is experience. The problem is though, since MUN experience mostly comes through attending MUN conferences, it usually comes in large chunks with periods of (mostly) inactivity.
The finalization of the THIMUN and O-MUN partnership was a highlight of the Qatar Leadership Conference this year.

By Lisa Martin

THE SECOND ANNUAL Qatar Leadership Conference, which took place September 27-29, once again surpassed last year’s expectations. Over 400 students and their directors, from all over the Middle East and the world, attended the conference, which took place September 26-28, 2013, in Qatar. The conference, which was made by the executive team, proved the skills, which the participants personally lacked confidence in. Another memorable and commendable component of the conference was the diversity of sessions. A variety of sessions were provided to cater to different aspects of one topic. For example, on the topic of Model United Nations there were individual sessions each focused on sub categories of MUN such as lobbying, debating, framing and writing resolutions, and preparing speeches. This not only provided a wide variety of sessions to attend, it also assisted in improved the skills, which the participants personally lacked confidence in.

In addition to the teaching sessions, there were also sessions with guest speakers. We enjoyed two sessions with Carl Wilkens and his compelling first-hand account of being in war situations. He told of his incredible bravery while being the only American who decided to stay in Rwanda during the genocide of 1994. It was extremely moving to hear of the courage he displayed throughout the horrific event, refusing to leave the country despite all the dangers, in order to ensure the safety of his Rwandan friends. It was not uncommon for the odd participant to shed a tear or two. When the time came for the closing ceremonies, many participants were left with bitter sweet feelings. Yet at the same time, they felt confident, and determined to help make a difference in their communities with their newfound knowledge. Overall, the second annual Qatar Leadership Conference was a huge success. It is only a matter of time before QLC will return for a third time, which was most special about the QLC was the ability to connect, face to face, around a community we are building together. From our friends at Best Delegate, Ryan and KFC, to professional acquaintances, many friendships were made and renewed, It was a time for both students and teachers to reflect on the importance and promise of MUN, leadership and film. The energy and pride were palpable, and friendships, made first online, were deepened by the exceptional experience that made up this leadership event. Judging from the many long faces in the lobby of the Movenpick as people said goodbye, it was an event no one wanted to see end! So while the memories are still fresh, I wanted to reflect on what has been an incredible weekend for THIMUN O-MUN. What a difference a year makes! And if history is any indicator, the upcoming year is sure to be an incredible one too!

By Hannah Akhtar

“INSPIRATIONAL, absolutely amazing, unforgettable, a fashion show;” these are a sample of some of the praising remarks made by the participants of the second annual Qatar Leadership Conference.

Georgetown University of Foreign Service hosted the second annual, three-day, Qatar Leadership conference which took place on September 26-28, 2013. While the events of the conference are still fairly vivid, one particular aspect of the conference which continues to remain prominent in my memory, is the rush everybody was in, which was the driving force of the entire event.

The rush of the admin staff, as they dashed here and there behind the scenes, ensuring that every aspect of the conference was nothing short of perfection. The rush of the participants, desperately attempting to reach their desired sessions, surged of adrenalin from the wonderfully canted eanage assisting to speed up their frantic movements. The rush of the presenters and speakers, attempting to regain their composure, sharing their compelling depths of knowledge with the overwhelming quantities of eager participants. The rush of the executive team, as members organized and subsequently reorganized each aspect of the conference.

And finally, the rush of Mr. Janzen as he oversaw each and every detail of the conference while he observed the burrying of the Admin staff, the mad and frantic movements of the participants, the communication of information from the presenters, the very decisions, which were made by the executive team.
O-MUN Marks its Partnership with THIMUN

By Lisa Martin

IN A BRIEF ceremony during Friday's plenary session, members of O-MUN, the THIMUN Foundation and THIMUN Qatar marked Online Model United Nation's partnership with THIMUN Qatar. heads were presided over by the Head of THIMUN Qatar, Cameroon. The ceremony was called to stage. Members of O-MUN, represented the THIMUN Foundation, represented the continuity and staying power of Model United Nations. In addition, from Somalia, represented the hundreds of students O-MUN is working to reach with its innovative format. Overall, the ceremony capped an amazing year for Online Model United Nations and officially ushered in a new era for THIMUN and its many delegates.

Finding Purpose, cont.

It would be near-impossible to describe all of the eye-opening presentations and incredible stories from the conference in a single article, but for me, there were three people whom I met who captured the meaning of this conference and what made it such an impactful event for everyone who attended.

Kevin and I had the chance to meet David Williams, a bona fide legend in Model United Nations. David is the founder and former Chairman of the THIMUN Foundation, and co-author of one of the first books on MUN, United Nations through Model United Nations. At the conference, his keynote presentation was "Model UN is Not a Game," which piqued my interest; the idea of "gaming" and non-UN-related simulations has become a hop topic within the MUN community. I only considered this after this summer's New York Times article on "The Dog-Eat-Dog World of Model UN."

I attended David's presentation and found it to be much more of a critique of current MUN practices, but a historical examination of how MUN specifically THIMUN used to be when David started advising MUN. David showed us video of delegates from THIMUN in the early 80s, with delegates dressed in costume; the delegate from Cuba, emulating Fidel Castro, wore a cigar in a pocket on his cummerbund! Delegate from China, with delegate from Cuba and "Mien" from Hong Kong, had a discussion on China's influence in the MUN community. And, I received a pleasant surprise when Kevin and I even attended our high school! "Mission Viejo" — she was from my school! "Mission Viejo" — she was from my school! "Mission Viejo" — she was from my school! "Mission Viejo" — she was from my school! "Mission Viejo" — she was from my school! "Mission Viejo" — she was from my school!

My jaw dropped with every story that Salam shared, which made the audience and me realize the extent of her oppression as both an Israeli and a Palestinian, as someone caught between both cultures and accepted by neither. But the one thing that gives her a chance to share her story, that gives her a voice — that gives her a sense of identity — is Model United Nations. Through THIMUN O-MUN, she's able to interact with students across the region and the world. Although their interaction starts anonymously, slowly she learns about other students and they learn about her, and she's able to get around the cultural and political barriers of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, to share her story, and become part of a larger community. And at Best Delegate Summer Programs, Salam told me, was the only times she felt like she could be herself around other students, where she was seen as a fellow student with her own unique background and experience and story, where she also felt part of a community.

The QLC was a wonderful experience that truly encompassed the meaning of leadership on many different levels, from building lasting educational institutions, to holding onto hope in the face of horror, and having the courage to share your story and finding your identity within a community. Thank you to Secretary-General Jamal Al Ani and our team of student leaders, Heads of THIMUN Qatar Cameron Janzen and Conference Coordinator Ann Rogers, and all the presenters and participants on a great experience. And at Best Delegate Summer Programs, Salam told me, was the only time she felt like she could be herself around other students, where she was seen as a fellow student with her own unique background and experience and story, where she also felt part of a community.

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By Lisa Martin

IT HAS BEEN an incredible couple of days, tagging along with Best Delegate’s Ryan Villanueva on our tour of Palestine and Israel. One blog post would not do these three short days justice, but in an attempt to document this special outreach tour, I need to provide a little background.

This outreach tour was sponsored by THIMUN Qatar, who supports Best Delegate by providing logistical resources to visit schools in the Middle East. In addition to visiting Kings Academy and the International Academy of Amman in Jordan, O-MUN facilitated visits to two additional schools: Al Qasemi High School in the Arab town of Baqa al-Gharbiyye in Israel, and Friends Boy School in Ramallah, Palestine.

O-MUN has been working to develop contacts with these last two schools. The FBS program in Ramallah is O-MUN’s sponsor for the THIMUN O-MUN Palestine program, run separately and independently from O-MUN’s core online program. In the case of Qasemi High School, Salam Keadan, one of our Assistant Directors for the MEA region, and a recent graduate, is working to assist the school in growing their MUN program. Baqa el-Gharbiye is an Arab town just inside the Green Line (the 1949 demarcation line between Israel and Palestine). Salam, a THIMUN O-MUN Delegate to The Hague in 2013, a QLC presenter this September, and a recent graduate, is working to assist the school in growing their MUN program.

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After a day of sightseeing on Sunday, we headed to Ramallah on Monday. Our drive through Palestine, this time hassle free, was beautiful, and for me, felt like driving through my adopted country of Jordan, just a mere 30 miles away: olive groves, rocky soil, small villages with striking minarets looming above the skyline of these towns. Of course, in the distance one could see settlements, and particularly exciting was having delegates from two additional schools present: Jerusalem High School and American School of Palestine (in Ramallah). Fashions flared as students again debated the merits of their fruits and vegetables, with lightning rod statements for and against the Kingdom of Pumpkins. New delegates got to feel the cycle of MUN preparation during this simulation, and experienced delegates showed off some strong oratory skills. There were some hilarious moments during this debate. Most interesting in this session was the Q and A about the UN itself, and the deep skepticism and frustration most felt at the inability of the organization to do much in the area of the Israel-Palestine conflict. We left with the added appreciation for the strong MUN culture that exists in pockets of Palestine, and excited that our trip had allowed us an opportunity to connect with these programs.

We then drove through Ramallah, headed back to the border and home to Jordan. The roads crowded, the streets dark, The Wall looming to our right, the cars piled up at the check point and our taxi driver ranting all the while. In the distance we could see gleaming lights and wide roads in the settlements. It had the feeling of being in a bad scene from The Blade Runner: dark, decrepit, menacing, surreal, and all in such start contrast to the quirky, funny, passionate, intelligent delegates we met at Qasemi and Friends. Ryan and I sat in silence as we were driven to the border, each of us lost in our own thoughts. Fortunately we will be back, but until then, I personally will hold on to the images of goodness and kindness and straight up fun that we had on our tour. That is the Israel and Palestine that I will work to connect O-MUN to, and perhaps, some day, to each other.
With my THIMUN O-MUN business photo included both Salam and myself. January 2013 MUNITY article that proposed, I grabbed my bag and pulled out the travelling together as friends. three people, who had met online and unfolding, It eventually came down to we were getting the gist of how this was disappearing with Salam’s passport, and overseeing this lovely operation kept dogs descended on the car. The woman pulled over at the Israeli checkpoint mention at Qasemi High School. The lighting rod of attention was our O-MUN AD’s hijab, and we were immediately pulled over at the Israeli checkpoint and ordered out of the car. Our bags were taken out, searched, and sniffer dogs descended on the car. The woman overseeing this lovely operation kept disappearing with Salam’s passport, and called Ryan, Salam and myself in to be questioned semi-privately. Fortunately Salam insisted she speak in English, so we were getting the gist of how this was unfolding. It eventually came down to one overarching concern: how could three people, who had met online and ‘known’ each other for only a year, be travelling together as friends. When round two of questioning be began, I grabbed my bag and pulled out the January 2013 MUNITY article that prolined O-MUN’s trip to The Hague. That photo included both Salam and myself. With my THIMUN O-MUN business card as the last piece of evidence handed over, our passports were immediately returned and no further questions asked. Glancing over our shoulders, we saw two women and three small children who have spent the last few months of our trip here, and this might have forced our security matron to speed up her game and get us on our way. I’d like to think that our special O-MUN story won her over, but I doubt it.

We were late to Qasemi High School, but the students welcomed, quite understanding of our recent experience. The students at this school were Palestinian, living on the Israeli side of the green line. And in our stay in Baqa El-Gharbiye and travels around Israel, we experienced other examples of racist, discriminatory actions. Ryan and I got to live a slice of Salam’s QLC presentation, and it was uncomfortable, infuriating and ultimately, incredibly sad.

How does this story tie back to O-MUN’s policies in Israel/Palestine? Quite simply, students here, a mere few miles apart, live in different universes, and in some cases, are actually forbidden to formally associate with one another. O-MUN discovered this the hard way, when in the winter of 2011, we attempted to connect with students in Palestine. At the mention of the small handful of Muslim student’s participation in O-MUN (who happened to live in the conversation ended. Due to Palestine’s non-recognition policy of Israel, schools cannot participate in organizations where Israeli students might frequent. We faced a dilemma, but as our Palestine connections faded, so too did the urgency of a workable solution. One thing was certain. There was no ethical or legal way to create a global MUN organization with an exclusion policy against Israeli teenagers.

Last year we developed national level O-MUN programs, and herein we found our solution. National programs are run by a school for the benefit of the entire country. For example, Taiwan, with its 100+ delegates, debates monthly, with the moderators and students all coming from Taiwan itself. This national-level program is duplicating itself in France, Egypt, Singapore and Jordan. As we developed these last spring, we again attempted contact with Palestinian students, this time at Friends Boys School (FBS) in Ramallah. When we laid out the program and our desire to find a Palestinian partner school, they agreed to give it a try. To keep this program separate from the larger global O-MUN program did not require active exclusion, since national programs are designed to be autonomous, so we were not promoting or accommodating exclusionary online spaces.

It works like this: First, FBS runs an all-Palestine program, and will develop the THIMUN O-MUN Palestine program for students in Palestine/Gaza. Second, FBS does not have its own MUN activity, just like any other student, but offers, just like any other student, but will not be able to join the Palestine program, just as students on mainland China or other places in Asia can’t join the Taiwan program.

Of course, secretly I hope that these students bump up against each other in the virtual world, and that possibly the allure of a great debate will entice Palestinian delegates to join our larger global debates. But that’s my secret wish, and not one I need to actively promote. Students will gravitate to the programs they feel most comfortable with, and for now, that is more than enough.

Don’t think for a moment that I see this as one big global family where differences will fade away and peace will take root and end the Palestinian-Israeli conflict in some kumbaya-moment of youth solidarity. But I’ve seen enough of O-MUN to know that for some students, the ability to connect with others beyond their home towns, countries or other barriers (socio-economic, political, religious etc) is profoundly important, even transformative. That is O-MUN’s biggest strength and the ultimate compliment. If our current policies bring that possibility to as many students in Palestine and Israel as possible, I can say were are on the right track. If readers have further questions on the THIMUN O-MUN Palestine program or other program activities in the Middle East, contact Lisa Martin via the website’s feedback form.
Tech Corner: MightyBell Goes Global

Ugbad Kasim is the Assistant Director for THIMUN-O-MUN.

Meet Ugbad

In February, I asked Ugbad to become our MightyBell expert, and to apply to present at the Qatar Leadership Conference on how O-MUN uses this great community building tool. Not only did Ugbad write a presentation and get in the O-MUN program, but she was also able to help convince program convener at MightyBell to reinstate a privacy feature recently removed, making each Circle a private and productive space for students. When she brought the issue to my attention, we lobbied for changes, and within a week, a much-appreciated and needed feature was restored.

The girl from the unknown country had made her mark not only on O-MUN, but on a rising company within the technology sector. She represents the power and community that is THIMUN Online.

Ugbad is currently an Assistant Director for the Middle East/Africa region at MightyBell. She is a leader in the O-MUN world and oversees high school students around the world by using MightyBell to help them prepare for their upcoming debates.

As part of O-MUN, Ugbad and her team organize private MightyBell Circles that act as research hubs, where students can gather to share information as they prepare for their online debates. Leading up to the debate, students and their teachers use the Circle to organize relevant news stories and facts, chat, give feedback and share their speeches.

Once the debate is over, the Circle is switched from private to public, but new members can still join if they request an invite. However, Ugbad and her team discovered that making each Circle public after the event allows other students and teachers to see what others have done, so this find and use these resources as inspiration for developing their own debate topics.

Want to learn more about the Online Model UN uses MightyBell? Read their story on the O-MUN blog.
that the deadlines are met. From this, we decided what roles the team should take—reporter, photographer, webmaster, online broadcasting. We find that these roles evolve along with our publication.

Give Them a Taste of ‘Real Life’

To make this more professional and to give students some much-needed practice, we ask them to complete an application form. We do this for two reasons.

Firstly, for many, the first time they have to fill out an application form is for their university application, they have no experience in this and often need a lot of guidance.

Secondly, if their goal is to apply for a position on a MUN conference press team, they will be expected to complete an application. Therefore, having the students complete an application form for the press club sets the tone that we are looking for keen writers and photographers but also gives them the much-needed practice of selling themselves on paper. It also gives them an opportunity to consider putting together a portfolio of work, which again, can be used for university applications. Having spoken to many of our students, they are glad that they had the opportunity to go through that process.

What Role does the Teacher Play?

In short, Editor-in-Chief. As the teacher, you have to be aware of the content. You get the final say on whether articles can go to print. Many budding reporters like to push the boundaries and write about some of the controversial issues affecting our world. While there is nothing wrong with this, it’s the teacher’s job to make sure the story is presented in a non-biased manner.

There are many things many students have to learn. They have their opinions about what’s going on in the world, but a true reporter must be able to present the different sides of the issue, showing no bias. So, as the teacher, we have to make sure everything runs smoothly and assist the student leader when required.

Know Your Audience

Establish who is your writing for and who will read your finished product. At our school, we use the MUN club as our inspiration. We record what is happening on a daily basis within our club, conferences that are attended and issues our delegates will be discussing. Whilst MUN is our springboard, we do not limit ourselves to the MUN club. We also report on events going on around school, for example fundraising activities as well as other issues that are affecting our local community, our region, and the world.

The Age Old Question: To Print or Not to Print?

The answer to this often comes down to budget. If you have the funds, or if you charge students then you will be in a position to produce a professional-looking hardcopy. However, the format does link to your audience. More and more, young people are turning to online media. It is faster, more up-to-date, and the possibilities are endless. We choose to run our publication online. There are many great blogging tools, which are free, such as Wordpress, Blogger, Blog. In the end, it comes down to personal preference as to which one you use.

The Possibilities Can Be Endless

As our press club expands and our students gain more experience, we are finding that an online publication is best for us. Within our club we have an online broadcasting team. Two of these members were part of the Online Broadcasting Team of THIMUN Qatar 2013. They developed a passion for it and wanted to continue long after the conference had ended. Having the press club at school has allowed them to do what they love. Having a blog allows us to embed videos so that our audience is more engaged in our publication.

It’s also about showcasing the talent of our team. A blog means we can upload our videos, publish a wide variety of photos as well as our articles. We are not limiting ourselves, our possibilities are endless.

In the End it’s the Enthusiasm, Not Experience that Wins

While experience is a valued asset, enthusiasm is a quality that goes further. It is enthusiasm that keeps the team going. It is enthusiasm that drives the individual. It is enthusiasm that gets the story. So if you have an enthusiastic student willing to get this off the ground, do it. Being part of a press club is one of the best aspects about MUN.

Rebecca Cain is an English Teacher and MUN Director at Park House English School, DCMUN Press Supervisor, and THIMUN Qatar Press Team Supervisor.

Reflections: An Indian’s Insight into the World of O-MUN

By Mannmeet Singh

ONE OF MY favorite moments at the Qatar Leadership Conference actually happened at the Movenpick Hotel. Thursday morning, over the breakfast buffet, three of O-MUN’s leading ladies met face to face for the first time. During which our Assistant Directors, Salam Rezaian (left) from an Arab city in Israel, Ugbad Kasim (right) from Somalia, and O-MUN’s Secretary General, Maryam Al-Ammar (center) from Saudi Arabia, pose for a photo while they cemented, a relationship already established over the web during the past year, through a bug and some laughter.

For me personally, there were many highlights to the second Qatar Leadership Conference, but it is these kinds of moments, the ones you see in the photograph below, that truly defined the event for me.

The beauty of O-MUN is that it provides the platform for the most unlikely combinations of delegates and leaders to connect, establish friendships, and working collaborative partnerships. By the end of the conference, this group, including SG for jro-MUN, Rohan Sinha were seated together working on an upcoming O-MUN promotional video, sharing photos, and saying some tearful farewells.

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The Man Who Couldn’t Stop Telling Stories

By Lindsay Peak

The Never-ending Storyteller

Let me tell you a story about a man who was held at gunpoint numerous times and still believes in the inexplicable power of forgiveness, a man who can hold the attention of 14 and 15-year-olds for over an hour, a man who can’t stop telling stories.

“Stories are much more powerful than guns because stories change the way we think and act.” — Carl Wilkens, at a Qatar Academy classroom visit, Sept. 30, 2013

A Ghost Story

Now let me tell you a story about a high school senior, itching to leave life as she knew it and begin her university studies. One evening, she settles down in the comfort of her living room to watch the latest episode of friends, but gets distracted by a documentary with a chilling title ‘Ghosts of Rwanda.’ In this documentary, witnesses of the Rwandan genocide, including Carl Wilkens, tell a story of how they dealt with the unimaginable horror behind the scenes.

“Carefully orchestrated” rather than random, this horror was “planned, coordinated, meticulously calculated.” The documentary allowed Carl to speak about his life and role in Rwanda.

Carl’s Stories

The hour began, continued, and ended with stories. Carl began with the story of how he met his wife, and subsequently began their life together with their three children in Rwanda. He told stories of his children growing up playing with neighborhood Rwandan children, of hard-working household workers who became a valued part of their family, and of the optimistic people who inhabited the endlessly green and rolling hills of the Rwandan countryside.

A Chicken for a Life

After pausing his stories to open up for questions, students learned reasons why the genocide occurred, how the genocide was, in Carl’s words, ‘carefully orchestrated’ rather than resembling a random killing spree, and there would be days in which Hutus would have to be bribed with money or even chickens to save Tutsi lives.

But there was one story that shocked us all. Not because of a story of death, or injury, or blood, or anger. It was a story of strength, love and forgiveness.

“Call Me Grandma”

She asked for this man, who had murdered her own son, to be released early from prison. The arrangement was made for him to be released into her care and moved into the family house. The man felt unimaginable guilt and shame, but submitted to her unprecedented compassion. Today, this man’s children call this miraculous woman, “grandma.”

“Forgiveness doesn’t mean that what they did is ok, but you will no longer be angry or resentful because of an offense or mistake.”

I Forgave You Long Ago

There once was a Rwandan woman who miraculously survived a blow to the head during one of the many killing days of the genocide. Years later, she spent her time visiting prisoners guilty of genocide. But that’s not all. She learned that one of these men was responsible for killing her own son. Surely this was the moment where she snapped, unable to continue showing compassion for these evil men.

Oh, by the way...

Carl couldn’t stop telling stories. He would frequently pause one story to start another. He would frequently lose track of what story he had originally been sharing, but students didn’t seem to care. He even passed his stories of incredible sadness and blood stained matches to tell a story about the first time he saw his wife. That did it. Students were all sold. This storyteller had left a mark on these students’ lives.

Collecting Stories

Life is about collecting stories: tales of sadness, anger, joy, silliness, and even forgiveness. It is time the rest of us figure out what Carl learned long ago — that our stories need to be heard.

Carl Wilkens serves as the director of World Outside My Shoes, a non-profit educational and professional development organization. To learn more about Carl Wilkens’ experience, watch his videos, or get involved by sharing your story, you can visit his website here.

Silver Linings of the Rwandan Genocide

By Sarra Hamid

DURING HIS Rwanda Today workshop, Carl Wilkens displayed a picture of a scenic view from a hill in Rwanda accompanied by an anecdote. Wilkens recalled that when he took that picture, he was expressing disbelief towards a Rwandan friend who wanted to build a gondola lift up the scenic hill to a proposed guest house. In response to his disbelief, his friend replied with the only two English words he knew, “Is possible.”

Wilkens has come to QLC to talk to us about him and his wife’s, Teresa Wilkens, work in Rwanda after they chose to stay behind during the genocide. “My wife was really the only one in my family who supported me during this cause. Most of my family were telling me to get out of there, but I probably would have reacted the same way if I was in their place.” The main topic behind the workshop was to educate people that Rwanda has changed and managed to move past the tragedy and rebuild themselves through unity. It’s really important that everyone is involved in both the reconciliation and the physical building of the damage after the genocide. A lot of contributors to the genocide have been building homes for widows, they’ve been doing radical terracing [a method of agriculture], and building schools.”

Wilkens emphasized the importance of forgiveness and leaving the bad blood created by the genocide behind, saying “I think they demonstrated that there is a way to live together in the future and contribute to rebuilding the country they were part of destroying.” Wilkens also discussed a project where civilians would write letters to the people they lost in the genocide. “When we remember the loved ones we lost during the genocide, we don’t remember them anymore, they are forever frozen in this box of genocide.” This project gives us the opportunity to communicate to those we lost and remember them for who they were rather than the tragedy behind them.

They even moved the project to Rwandan prisons, where contributors to the genocide actually wrote letters to the victims. It was also discussed how the idea of revenge through acts like, public executions, have held the country back from unity. When telling a story from a Rwandan citizen regarding attending an execution of a genocide convict, Wilkens recalled “As the blood of the execution started to pour on the ground, it reminded him of the blood of his family.”

However, Wilkens also wanted to clear the air of any unanswered misconceptions regarding the genocide and its aftermath, “People often thought that it was all just about the Hutus and Tutsis and they don’t recognize that it was really politically driven. There were actually many Hutus and Tutsis that loved each other. The planners of the genocide actually had to work really hard to break the bonds between Hutus and Tutsis.”

But like many societies today, there was still some prejudice present in Rwanda. “There were still some prejudices just like any society, so for their own political means to stay in power, they exploited those prejudices. But for people to think that the genocide happened because one group hated another group is completely untrue. I think that’s one of the biggest misconceptions.”

While the Rwandan genocide still may haunt many, it is important to abandon the bad blood and find the silver lining: Carl and Teresa Wilkens found the value of this message. For more information on the issue please visit their website, World Outside My Shoes.
People on the Ground: Rwanda’s Survival and Perseverance

By Sarra Hamid

Wilkens' experience is safe to say that potential has been recognized within the people on the ground. For more information on Carl Wilkens and his wife Teresa Wilkens’ experiences in Rwanda, please visit their website worldoutsidemyshoes.org.

By Cameron Janzen

The initiative is without a doubt a success. This is evident through students who attended the school achieving the highest exam results in the area. The local government also awarded the school as the Best Educational Institution in the area.

Moreover, the initiative is a two-way experience. Qatar Academy provided the resources, materials, and financial means in order to run the school. The Eravur Educational Development Institute, in return, provides priceless cultural enrichment of visiting students from Qatar Academy.

The initiative is a challenging requirement of the program. Parents may be upset if their child is assigned to a particular country. Government laws or cultural barriers may make representation of certain countries politically risky. Students may choose to deliberately miss represent country policy or behave in such a way that would be an embarrassment to the host country. Most commonly, students simply fail to do the research to accurately learn the assigned country’s points of view. However, without including this aspect of the MUN program, we are simply providing our students better debate tools to defend narrow and/or cultural points of view.

There are really only two main ways of solving conflict; through force or by means of discussion. The goal of Model United Nations is to try to show our young people that diplomacy and discussion are possible, and that they can learn to listen and look at problems from new perspectives in order to achieve the best results.

By Afif Haisam

ERAVUR, located on the east coast of Sri Lanka and 320 kilometers from Colombo, is home to an initiative between Qatar Academy and the Eravur Educational Development Institute. The two collaborate to run an after-school program in English and ICT. Not only is EEDI focusing on education, but also on community development such as providing lights to homes by installing water bottles on the roof. EEDI is also helping special need students and orphans who lost their parents to the 2004 tsunamis.

And even after a recollection of harrowing events from the genocide, Wilkens ended on a positive note with a chicken for a human life."
The Case Against Syrian Intervention

By Faisal Darwish

The Crisis

As we all know, the repulsively horrible crisis in Syria has been going on for about two and a half years, and has developed to become even worse throughout those years. Today, there are almost 7 million refugees, over 110,000 people murdered, and everybody has been tortured, one way or another. Undoubtedly, this is the most chaotic conflict the world has experienced to date.

Disturbingly Horrific

Sadly, I must admit that both the supporters and non-supporters of Assad have discovered methods of killing and torturing which are vilely creative. Whether it’s burying alive, using bullets and shelling, electrocution, kidnapping, slaughtering, disemboweling people’s limbs, raping with foreign objects - such as broken glass bottles and even live rats – and most recently, they’re using chemical weapons! Bill Maher, American satirist and political commentator, has tried to elicit how mental Bashar Al-Assad is by remarking a comic insult, he said, ‘I think he’s the worst kind of socio-path, the kind who commits un-speakable acts, but who looks like a shoe salesman at Macy’s.”

The ‘Solution’

However, the main issue I’m trying to address, or maybe question, is the involvement of several countries from the international community, like Russia, Iran, China, and of course, the US. Why does America always feel the need to play the hero? Now I know that it seems to be the most powerful country on this planet, and that it may have been pressed into it because of how high the international community’s expectations are of it; although, that does not give it the right to decide what the solution for this civil war is, especially when their “solution” is not one at all.

Military strike isn’t the correct approach. What I am referring to is the strike that Obama proposed a short while ago in order to take down Assad and his regime. He precisely stated, “…the use of chemical weapons that we saw in Syria was a criminal act, and that

The Obama administration has made its stance clear, but the American public remains divided on Syria.

UN Plots for Destruction of Chemical Weapons

Recently the UN has sent an advance team consisting of 16 of its personnel and 19 from the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) to carry out a plan to completely destroy any chemical weapons in Syria. This mission is made up of 3 strenuous phases: “Phase 1” is to establish that the team is present in Damascus to inspect the initial list of chemical weapons in Syria. “Phase 2” is to elen- gate the teams duration till the end of October, in order to confirm that the re- vision of such weapons and storage fa- cilities is complete, as well as to establish a support base in Cyprus. Finally, “Phase 3” – which shall happen from November 1st until June 30th- is for the team to monitor and verify the destruction of

The Advocate

I had recently invited a strong supporter of the Syrian rebels to a personal interview in which she answered questions critically and insightfully. She does not wish to be named, so I shall refer to her as The Advocate. She believes that Assad used chemical weapons against innocent communities because “he is desperate to end this revolution and keep himself in power - to exert his authority over people, he has to scare them. So one day, he can turn around and say ‘is your revolution worth all these dead?’ and hope that everyone will just give up.” Furthermore, I asked The Advocate, ‘Do you agree with Obama’s decision to strike Syria in order to eradicate Bashar Al-Assad?’ Promptly, she responded with, ‘No, I do not. My personal opinion is that the US does not have honest and caring intentions; they would strike in order to keep their earlier promise of striking if Assad used chemical weapons instead of trying to help those inside Syria. Obama has previously stated that a US strike would not have the intention of taking down the Assad government so I don’t see why everyone is convinced that it will. So re- ally, I think it’s useless for them to care now after over two and a half years.”

‘Morally and Strategically Indefensible’

Two political figures who share a mutual opinion with The Advocate are John McCain and Lindsey Graham, who believe the strike is “meaningless.” They claimed that the agreement between the US and Russia to prohibit Syria from using and producing chemical weapons “does nothing to resolve the real problem in Syria”, and that “Assad can go on slaughtering innocent civilians and destabilizing the Middle East.” Con- cisely, they described the agreement as “morally and strategically indefensible”. I completely concur with both politicians as the US thinks it is the band-aid to Syria’s wound; though it isn’t, in- stead it is the salt being poured into the wound - only making it worse.

Why so supportive?

Since the resolution has been finalized to be non-beneficial, why are people still encouraging the US and Russia to move forward with such a faulty action? I think the reason is that many Syrians have given up because they’re fed up with their homes being destroyed and their family members being killed, therefore they desperately cling to any- thing that they believe could save them. However, we have to retain a realistic view and not be led away by false hope. I believe that the US is seen as a major superpower that has the means to help countries that are in trouble; then again, this is an idealized and naive view.

A More Reasonable Solution

We have to remember that most of those who died in the chemical weapons massacres were children. There are children being hit by shells, losing their limbs, being killed by snipers, and children being arrested and tortured for either no valid reason or because their parents are involved in the revolution. Moreover, The Advocate explained to me how several of her own family mem- bers have been forced to escape to LEBANON, and how her mother’s hometown was destroyed, and last but not least, how some of her relatives have died because of the lack of medical aid they have been given. Seeing that the UN Security Council has unanimously passed a resolution to stop the US military strike, I believe the US should at least begin to help Syrian civilians by providing in- nocent children, women, and refugees with proper shelter: safe, clean and sustai- nable, as well as providing medical as- sistance for the sick and wounded, since the regime has prevented them from receiv- ing any sort of treatment.

The End?

Overall, ending this severe civil war is quite a difficult task and will undoubtedly take a long period of time to be solved - precisely by mid-2014. How? I guess we'll all just have to wait and see what other ‘solutions’ the UN comes up with.

President Obama discusses Syria with congressional leaders and cabinet members.
in between. Surprise, surprise, this is where O-MUN comes in. Rather than an annual program or conference, its regular debates are literally the best way to gain the most experience in a short amount of time (aside from attending conventions, of course!) I distinctly remember how many times I gave speeches during the three days of my first MUN conference, four times. I did marginally better in terms of Points of Inquiries, considering I made around seven of them. Not the best start to an MUN career, I know.

At my second, I made so many that I lost count after tea on the first day. Not to mention the fact that it was in a Security Council crisis simulation filled with delegates who were, on average, four years older than I was.

In between these two points in time, however, I remember going to essentially every O-MUN debate I could, starting with the stairs lobbying session on the night my first conference ended. The only ones I think I missed out on were the Americas debates because they required me to stay up until something like 1:00 am. Other than that, if you were to log into the old conference room, you'd probably see my name on the list. From what I can still remember, my absolute favorites were the SC debates where Dinhia Liu and Steven Pan usually duking it out in some shape or form, be it Delegate on Delegate … Or Delegate on Chair … In hindSight, those were probably the moments which developed my passion (or you could even call it obsession), with small, intimate and intense debate scenarios. Chuck me in an SC and I'll do nothing but thrive.

On the other side of the MUN spectrum, O-MUN introduced me to the whole concept of an organizing team comprised of individuals scattered all over the globe. If I were not for O-MUN, I would never have had the confidence to take up a Secretary General position for SelangorMUN, a student-run conference in Malaysia, while I was based in Singapore.

Interestingly, the next thing to do would be to look to the future for what it holds, but looking at how much has changed over the past one and a half years or so, I don’t think I’ll be putting my money on anything just about yet. Only time will tell for certain.

Even though that most of my MUN participation in the past six months has been organizing the conference, I’m looking forward to turning the clock back a couple of months and diving back into MUN conferences (and O-MUN debates too, of course) as a delegate, for the time being.

If any of you are joining the SC debate this weekend, I’ll see you there! For any other questions, feel free to contact me on Facebook or shoot me an email

Shukri Ahmad Shahizan is the O-MUN Deputy Secretary General for Asia.

The Road Less Traveled: Forgiveness in Leadership

By Sarra Hamid

Forgiveness has often been an afterthought in leadership, but how well can a society function with an unsympathetic leader? The QLC press team had a conversation with Wilma Derksen, a presenter who overcame a challenge in forgiveness. In 1984, Derksen's daughter, Candace, was walking home from school and never returned, that day changed her life forever. "She was gone for six and a half weeks. My family and I begged the media for the safe return of our daughter." Candace's disappearance triggered one of the largest search parties in Winnipeg.

On November 17, 1985, Candace's body was found in a shack, wrists died, frozen to death. "The day Candace's body was found a man came to my door and told me that he was also the parent of a murdered child, I realized that was my status now. He told me that it was going to destroy my mind and that we needed to stick together for support." This support is very familiar to Derksen who has since been involved with support groups. "Healing is a very complicated process. Support groups are really important in this process, we have our own self reflective mirrors but the only mirrors for our soul is the one we find in the eyes of our friends." Derksen has developed a healing path that involves a list of 15 steps to recovery. "When asked about how I wanted to deal with the offender during a press conference, my husband and I admitted that we were going to forgive. We wanted to focus on our own lives."

Derksen has inspired many students, with her workshops and support groups, to head down a path of compassion, "I think forgiveness is a skill and a tool that needs to be a part of the tool kit of every leader." With that said, she has encountered her own problems regarding healing and the path down forgiveness and self discipline; "Even though we forgive, we still deserve justice." Derksen's presentation involved discussing the role of forgiveness in leadership, "Forgiveness gives us the ability to realize that a leader has to look after people, otherwise they can't move through the issues and personalize things when really it isn't all about you." She also encourages dialogue and communication, especially with her program of victim-prison inmate dialogue. "We found that we often have a lot in common with these inmates, like birthdays, anniversaries, even the legal teams we worked with." Derksen's dialog greatly encouraged the role of compassion, understanding, and forgiveness in leadership today. The irony was that the man who murdered my daughter was the most influential person in my life. In some ways, he inadvertently became the greatest teacher in my life and I wouldn't be here if it wasn't for him today. Despite the tragedies, we often end up formulating a bond with our enemies."

Derksen's moving presentation has provided us with some input into the less traveled road of forgiveness, "I bled all over Canada, I told everyone my story, and there's a real beauty in listening to each other" and it truly was an inspiring story to listen to.
Resource Corner: Amnesty International

By Cameron Janzen

Amnesty International is a renowned human rights organization providing in-depth information on countries around the world. While the Amnesty International site has a large volume of helpful resources for the MUN delegate, one of the best resources are the annual country reports.

Each year, Amnesty International provides a summary of the major human rights issues in every country of the world. These reports provide the MUN delegate access to key issues facing the country. While the reports will focus on human rights, delegates can quickly get a sense of the social, political and economic issues facing the country.

Let’s examine the 2012 annual report on Qatar:

The first section of the report focuses on issues of freedom of expression. The report mentions individuals detained for criticizing the monarchy and for blasphemy identifying the important role the royal family and religion plays in Qatar. The next section focuses on Migrant workers ‘who make up more than 80 per cent of Qatar’s population’ identifying a key social and political understanding for a delegate assigned to represent Qatar. All reports are quick and easy to read allowing delegates at all levels of experience to use the resource.

Access

Access to the country reports is easy to find off AI’s homepage. On the right hand side of the site, use the drop down menu to find your assigned country. Once you get to your country’s page, you can access the annual report as well as see the latest AI’s stories about your assigned country.

By reading the country reports, delegates will better able to understand their assigned country.

Extension Activity

An extension club activity would have delegates read their country’s annual report and then have them act as a member of the government and present their country’s response to the report. By doing this activity early in the preparation cycle, it teaches the delegate that the need to understand the type of source they are to use (non-governmental vs. governmental) and their role in defending their assigned government’s position on issues.

Amnesty International provides free country reports that allows delegates to become familiar with their assigned countries.

SAVE THE DATE

February 12 - 15, 2014

King’s Academy Model United Nations Student Conference

King’s Academy would like to invite your school to participate in the fourth annual King’s Academy Model United Nations (KAMUN) student conference, to be held on the King’s Academy campus in Madaba, Jordan in February 2014.

Our conference will stimulate the minds of delegates and broaden their horizons on world issues, ranging from the peace process in Palestine to the recent political upsurge in Iran.

We look forward to seeing you in Jordan and hope that you will take part in our conference.

For more information please go to http://kamun.net or email us at info@kamun.net
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