

2005 Youth Town Newspaper

2004 WorldLink Youth Town Meeting – Opening Speech

Good morning, Ladies and Gentlemen.

Welcome to the seventh annual WorldLink Regional Youth Town Meeting. My name is Harin Song, and I am a sophomore at La Jolla High School. I have attended this forum as a delegate for the past 4 years, and this is my first year being a moderator. When I was first asked to open the 2004 Youth Town Meeting, I did not know what I could say that would be inspiring and motivating for a full day of intelligent discussion. So, believing that you **can't** go wrong with quoting the UN Secretary General, I decided to share with you his remarks from a press conference. United Nations Secretary General Kofi Annan said, **“Let's get our priorities right in 2004. Let's make 2004 the year of kept promises.”**

As I read his speech, I realized that the reason we are here today is **to fulfill those promises** – promises of a stable government in Iraq; promises of reducing poverty, hunger, disease, and illiteracy; promises of financial aid for countries in debt; promises of education, rights, and representation to those who lack them; and promises of peace and security for the entire world. All 600 of us are here today to contribute to the implementation of the United Nations' promises to the world – through critical thinking, international awareness, and dialogue with our peers as well as leaders from around the world.

Today you have the opportunity to meet people who daily advocate the causes of people whose voices are unheard, whose needs are great, and whose problems are our concerns. Listen to these leaders and consider how you can address these issues by being an active participant in the forum, and not a passive listener. If you do engage yourself, you will leave USD today with heightened gratitude for your own lives, sympathy for those more unprivileged than you, and a compelling desire to make a difference.

Today, you will hear the experiences and ideas of people who have done everything from mediating conflicts in Bosnia to infiltrating the Ku Klux Klan in the United States. Though their areas of expertise are diverse, all of them focus **on one theme**: “Preventing Deadly Conflict” – specifically, gender and human rights, and national priorities and international responsibilities.

These topics were chosen by the delegates of last year's Youth Town Meeting, who asked that we discuss ways to resolve violent conflicts, especially the “inclusion factor.” The “inclusion factor” is the need to empower ethnic and gender groups and allow their views and thoughts to be heard. The “inclusion factor” also means looking at issues that should be included under international responsibilities in order to create a safer world and uphold human rights.

So as you attend the plenary and briefing sessions, please take the time to reflect on how missing voices and the lack of understanding between people can lead to anger, hatred, and frustration, which in turn, fuel disputes and wars.

Finally, I would like to thank the teachers who put in time and effort to bring the students here today. I extend special gratitude to the teachers and students who came all the way from Mexico and had to wake up **a lot** earlier than the rest of us. **(pause)**

Due to your participation, students from Mexico and the United States will have a unique opportunity to interact with each other and cooperate to fulfill our promises to the people of the world.

Thank you.

Novi Zivot: Through The Eyes of Its Youth

By Lauren Cadish

In the early 1990s, Vukovar, Croatia was one of the most brutally impacted towns from the violence during the Croatian-Serbian war. Over a decade later, the city still lies in ruins and its inhabitants live in poverty. In 2002 five American peace activists formed a group called “The Youthbridge Initiative,” a non-partisan, non-profit organization whose main purpose is to spread peace throughout a world faced with conflict and to empower the youth to take personal action in rebuilding their communities.

On January 26, 2005, Brian Israel, a senior from the University of California San Diego, presented the *Novi Zivot: Through the Eyes of its Youth* exhibition with pride and passion. “The war in Vukovar was devastating beyond anything most of us here in California can begin to comprehend,” said Israel. “The brightest hope for Vukovar is its youth, who have their entire lives before them and thus see through the cloud of bitterness. The youth in Vukovar do not enjoy a fraction of the opportunity we take for granted.”

Novi Zivot, meaning “New Life” in Serbo-Croatian, was a display of various photographs taken by youth leaders in Vukovar. In the fall of 2004, Serbian and Croatian photographers looked beyond the ruins and portrayed their city through photos. They hoped to show that the ruins of their city were merely a façade which hid the true beauty behind it. “The photos displayed at the Youth Town Meeting demonstrate that when presented with opportunity, the youth will respond with extraordinary results,” said Israel. “I can’t think of a group of young people I have ever met that would have approached this documentary project with such commitment, enthusiasm and passion.”

During the 2004 summer, Worldlink interns wrote letters to some of the youth in Vukovar which “made more of a difference than anyone could have imagined. It meant so much to them that someone in California knew they existed and actually cared enough to write,” said Israel with excitement. With their work being recognized during the Worldlink conference, Israel hopes that the youth in Vukovar will have a sense of accomplishment to accompany their hard work.

Photos ranged from a single red flower growing from a crack in the sidewalk showing the tenacity of life to an elder full of life walking down a desolate street. “The kids in Vukovar are normal citizens just like any person in the United States,” says Israel, “but what they lack is the opportunity for creativity.” The Youthbridge Initiative strives to provide the youth in the world with the tools they need to be creative and become leaders in their community. When it came to Vukovar, the youth leaders were encouraged to express their creativity through the lens of a camera, which resulted in capturing the city through an artistic eye with the hope of returning Vukovar to the idyllic community it once was.

Proyecto Aja: Grabando las Vidas de Juventud Refugiada

Por Laura Lover

Saw Moo Doh Wah es un niño del Campamento de Refugiados de Karen, cerca de la frontera de Burma-Tailandia. El tuvo que abandonar su casa en un pueblo a las orillas del lago Pwe law cuando el Estado de la Paz y el Comité de Urbanización (los militares de la dictadura de Burma) hicieron una redada. Ahora es uno de los más de 140,00 refugiados viviendo en campamentos de refugio a la orilla de su país natal. El es parte de la población de jóvenes que forman parte del cincuenta por ciento de este grupo de gente indígena que ha sido trasladada.

Las historias de refugiados como la de Saw Moo Doh Wah son las que el Proyecto Aja espera conservar. El co-fundador Shinpei Takeda ha trabajado por más de cinco años ayudando a que los niños refugiados documenten sus historias desde su propio punto de vista con la ayuda de la fotografía. Aja significa Autosuficiencia Juntada con Apoyo. Aja no solamente esta dedicada a grabar las historias de esos refugiados, sino también los instruyen en fotografía e instrucción vocacional. Estas herramientas los permitirán mejorar su nivel de vida y la vez darles un método para contar su historia.

Como personas indígenas, los Kareninos son malinterpretados. Ellos son tachados como subversivos, perseguidos por la dictadura de Burma a causa del insubordinado, cuando en realidad lo único que piden es retener su terreno que les ha pertenecido por años. No solamente son los Burmeses quienes no entienden a los Kareninos, sino todo el mundo no comprende a este grupo indígena.

Durante la sesión de Takeda en la Junta Regional Juvenil, este reto fue el enfoque. La definición de “gente indígena” es muy ambigua. “Indígena” en el diccionario generalmente quiere decir “original,” “local,” o “nativo.” Sin embargo existen varios sentimientos negativos asociados con este término. Cuando la gente escucha la palabra indígena, términos como pobre, cuarto-mundo, y tecnológicamente lentos no les parecen diferentes. La realidad es, esta gente es exactamente iguala los demás u disfrutan de las mismas cosas modernas como tomar fotos y portar jeans. Esto es un contraste a la idea general de que ellos no quieren participar en la vida moderna, con su vestuario tradicional. Aja permite que los niños cuenten sus historias tal y como son, sin que un interprete pierda el significado en una traducción.

Aja es importante porque crea una historia para los refugiados. Les da la esperanza que sus voces serán escuchadas. Ahora, muchas de sus fotos las están exhibiendo en varios lugares. También hay varios programas en Colombia (Disparando Cámaras para la Paz) u en San Diego (“Journey”). Mas información puede encontrarse en la pagina de red oficial de Aja., <http://ajaproject.org>.