

BAKU: youth chart vision of inclusive society at UN forum

25 April 2016 – Gathering from around the world for a United Nations conference in the Azerbaijani capital of Baku, young people of all walks of life, from an Internet technology intern to a dentist, are working to define future narratives to counter potentially compelling discourse of those who seek to divide society.

“People are disconnected because they don't know each other's experiences,” Rashida M. Namulondo, a storyteller and actress from Uganda, told the *UN News Centre* today during the pre-opening event of the UN Alliance of Civilizations (UNAOC) Global Forum Baku 2016, which will formally kick off tomorrow.

Ms. Namulondo operates an online platform through which people can share each other's experiences. “It is important that we tell our stories and listen to other people's stories,” she said, emphasizing the power of storytelling to heal people's hearts.

Lou Louis Koboji Loboka, a medical lab scientist in South Sudan, was also among the 150 participants at the youth event, titled 'Living Together in Inclusive Societies: Narratives of Tomorrow.'

Having been displaced to a neighboring country, he returned home to start a health training venture. “A lot of youths are not educated, and therefore are messing up the country as I speak,” he said. In order to contribute to the development of his own country, he is seeking to learn how other countries bring their youths together.

After being selected two months ago from 6,000 applicants in more than 160 countries, the youth participants, who had never met each other, started sharing their narratives via Facebook, WhatsApp and other online platforms.

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They work in 10 groups. For instance, one group is discussing narratives from the perspective of migrants while another is trying to build narratives for conflict-affected areas.

Ranim Asfahani, of Syria, said she chose to join the thematic group on youth and children because her organization engages with youth and children. Her one-word message is “peace.”

Shuhei Sakoguchi, a student at Soka University in Japan and a Buddhist, said he joined the thematic group on interfaith because every religion has good principles.

For Minh Anh Thu, of Viet Nam, said she was inspired by many peers who engage in innovative intercultural projects, and this youth event was an opportunity to think about community development and investment in youth in her country.

'Young people are the primary agents of change'

Welcoming the youth to the [Global Forum](#), UNAOC High Representative Nassir Abdulaziz Al-Nasser highlighted their ability to transform the world for the better. “For the Alliance, inclusive societies cannot exist without the full participation of youth,” he said, stressing that UNAOC's youth-focused activities and programming are built on the principle that young people are the primary agents of change – not just in the future – but in the present as well.

The outcome of this youth engagement, titled 'Narratives of Tomorrow,' will be presented to high-level representatives of the UN and governments during other sessions of the Forum. It will also be published as a reference to be used by youth organizations, other civil society organizations, the UNAOC, and interested stakeholders. The youth participants are expected to promote the Forum's outcomes in their home countries, communities, and platforms of action.