



Asia Pacific Young Leaders Partnership

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Moving forward from the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations 7th Global Forum in Baku

May 6, 2016 | Bolun Li

(Author: Bolun Li) The United Nations Alliance of Civilizations (UNAOC) 7th Global Forum has officially come to an end in Azerbaijan. Around 150 young leaders from over 100 countries attended the forum with excellent conclusion of "Narrative of Tomorrow" program at the forum. Under 35 years old, passionate about serving the marginalized people in the grassroots, founder/CEO of youth-led organizations, these are the common "tags" of the young family. "You are not tomorrow, you are NOW", said Ahmad Alhendawi, the UN Secretary-General's Envoy on Youth. NOW, we gathered here in Azerbaijan, to learn from world leaders, but more importantly, to learn from ourselves.



Photo: group photo of "Narrative of Tomorrow" program at UNAOC 7th Global Forum; source: Aldiyar Auyezbek, Central Asian Youth Network, Kazakhstan

Narrative of Tomorrow

The "Narrative of Tomorrow" program is created by UNAOC as the major deliverable of the youth event. 150 young leaders are divided into 10 teams, with each working on a theme associated with the mandates of UNAOC, such as education, gender, media, inter-cultural exchange. Each team was given a month before the forum to work remotely on the narratives of the specific topics, then on the forum day, they would speak out and propose solutions for the challenges of the themes. For the education team, the story of "a pygmy from rural Cameroon who overcame cultural discrimination and became an activist for education of marginalized groups in Central Africa region" stood out from various brilliant ideas and was finally presented at the closing ceremony. However, for the education team, tasks are still incredibly tough. How to implement high quality educational programs in the grassroots in various countries in need? And how to accumulate lots of resources (financial, human capital, etc) in need to foster changes?

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Photo: members of education team of "Narrative of Tomorrow" program; source: Gelila Biresaw, Young Africa Leaders Initiative (YALI) Network, Ethiopia

Plural+ Video Festival & Intercultural Innovation Award

There were so many conference sessions and side events going on in Azerbaijan last week, but if you want me to highlight a few that are very inspiring and unique, I would vote for Plural+ and the Intercultural Innovation Award. Created by UNAOC and International Organization for Migration, Plural+ has constantly supported dialogue among young people from different cultures through creative media platform (mini-film). Each year, Plural+ and its partner organizations around the world have offered significant support for winners of the award, including cash, invitation to international forums like the one in Azerbaijan. This time, seven mini videos stood out and were screened during UNAOC Global Forum, representing various countries such as Belgium, Philippines, India, Canada. Want to learn more about it? Check out here! <http://pluralplus.unaoc.org/awards/>

The Intercultural Innovation Award is a "gluttonous feast"-an event filled with inspirations and excitements. Organized by UNAOC and BMW, the Intercultural Innovation Award strives to support most innovative grassroots initiatives to promote intercultural understanding and cooperation. Teams from Germany, Kenya, India and other part of the world stood out and were given the chance to address remarks during the ceremony in Baku. Delegates will never forget the man from Kenya, the founder of a grassroots NGO working on gender equality, saying that "men also get hurt when our women get hurt, and that is the single idea behind my initiative". Likewise, memory will never fade that a grassroots initiative in Israel presented how they have worked hard to unite Arabs and Jewish people in the conflict zones. Even though the awarded initiatives are from diverse communities completely different from your own, you will still have a strong sense of familiarity with them. As it is well said by Asmaa El Messnaoui from Morocco, "it is all about human." Want to inspire others with your grassroots initiative and gain more international support? Next time, you rock!

"More Than One Story"

In 2005, when Kofi Annan met with the presidents of Spain and Turkey, he had a deep sense that the dominance of voice from huge powers and the polarization of societies will eventually destroy the fruitful achievements of civilizations around the world. The threat of "a single story" eventually motivated Annan and other world leaders to establish the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations and promote communication and learning among diverse cultures. Today, UNAOC offers programs including UNAOC Fellowship Program, Youth Solidarity Fund, UNAOC EF Summer School, Plural+ Video Festival and Intercultural Innovation Award. Even these initiatives are far from enough, they have offered an example that voice from the vulnerable grassroots communities can be heard at the highest and broadest level.

Interesting enough, an initiative awarded at the Intercultural Innovation Award during the UNAOC 6th Global Forum in Indonesia has the same idea, but in a more brilliant and innovative way: More Than One Story was developed by a Swedish institute as a card game which can be played by people from all age groups, cultures and professions.

Through careful and innovative design, the card game adds the reflection of personal experiences and listening to diverse stories as a core element of the whole game, awakens "empathy, compassion, understanding and appreciation for the unique experiences of each person", and bridges cultural gaps.

For the delegates in Baku last week, perhaps the most exciting moment was the time when they received their own deck of More Than One Story.



Photo: Young people in rural communities in Africa playing the game; source: More Than One Story

I am blessed to be selected as the only representative of China for the "Narrative of Tomorrow" program at UNAOC 7th Global Forum. Speaking for the voices of vulnerable grassroots communities, respecting and learning from diversity of civilizations, and empowering the young population have been my deep belief and life-long dream. It is also the core value of the Asia Pacific Young Leaders Partnership platform I created. In the future, the Asia Pacific Young Leaders Partnership is committed to providing more information on youth opportunities around the world, and hot issues related to international development and intercultural dialogue for young professionals. We are also dedicated to establishing a "spotlight" column for individuals/ organizations/ initiatives working in the grassroots level in the under-served regions of the world, and helping them gather more resources to grow up and be successful. We also hope to start soon a mentor program to assist a certain number of young people from the marginalized communities to lead themselves in becoming the change in their communities and have a life-long successful career. Any help on this will be deeply appreciated. Please join my campaign to make it happen.

Dear friends, will you share my dream?

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