2018 Speaker's Series
World Information Transfer
Promoting Health and Environmental Literacy
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Introduction

World Information Transfer, Inc., an NGO in general consultative status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council (UN/ECOSOC), hosted its annual Speaker’s Series during the 2018 internship program at the United Nations. UN diplomats and other experts were invited to speak with WIT interns about their experiences in their respective fields. The range of topics was extensive and each speaker gave the interns the opportunity to see their life's work from their own perspective. These discussions have been summarized in this 2018 Speaker’s Series.

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H.E. Sergeyev started by tracing the origin of the United Nations. The United Nations was established following the end of World War II to prevent the outbreak of war and advocate world peace. Among all the principal organs of the United Nations, he reaffirmed the importance of the Security Council which promotes collaboration among different member states. The Security Council has played a remarkable role in resolving global humanitarian crises with concerted efforts from member states. Serving as a key combination of different world powers, he reiterated that no member states of the Security Council could expel any others. In light of this, he referred to Article 3 of the UN charter and quoted that “once member states either participated in the United Nations Conference on International Organization in San Francisco or having previously signed the Declaration by United Nations of 1 January 1942, they shall be the original members of the United Nations”.

With regards to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, Ambassador Sergeyev commended the collaborative efforts of member states at the United Nations to provide voluntary national reviews, as well as recommendations on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). For example, to alleviate poverty in Africa, in line with SDG 2, community financial resources have been replenished to promote sustainability, with universities of the UNESCO campus installing solar panels. He called for a multi-lateral mechanism to motivate countries with advanced technologies to bring production lines and transfer knowledge to less developed countries. With the provision of affordable technologies, he wished that global financing institutions, such as the International Monetary Fund or the World Bank, would mobilize financial resources and take initiative in fostering implementation of the SDGs in underdeveloped countries.

He further elaborated on worldwide examples of multi-lateral mechanisms. He stressed that transnational cooperation could utilize multi-lateral mechanisms to mitigate environmental problems. The intellectual transfer of knowledge and technologies from the USA to the Caribbean Islands has demonstrated the success of multi-lateral mechanisms on preventing the occurrence of natural hazards and casualties.
promotion of inclusion in the transboundary Global Business Compact could serve as a suitable model to bring the business sector to address environmental problems. Apart from mitigating environmental problems, he stressed the importance of promoting regional economic development with the effective use of multi-lateral mechanisms. The One Belt One Road Initiative launched by China has promoted land and sea routes from China to Turkey. This initiative is regarded as a power balance against the uprising Russian Federation whilst promoting interconnectivity and interaction among China, Turkey, and other Central Asian countries. The construction of related infrastructure along the routes will become valuable economic channels for the Central Asia bloc. He reaffirmed that this potential economic gain has been the key driver in the developing diplomatic relationships between these nations, contrary to the pre-WWII belief that diplomatic relationships were based on shared cultural values.

Regarding the relationship between the UN and the ICC, Ambassador Sergeyev recalled that there were many cases recommended by the GA and submitted for procedure. Currently, the number has declined although a full investigation of the missing Malaysian aircraft MH370 was submitted. However, Russia vetoed a draft resolution to establish an international tribunal. Cases involving national jurisdictions usually take months, while those involving international jurisdictions take much longer, i.e. The escape of former president of Chad to Senegal took almost 10 years for court hearings. ICC member states do not include the US as it is only recognized as part of its charter.

Regarding the United Nations Declarations of Human Rights, Ambassador Sergeyev said that the implementations of the Declarations vary across cultures and countries. He quoted the example of Africa’s legal system on protection of human rights, which combines the American legal systems and local cultural practices. He noted that there have been mounting international concerns about violations of the United Nations Declarations of Human Rights. For example, the Iranian government has been criticized for imposing death penalties on criminals; the Saudi Arabia government has been blamed with infringements of morality standards whilst liberalizing LGBTQI; the statement delivered by the prime minster of Ukraine was challenged when the participation of women in business and governance was denied. In view of the escalating humanitarian crises in Greece and Myanmar, Ambassador Sergeyev acknowledged that there have been no clear, legally binding international instruments to protect the rights of migrants. He also drew attention to climate refugees from small island states. Referring to Australia’s political failure to home refugees from these states, he called for re-establishment of social justice and for it to be prioritized by member states.

Ambassador Sergeyev stated that the United Nations has launched international instruments to advocate peace and minimize the use of destructive weapons. However, he was concerned about the responsibility of sovereign states to abide by such legal instruments, demonstrating his concern for future wars. In reference to the recent humanitarian crisis in Myanmar and Bangladesh, he explained they were caused by different national interpretations of the UN’s legal policies. This is because member states have the right to interpret legal instruments according to their own national jurisdictions. In view of such, he recommended to hold annual plenary sessions at the United Nations to discuss key humanitarian issues, with reference to the Universal Declarations of Human Rights.

The speaker’s series was concluded with the Ambassador’s recommendations for leveraging United Nations instruments further. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and Sustainable Development Goals offer fantastic insight for interns to focus their research in specific areas of modern world development. In addition, The Global Risks Report 2018, published by the World Economic Forum provides up-to-date information for unified global action in the areas of public health, science and innovation, geopolitics and socio-economic development.
H.E. Marwan Noman
Deputy Permanent Representative of Yemen to the United Nations

World Information Transfer hosted His Excellency Mr. Marwan Noman, the Deputy Permanent Representative of Yemen, as part of the 2018 Speaker’s Series. His address was delivered in two-fold: the first being a brief overview of the current situation in Yemen and the second, an account of Yemen’s involvement within the United Nations.

Mr. Noman began by introducing Yemen as an Arab civilization dating back 5000 years, home to many cultural sites and traditions. In fact, ‘mocha’ coffee finds its origins in the Yemeni city of Mocha. Situated on the edge of the Red Sea, its political topography is inextricably linked to that of its Arab neighbors, reflected by its active membership in the Arab League.

As he moved onto the situation in Yemen, Mr. Noman emphasized that the conflict finds its origins not in racial or religious discrimination but in the 2011 Arab Spring that swept across the Middle-East. The revolt against corruption and authoritative regimes transcended Arab borders, forcing the 33-year ruling president, Ali Abdullah Saleh, to step down. Defection within the army brought Yemen close to civil war. The GCC and UN intervened, relieving tensions at a critical time, although the peace was short-lived. The president’s role was assumed by the sitting vice-president in 2012. The following year marked months of comprehensive negotiations, with many national stakeholders involved such as academia, political parties, youth, women, southerners, Houthis and marginalized groups. The sweeping representation and formality of the 2013 negotiations resulted in 1800 outcomes being drafted into a constitution, distributing the governing power amongst the various regions. With their respective authorities diminishing, the Houthis and now ex-President Saleh opposed the draft constitution. Despite being in direct opposition for 6 years, these parties allied forming the ‘rebels’ movement, and commenced to seize territory by force.

Yemen was on the verge of negotiating peace but with this emerging opposition, President Abdrabbuh Mansur Hadi made many concessions to preserve stability; but all failed. At their peak
in 2015, the rebels controlled 80% of Yemen and placed President Hadi under house arrest. An aerial bombing assassination attempt on the President marked a decisive moment in Yemeni history as it forced legitimate government to mobilize the GCC and Arab League forces to restore government control. With foreign support, the government was able to recapture up to 85% of Yemen but importantly, not the capital Sana’a. However, despite three rounds of peace talks and Special Envoy appointees since 2015, the Rebels have rejected every proposal. Mr. Noman attributed this to the Houthis’ resolute belief that they possess the divine right to rule Yemen and the continuous support channeled to them by Iran.

He also acknowledged the dire humanitarian situation in the country’s various conflict zones. However, he emphasized that the humanitarian suffering is a ‘symptom’ of political failure. Although directing foreign attention and support to humanitarian aid is vital, any effort will be short-lived if the root cause of political settlement is left unaddressed.

The discussion then shifted gears by directing focus towards Yemen’s role within the United Nations. The state’s small delegation requires it to participate in matters only relevant to its national, regional, and international priorities. Elaborating on the prior, the Yemen entourage prioritize achieving political peace and mobilizing international support in its civil conflict. Yemen takes part in the following UN discussions that derive from the conflict; anti-mining programs in the 1st committee, cultural heritage protection partnerships with UNESCO, and developmental programs in the 2nd committee. Additionally, addressing the harrowing issues of child recruitment and internally displaced persons (IDPs) are key in alleviating disproportionate Yemeni suffering.

Yemen’s fragmented economy drives citizens to extreme measures for food and security. The Houthis have also infiltrated the education system in rebel-held territories, installing the foundation for child recruitment at schools and universities. One final complication to restoring national stability is the incoming migrants and refugees from Yemen’s regional neighbors, particularly Somalia and Ethiopia, looking to settle on the Arab Peninsula.

When posed with a question about the concerns of Yemen’s regional neighbors, the Ambassador noted their common apprehension towards conflict spill-over. The GCC’s decisive intervention in 2015 can be partly attributed to their collective interest in preventing this. Regarding the extent to which the UN intervenes in Yemen, Mr. Noman emphasized that the Yemen situation is one of few conflicts that receives unilateral agreement in the UN Security Council, mobilizing effective international support. To give an overview of how conflict-ridden countries approach the SDG’s, Yemen is virtually unable to act upon them. Despite this, Yemen’s leaders hope to incorporate the SDG’s in the peace negotiations and national rebuild programs. The city of Sana’a was the world’s first capital to experience austere water shortages and is a subject that is still a cause for concern. The financial burden of sea water desalination and pumping this water to the capital’s 7500 feet altitude is only exacerbated by the conflict.

Mr. Noman offered many unanticipated insights into the situation in Yemen. In our view, being aware of the conflict’s many dimensions highlighted its complexity but also guided our optimism for peace.
H.E. Henry MacDonald
Permanent Representative of Suriname to the United Nations

H.E. Mr. MacDonald sitting to the left of Dr. Durbak

H.E. Henry MacDonald addressed the opening of the meeting by introducing the geographical profile of Suriname. As a former colony of the Netherlands, Suriname is the only country in South America where Dutch serves as an official language. In spite of its small population of around 600,000, Suriname is one of the most ethnically diverse countries in the world. There are no dominant ethnic groups in Suriname, since its population is mainly composed of Indians, descendants of Africans, Maroons runaway slaves, Indonesians, Amerindians (the indigenous community) and Chinese.

As a Former Permanent Representative of Suriname to the United Nations, he then drew attention to the roles of the Permanent Mission of Suriname to the United Nations. Due limited staff at the Permanent Mission of Suriname, he explained that it was not possible to focus on a wide variety of UN issues and that just like every other small he also needed to focus on 3 or 4 specific niches. The Permanent Mission of Suriname mostly addresses issues from the Second and Third Committees of the General Assembly. The negotiations on the Sustainable Development Goals was also a main focus of Suriname. He mentioned the following key focus point within the SDG discussions. The complete eradication of poverty (#1), quality education (#4), gender equality (#5), jobs creation (#8) peace, justice and strong institutions (#16) and partnerships for the goals (#17). Regarding the Third Committee, Suriname has launched initiatives to convene a Barbershop Conference to bring males in the discussion on hop the Stop Violence against Women and how to realize gender equality.
The Speaker then discussed the reform of the Security Council at the United Nations extensively. He shared his personal views with respect to the long negotiation process that already spans a period of longer than 20 years. The Security Council is composed of five permanent members and ten non-permanent members. The five permanent members are: China, France, Russia Federation, the United Kingdom and the United States. According to the UN Charter of 1945, these five superpowers could execute veto powers to prevent resolutions from being adopted. On the other hand, the ten non-permanent members are elected on a two-year basis and do not execute any veto powers. In view of rising superpowers other than the traditional five permanent members, there have been heated debates on increasing the number of seats for permanent members at the Security Council.

H.E. Henry MacDonald particularly mentioned African countries, including South Africa, Nigeria, Egypt and Ethiopia, to be interested in a permanent seat. The commonalities of these countries of the two strongest contenders as English-speaking. If they are to be included as permanent members, not only will the general interests of Africa be better represented at the Security Council, but also policies on humanitarian aid and regional stability will be influenced.

Nevertheless, H.E. Henry MacDonald suggested that there has been no constructive progress on leading the reforms of the Security Council. No official negotiations nor publication of documents have been achieved thus far, hampering the reform of the Security Council.

Being a founder of the intergovernmental NGO titled World Development Foundation, H.E. Henry MacDonald shared his global vision to advocate gender and human rights. He quoted the worldwide figure of every seven out of ten women has experienced gender-based violence and delivered his genuine support towards the rationale of the #HeForShe Movement.

While developed countries in general are more advanced in reducing gender inequality, H.E. Henry MacDonald shared examples of developing countries being deprived of gender equality. In Caribbean Islands and Latin America, traditions have constrained the lifestyles and identities of women.

As a co-organizer of the informal United Nations Barbershop Conference on gender equality, he reaffirmed that men and women have intellectual, behavioral and mental discrepancies, which shall not be overlooked when it comes to policymaking and electoral votes. As a fundamental pillar of human rights, gender equality is crucial for bringing women to the policy table and influencing gender politics at the United Nations.

Owing to the regional differences when it comes to reducing gender inequality, he introduced the top-down approach practiced by Scandinavian countries to accelerate gender equality. The success of reducing gender inequality lies on educated, strong political will and leadership to stimulate constructive progress on promoting gender equality. He called upon international communities to seek further partnerships with Iceland and Rwanda, the leading countries in the world to advocate gender equality.

The speaker series was concluded with His Excellency’s future vision on achieving gender parity. H.E. Henry MacDonald is considering to run for a Commissioners position in the Committee of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in year 2020.
Mr. Igor Shpiniov
Chief of the Office of the Under-Secretary-General for General Assembly and Conference Management

Mr. Shpiniov is Chief of the Office of the Under-Secretary-General for General Assembly and Conference Management. He commenced his meeting with WIT interns by introducing his career path at the UN. He started as a translator in 1989, holding a fixed-term contract. When the Soviet Union dissolved in 1991, he decided to become a career International Civil Servant and was eventually awarded a permanent contract with the UN. Working as a language professional, he realized that there was a scarcity of qualified interpreters and translators that were needed to replace the retiring colleagues and developed a targeted project of cooperation with some universities. That led him to change his career path and become a manager. Currently, his role in the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management (DGACM) is to advise and assist the head of the department in all areas of its work.

Additionally, he gave the WIT interns a broad picture of what DGACM is and how it functions. According to Mr. Shpiniov, this department has the most staff in the UN Secretariat. It is composed of two parts. A large part of DGACM provides secretariats to all committees under the General Assembly. Its main role is to create an environment for member states to reach agreements. In this sense, secretariats facilitate the meetings and make sure they are going in the right direction. Secretariats also help delegates from member states to understand UN rules of procedure. Another part of DGACM provides language services.

Particularly, Mr. Shpiniov highlighted how innovations and other technology advancements are transforming DGACM services. For example, before consecutive interpretation was introduced at the UN, interpreters used to be positioned near the speakers’ rostrum. Meetings lasted forever to allow consecutive interpretation of speeches into all official languages. Nowadays, with the advancement of transmission instruments, interpreters sit in the booths at the edge of the conference room and interpret the speeches.
whilst the speech is given. Apart from interpretation, he also emphasized how the use of AI and digital technology could transform conference management. Overall, Mr. Igor Shpiniov believed that technology will continue to play a growing role in the operations of DGACM.

During the Q&A session, Mr. Shpiniov focused on the interplay between technology and translation. Mr. Shpiniov believed that technology will not advance so much as to replace the translators and interpreters. In written translation, he explained that machines are already used to produce a first draft, but are not yet able to assure quality comparable with human output. He went on to say that perhaps the future of written translation could be machine drafting and human post-editing, but interpretation will be more difficult to replace. This is especially the case in intergovernmental meetings where precise interpretation is required. He believes that humans will still add critical contributions in interpreting true meaning. After all, translators and interpreters must ensure the translated piece both conveys the meaning of the original and is readable in a foreign language.

Dr. Patricia L. Myskowski
Dermatologist Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center

In 2001, skin cancer was diagnosed to 1/71 people in America and has since then risen to 1/50 people in 2010. Skin cancer is the 6th most common cause of death in developing countries. Dr. Myskowski, a dermatologist who treats skin cancer patients at Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center in New York City, spoke to WIT interns about radiation and its possible cancerous effects.

Radiation comes in two forms, natural and ionizing radiation. Natural radiation comes from the sun while ionizing radiation results from cancer treatments, chemicals, gamma and X-rays, and
other forms. Two sun-born radiation types that reach humans are the long-wave UVA and short-wave UVB emissions. UVA deeply penetrates the skin and can cause aging and skin damage, while UVB causes sunburn and redness. Exposure to the sun is the leading cause of skin cancer through either natural or artificial tanning. Unsurprisingly, people who use tanning facilities are two to eight times more likely to suffer from skin cancer. Sun exposure varies from person to person because of factors such as duration of exposure, latitude of their country, and skin color. People working long hours under the sun are more prone to this type of cancer. People living in countries closer to the equator and with lighter skin, which burns more easily than darker skin, have higher rates of skin cancer. Evidence of this can be seen in Australia, who holds the highest rate of skin cancer in the world.

Also, older people are more likely to get skin cancer than younger people. Men over the age of 60 face the highest threat. This is because older persons have weaker immune systems as well as less Langerhans cells, antigen-presenting skin cells that initiate immune responses. Rarer cases such as individuals with albinism are also more likely to get skin cancer. Acute effects of sun exposure include tanning, sunburn, and pigment darkening. Chronic effects include photo-aging and skin cancer. Family genetics was not a critical factor in retracting skin cancer.

The question of why skin cancer is becoming an epidemic can answered because of many reasons. Ozone depletion is one reason, as gases found in aerosol spray cans and refrigerants break down ozone molecules of the ozone layer, that absorb much of the sun’s UV radiation. Due to cultural fashion shifts, women now are more likely to wear clothes that expose more skin. Lastly, recreation is a growing activity in the US and much of recreation is done outside.

There are three forms of skin cancer, which are basal cell carcinoma (BCC), the most common kind, squamous cell carcinoma, and the deadliest of the three, melanoma. Basal cell carcinoma rarely spreads to other parts of the body and is the least harmful. The head and neck are areas where it is most likely to form. Inherited diseases can start basal cell carcinoma such as skin sensitivity because of Xeroderma pigmentousm or genetic defects through basal-cell nevus syndrome. After the 1945 Hiroshima nuclear bombings, Japan faced an increased risk of BCC because of the beta and gamma radiation damaging skin cells and upper airways. Cases of BCC are increasing 10% yearly in the U.S. Next, squamous cell carcinoma, begins in the uppermost skin layers, mainly due to lifelong sun exposure. This form can be aggressive and can spread throughout the body. Other risk factors for squamous cell carcinoma include head injury, PUVA treatment, HPV, smoking, and ionizing radiation. The most dangerous form, melanoma, can spread quickly but can be cured if treated early. It forms in the skin cells that make the pigment. Treatment for skin cancer varies between surgery, chemotherapy, or radiation.

Skin cancer can be seen physically through moles. If moles form on the skin, Ms. Myskowski explained to WIT interns that they can be determined as harmless or cancerous by their characteristics of asymmetry, border color, and diameter (ABCDs). For example, bigger, black, asymmetrical, uneven-bordered moles would most likely be melanoma. The best tool for prevention is minimal sun exposure and always applying sunscreen. Despite popular sunscreen branding of SPF 80 over SPF 30, both SPFs give individuals practically equal protection. The use of makeup is also a physical barrier from the sun. In closing, Dr. Myskowski expressed that awareness and education are the best weapons to protect against skin cancer.
Dr. Brian Landzberg  
Gastroenterologist, New York Presbyterian Hospital  
Clinical Assistant Professor of Medicine at the Weill Medical College, Cornell University

Dr. Landzberg sitting to the left of Dr. Durbak

Dr. Landzberg is a gastroenterologist at New York Presbyterian Hospital and a Clinical Assistant Professor of Weill Cornell Medicine Center in New York. The purpose of Dr. Landzberg’s presentation to WIT interns was to give them a thorough understanding of prevention of travelers’ diarrhea. This is particularly relevant to young people who are interested in exploring the world and participating in volunteering programs, particularly in developing countries.

He began by giving a brief overview on travelers’ diarrhea. Traveler’s diarrhea is categorized into two types: acute diarrhea and persistent diarrhea. Symptoms of acute diarrhea would typically develop abroad or shortly after the trip while persistent diarrhea would have more long-term effects. Acute diarrhea is rarely life-threatening unless contracted by the elderly, immunocompromised, pregnant or by patients with underlying diseases.

The incidence of acute traveler’s diarrhea (ATD) decreases with time, implying that the longer one remains in the country, the less likely he/she would suffer from ATD. ATD is most common in travelers and there is no significant incidence rate between men and women. In addition, the young are more vulnerable than the old to be diagnosed with ATD because young people tend to be more adventurous, consume more food and travel more. Furthermore, people who regularly intake Proton pump inhibitors, such as Nexium or Prilosec which suppress stomach acid, may increase their risk of ATD. This is because stomach acid facilitates sterilization of the foods we consume and if one loses the ability to produce stomach acid, they lose that first line of defense when being attacked by an ATD-related bacteria or virus.
Dr. Lanzberg highlighted that it is vital to observe environmental risk factors. The main environmental risk factor is restaurant hygiene, which is also dependent on different travel styles. For example, backpackers usually purchase food from street vendors and increase their risk of contracting ATD. Nevertheless, 5-star hotels also incur a high ATD rate due to the exposure of buffet-style food in warm environments. Other environmental risk factors include poor access to plumbing, unreliable electricity and lack of access to water.

Winter travel and cruise-based holidays generally have a lower risk of ATD comparing to land-based holiday unless a norovirus outbreak occurs. Areas with more rainfall and swimming in fresh water often exhibit a higher risk of ATD. Hot seasons in non-tropical southeast Asia, multiple adventure tours, and all-inclusive hotel arrangements are regarded as notable risk factors to ATD. Travelers who are infected by ATD usually show symptoms of developing three or more unformed stools per 24 hours; plus at least one of the following symptoms: abdominal cramps, nausea, vomiting and fever. Patients with untreated ATD can take up to 4-5 days to recover; among them, 10% may suffer from ATD for more than 10 days and even smaller minority would develop chronic diarrhea.

The occurrence of travelers’ diarrhea is mainly caused by bacteria, virus and parasites in which contraction from parasites may result in chronic symptoms of diarrhea. Less common causes of ATD include pre-formed toxin syndrome, which could be indirectly caused by food poisoning. Viral causes, such as the norovirus which is transmitted by fecal-oral activity, is another non-bacterial cause of diarrhea. Travelers should be particularly careful with the buffet-style food and stairway banister on the cruise. They are strongly recommended to apply alcohol-based cleansers often and to wash hands frequently.

Dr. Landzberg also stressed that dietary and water precautions are critical in avoiding ATD. Travelers should avoid drinking tap or well water in developing countries, frozen mixed drinks with ice made with local tap water, unpasteurized milk or dairy products, consuming moist foods served at room temperature, especially from street vendors, raw or undercooked seafood or meat, unpeeled raw fruits and vegetables as well as buffet style restaurants.

Apart from food and water precautions, Dr. Landzberg warned WIT interns of the risks of swimming and bathing in unclean water as well as swallowing or inhaling such water. Such activities will drastically increase the risk of ATD. The elderly and immunocompromised are highly recommended to stay away from such areas like hot springs with a large amount of water vapor. At present, there are no vaccines to prevent ATD causing bacteria, except for Cholera. However, preventive antibiotics are available as an effective method of prevention. Despite its effectiveness, many doctors would not recommend it to people because of its notable side effects which include, breeding resistance, Candida infections and antibiotic-associated diarrhea. For patients that are immunocompromised and having a high risk of dehydration due to kidney or heart diseases, doctors may prescribe preventive antibiotics to safeguard their health.

Hydration therapy, a low-cost treatment, is considered to be the most important medical remedies in the century. By drinking the mixture of 8 teaspoons of sugar, half a teaspoon of salt and 1 liter of sealed and treated water, one can effectively alleviate acute traveler’s diarrhea.

In conclusion, Dr. Landzberg explained why the risk of ATD decreases with the longer duration of stay in the country. When a person stays in an area for a longer time, they can develop a certain
level of tolerance with increased exposure to the local environment. Currently, there is no specific action that one could perform to strengthen their immune system domestically to prevent ATD abroad apart from good health maintenance.

Dr. Bernard Goldstein
Dean Emeritus, University of Pittsburgh, School of Public Health

“Now, I am going to tell you all why Trump is right,” is not a phrase commonly heard outside of the realm of partisan—namely, American—politics, save as the opening of a presentation being given by an academic to a group of interns on Park Ave in New York. Upon hearing that phrase, one would immediately turn his attention to the speaker—in this case, Dr. Bernie Goldstein—curious as to what could have prompted him to make such an unpopular claim (in the context of both American and global affairs). Dr. Goldstein was not talking directly about politics; rather, he was talking about the role they play in deciding the degree and severity of regulating the amount of chemicals in food products in the U.S. and the E.U., and how said regulations have affected the international political climate. In his opening statement, he was referring to Trump’s position on the use of various chemicals and the commerce of genetically modified produce in the United States. Trump maintains that the use of chemical pesticides in produce is acceptable, as long as they are below a certain threshold. This stance does not depend on political party affiliation:
Obama and his recent predecessors were of similar persuasion. The European Union, on the other hand, has held a contrary opinion: that the use of chemical pesticides in produce and hormones cattle used for beef is unacceptable. The acceptable threshold of chemical pesticides in plants and hormones in beef is one-tenth in the European Union than in the United States.

Dr. Goldstein explained that this discrepancy was due to the ways in which both sovereignties interpret the Precautionary Principle, as well as their power structure and the ways in which that structure and the degree of centralization affects how their laws and regulations are passed. The E.U.’s mandate necessitates consensus from 28-member states on any policy proposal or regulation issue, whereas the U.S. only needs a majority vote in the House and the Senate for a policy change to become effective. Furthermore, the United States’ interpretation of the Precautionary Principle differs from that of the European Union. The precautionary principle is effectively a simple, basal guideline concerning means of approaching and implementing innovative technologies and research into policy. This is done through the employment of risk assessment, which enables governments to determine which policies to implement and to what extent to do so. There are three levels of risk assessment employed to address possible issues: primary, which is entirely preventative; secondary, in which newfound problems brought upon by previously-implemented policies are addressed and mitigated; and tertiary, which allows for a completely reactionary approach to issues.

The European Union employs the primary level of risk assessment in its approach to the usage of chemicals and GMO’s in their produce and meat production, whereas the United States employs the tertiary-level response of risk assessment. For the past several decades, the U.S. and its presidents have been of the persuasion that new, experimental methods of product production—regardless of the industry—are acceptable, and in many cases, encouraged, unless scientifically proven otherwise. In the most recent administrations, Presidents Obama, and subsequently, Trump have taken the position that using GMO seeds to grow produce and growth hormones in cattle and other livestock is permissible, since there have been no scientific studies which have proven that the levels deemed acceptable by the U.S. FDA are of a significantly higher detriment to the health of the consumer than those deemed acceptable by the European Union. Conversely, the E.U. holds the official position that since chemicals and GMO’s could possibly prove to be detrimental to the health of the consumers, they should not be used in food products. Dr. Goldstein proceeded to refute this stance, saying that the E.U.’s position for keeping chemicals and GMO’s out of their food products stems from economic and cultural motivations. In implementing this policy, the E.U. has managed to save a net of $1 billion (U.S.) per year on food. He continued, saying that the use of GMO’s and chemical pesticides on food products prevent the spread of disease and promote sustainability, as the livestock injected with artificial hormones require less green space and time to mature than those not injected.

According to the precautionary principle and the levels of risk assessment, the jury on the degree to which such usage is beneficial or detrimental to its consumers is still out, and until a verdict is delivered, the U.S. and the E.U. will both continue with their current practices, otherwise unpersuaded and unmotivated to bring about any change.
Scott C. Ratzan, MD, MPA, is a Board Member of World Information Transfer and a health literacy expert who has been addressing WIT interns on public health issues for years.

He became interested in health communication at an early age when he thought he wanted to be more engaged with medicine but it eventually became clear to him that being “healthy” was not just what you did with a doctor or what you did by being a doctor.

He revealed to WIT Interns that he studied rhetoric in political activities in college and after obtaining his medical degree from the University of Southern California, he realized he needed other backgrounds to effectively make a difference. That is when he got his MPA at the John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University and went on to get his MA in communication from Emerson College. He brought all three degrees together to form the mindset that how we communicate in health could make a significant difference in people’s lives, which is what health is all about.
In his own words, health literacy is the basic currency that is necessary for people to make healthy decisions. Health decisions vary around the world based on your age, environment and access to resources, so it is essential that everyone understands what they need to know about their health, how they can obtain better information as well as making those appropriate health decisions.

Dr. Ratzan spoke to WIT Interns on how health and technology go hand in hand with another, which is why he went on to support the development of Text4baby, the first free national health text messaging service in the United States that assists in providing timely information to pregnant women and new mothers to advise them on how they can improve their health as well as the health of their babies.

He also informed us that the number one killer of adolescents and young adults aged 18-24 are road-related crashes, which kills an estimated 1.4 million youth annually. He has been a part of Together for Safer Roads, an innovating coalition that brings together global private sector companies such as AT&T, Facebook, PepsiCo, etc. to collaborate on improving road safety and reducing deaths and injuries sustained from road crashes.

He currently serves as co-Chair of the UN secretary General’s Innovation Working Group in support of Every Woman Every Child, Non-Communicable Disease Network (NCDNet) of the World Health Organization, Global Strategy for Women's and Children's Health, Global Medical Advisory Board, and is a Global Health Ambassador for AmeriCares.

As a pioneer in the field of public health communication, he has written critically-acclaimed books including Mad Cow Crisis: Health and the Public Good which was described as “the biggest health crisis the European Union had”, in which the Mad Cow Crisis tackled important concerns in how public health is sensationalized, managed, disseminated (if necessary) and what strategies could be used to ease media frenzies, as well as AIDS: Effective Health Communication for the 90s. He has appeared as a guest on Good Morning America, Nightline on ABC as well as publishing articles in the Wall Street Journal and the New York Times.
Dr. Mark Robson
Rutgers University Professor of Environmental and Biological Sciences

Dr. Robson sitting to the left of Dr. Durbak

Dr. Mark Robson is Professor and Chair of the Department of Plant Biology and Pathology at Rutgers University. He is a toxicologist and orients his work towards pesticides use, its effect on the environment and the people who rely on them. He has facilitated projects in Thailand for the past twenty years, documenting environmental health patterns in rural Thai communities.

Professor Robson opened the presentation with remarks concerning the enormous growth rate of the world’s population. As the world population may reach 9 billion by 2050, food security will become a significant challenge for the developing world.

Detailing his work in Thailand, he explained that the country is the becoming the world’s leading exporter of rice, at an increasing risk to the health of rural farming communities. Pesticide poisoning among rice farmers has exacerbated every year since the 1990’s. By 2007, it is estimated that 40% of Thai farmers are heavily exposed to organophosphate which is a grave concern given the latency of the problem, the toxic chemicals will stay on the farmers for some time. Professor
Robson stressed his belief that to combat the use of pesticides, you need inspire a shift in knowledge and attitude, which necessitates cultural awareness.

For instance, he recounted a memory when he met a farmer in Thailand who wore cotton shirts and trousers while spraying insecticides. Unaware that cotton is an absorbent material, he was inadvertently exposing himself to harmful substances. In another instance, he found a farmer in Ghana spraying pesticides across his farm naked because he did not want to damage his clothes. Intervention, he explained, needs to be rooted in three dimensions - Knowledge, Attitude, and Practices - or KAP.

During his tenure at the Thai Fogarty ITREOH Center, he ran workshops for students and youth, focusing on changing the attitudes of young people to inspire lasting awareness. The exercises were practical, for instance, teaching students to effectively plan their farms in a sustainable manner to avoid contamination.

However, when it comes to children, he faces new challenges. As he compared the results from a questionnaire and observations exercise distributed among children as to how often they wash their hands, he found inconsistencies. When observing chemical exposure among children, he found that more rural children were exposed to Glyphosate during dry seasons. The rainy season exhibited no exposure difference between rural and urban children. Thus, he confirmed that children were exposed to pesticides as families could not use pesticides during the rainy season. A lack of genuine data stemming from parents influencing their children’s responses can hide risks for the most vulnerable members of the population – the youth.

Pesticides are not the only serious risk in rural Thai communities. When studying skin cancers in a village, he found the risk factor was in their water source. Households with wells suffered from the highest rates of skin cancer. Water contamination often leads to disastrous health impacts as the local populace relies heavily on fish from a contaminated local canal. Unreliable food security leaves villages two options, both with different trade-offs. Banning Genetically Modified Organics (GMO), as Thailand did, the country began to depend on pesticides and other harmful chemicals to facilitate crop growth; alternatively, one can fully embrace GMOs, as China did, but copyright issues surrounding genetic data may further impoverish villages and the country. But by no means is it hopeless for the villages on this question.

In conclusion, Dr. Robson emphasized his high hopes for the resilience of the people he has worked with, and the power for youth has to make an impact in public health.
United Nations Alliance of Civilizations (UNAOC) aims to improve understanding and cooperation among nations and peoples across cultures and to reduce polarization at local and global levels. It attempts to develop more inclusive societies, in which diversity is experienced as an asset.

The UNAOC was established in 2005, a political initiative of Mr. Kofi Annan, former UN secretary General and cosponsored by the governments of Spain and Turkey. Diversity is the golden word to describe the Alliance. Beliefs, cultures and actions guide the way people discriminate. Hate of differences leads to conflict. By being grounded in the word diversity, Alliance has the ambition to resolve this conflict. The UNAOC has 4 areas of activity: Education, Youth, Media and Migration. These activities can be grouped in clusters around the five key objectives of UNAOC: Facilitating the global conversation, promoting changes in policy frameworks and intercultural strategy, preventing intercultural tensions and crises, supporting innovative grassroots initiatives, and raising awareness and mobilizing public support. UNAOC can teach you what diversity means, interfaith means, and what it means to 193 member states. Unlike delegates, staff members of the UN are not required to go to UNITAR for preparation.

Dr. Hanifa Mezoui, 4th from the left, has had a distinguished career with the United Nations for the past 28 years. Within the last 10 of those years, she has served as Chief of the NGO Section of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA) where she has established a number of impressive accomplishments. She is currently the President of the Association UN-NGO-IRENE. The Association UN-NGO-IRENE was founded as a channel for communicating key themes and programs between the UN and NGO community globally. Since March 2009, she is the Permanent Representative to the United Nations and ECOSOC of the “International Association of the Economic and Social Councils and Similar Institutions.” She is also a member of Pio Manzu Centre’ Scientific Committee.
Dr. Hanifa Mezoui is from Algeria and holds a Doctorate in French Linguistics, an MA in French Literature, an MA in applied statistics, an MA in Business Administration from the University of Aix-en-Provence, France. Dr. Hanifa Mezoui explained that at the UN delegates make the final decision. There is an NGO committee within the UN however, when there is a problem, the process of accreditation will stop and there will be an appeal for those for and against the NGO. After a decision is made, the NGO committee reports to ECOSOC, which is a group of 50 members who then report to the General Assembly which has 193-member states. The goal of each NGO is to issue a statement to the UN that is translated in 3 languages. This statement must be relevant to the current focus of the UN, currently the SDG 2030 agenda.

Interns at the UN should start by researching the history of a particular issue. For example, with the new counterterrorism sector opening, there were resolutions and events leading up to that creation. Every NGO has to learn how to navigate the UN. There are different NGO statutes regarding the involvement in the program of ECOSOC. The highest level of an NGO has the General status which indicates that the NGO has examined all of the 17 SDGs and they are relevant to your mission. World Information Transfer is one of only 450 NGOs with this status out of 5000 ECOSOC NGO's.

Paloma Haschke-Joseph, the Project Management Specialist of Intercultural Engagement talked on the Fellowship Program which began in 2010 for participants ages 25-35. The participants are chosen based on their motivation and ability to foster intercultural dialogue in their organizations. There are 2 groups each year that meet with media representatives, religious leaders, and international organizations across the world, introducing them to the decision-making process of every country. Each year has a topic: this year is Youth Prevention of Violent Extremism. The alumni network following the program has currently 207 young experts that originate from 44 different countries.

Vanessa Suen, the Project Management Specialist for Youth and Innovation of UNAOC talked about the Intercultural Innovation Award, established in 2011 for supporting innovative and grass roots projects. Every year, 10 organizations are selected. Upon receiving the award, organizations are granted membership in the Intercultural Leaders Network for UNAOC Alumni. So far, there have been 51 organizations awarded, representing over 105 countries. The Youth Solidarity Fund, for organizations that promote a peaceful society, has been sponsored by the government of Finland since 2008. The fund has provided up to $25,000 annually along with technical support and training. Since 2008, the fund has reached 34 countries and 57 projects have been funded.

Bram Van Haver, UNAOC Project Management Specialist and the Young Peacebuilders Program Co-coordinator talked about the Young Peace Builders Education Program for ages 18-25 which consists of a 4-step process. Part 1 is an online phase that is 2 months in length. Participants access the course through an online collaborative platform provided by UNAOC. Part 2 is a face to face workshop for 1 week. All participants travel to Jordan to complete modules and field visits with trainers and facilitators. Part 3 is the online follow-up phase, which is 3-4 months in length. Participants stay connected through the online platform and consolidate the network and follow-up mechanisms. Finally, part 4, is the result sharing symposium for one day. Participants are invited to participate in a symposium where they share their experience, lessons learned, achievements and recommendations.

Jordi Torrent, Project Manager and Media Literacy Education is in charge of the PLURAL+ program as well as the PEACE app. The PLURAL+ program is based on media and education literacy. It promotes media skills and gives an understanding of social media and the world. Opinions can be extremely influential in the shaping of media and consumption of media; thus, it is very important to truly be able to navigate the internet. The PLURAL+ Media Festival is going into its 10th anniversary and is a platform for young people up to age 25. There are 3 age groups, and all videos are available for viewing – so far there are 371 total videos from 72 countries. This upcoming November 19th, there will be the world ceremony of these videos in New York City. PLURAL+ serves as a platform for young people to represent themselves and tell their stories.
The PEACEapp is also a media literacy initiative. UNAOC has been developing a series of projects aimed at the use of ICT, as a strategic way to build understanding among individuals from diverse cultural and religious backgrounds. The platform was designed for children by MIT SCRATCH as a way to develop video games that also develop computational thinking skills. The group consists of 30 people, 15 are from the home country and the other 15 are migrants and refugees. By dividing the group with local and migrant/refugees for one week, there is a better chance of interaction and getting to know one another, thus there is a concept of bridging communication between local youth and people from other countries.

Ms. Mariam Azarm
Board Member of World Information Transfer

Ms. Mariam Azarm is on the board of World Information Transfer and founder of Klosters Innovation Partners, a think-tank. She formerly served as the International Events and Conference Manager to the United Nations for 25 years, actively involved in fundraising and raising awareness for many philanthropic endeavors. Her calling to the United Nations began in 1980, after meeting the Under-Secretary General of the conference service department – whilst she was running an art gallery in New York City. However, it was not until 10 years later, when her mother brought up her long-time passion of working for the United Nations on a trip to Geneva that her work started.

When asked how she would define her job as International Events and Conference Manager to the United Nations, she answered that the description is “no one knows you are there”, the definition of behind the scenes. Being an International Events and Conference Manager to the United Nations entails knowing everyone’s name, rank, position and the structure of the conference room while remaining incognito.

The two most important aspects of being an International Events and Conference Manager are dress appearance and body language. Just as in any professional job, at the United Nations, you want to dress for the way you want to be perceived. In an establishment meant to bridge peace between cultures, looking respectable and presentable is essential to cultivating a successful work environment. An example given was the Mission of Iran. The Iranian delegation has strict conduct regarding shaking hands with women. Certain countries have specific protocols and it is a part of the job of the UN staffer to be aware of them. If a female UN staff member tried to shake hands with an Iranian delegate it would completely go against their customs. This exact situation happened to Ms. Azarm’s friend from Israel, who was dressed in a short skirt when determined to have an interview with the foreign minister of Iran. When she was able to get the interview, she hugged him and stole a picture, leaving him absolutely horrified and her in a lot of trouble. This is because certain countries have certain protocols regarding their religious customs and it is part of the job to know what those are.

Body language is also important for a UN staffer. Appropriate dress and behavior is strictly required and unprofessional behavior is quickly observed by the delegates. Mariam’s job put her
in a unique position that allowed her to interact with some of the most important people on the earth. She has been able to talk to these people about their speeches and interventions for conferences and meetings. Over time, she developed a rapport with some of the delegates, which engendered a sense of familiarity with even the most well-known diplomats. Conference planning is done all around the world and people in Mariam’s position are the facilitators of the meetings - meaning that they make sure there are lights, air conditioning, interpreters, translators etc. Mariam did not deal with the content of the conference; however, she has witnessed how the United Nation’s structure has evolved over the past 20 years.

At the start of the United Nations, there were 110 countries that were members. Now, 25 years later, there are 193 countries, which gave Mariam an immense amount of insight into the inner workings of the UN. Most of the work has to do with reports since each country has to abide by the agenda of its government. Around the same time that Ms. Azarm started her career at the UN – she began a lifelong friendship with Founder of World Information Transfer, Dr. Christine Durbak. She contributed annually to the WIT Conference and has maintained a permanent spot on the WIT committee.

The first person Mariam introduced to WIT interns was Anthony Salvia, the advisor to the Holy See on Arms of International Security. Every diplomat representing the Holy See is a priest, however there are many advisors, due to the vast regions that need to be covered. Mr. Salvia’s career began domestically, serving as the Special Advisor to the Undersecretary of State for Political Affairs under Ronald Reagan. He then continued into the media realm as the director of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty’s Moscow Bureau and is now a partner of Global Strategic Communications Group, a firm devoted to government relations and public advocacy.

Sahar Waly was kind enough to attend the second session with Mariam. Sahar Waly began her career path as a Syrian Diplomat, entering the foreign service with the intent becoming representative of her country. However, her life path changed as she started working at the UN. The first thing she learned was that at the UN, every country is equal and was to be treated as such. An observer state like the Holy See is seen with just as much respect as the United States because the UN functions to strive for equality among all members.

In the mid 1990's, Sahar became a senior official manager in the United Nations office and began arranging the main sessions of General Assembly and Security Council. This experience gave her excellent knowledge of the culture clashes that exist between the 193 member states and how to maneuver conferences without missteps. Certain countries have issues with other countries whether cultural, religious or political and have to be carefully resolved.
Nathan Beriro is a digital producer for the United Nations Department of Public Information (UNDPI). He studied media and political relations at Concordia University before earning a Master’s degree in Public Policy. He then worked as a video producer for Much Music, a segment on MTV where he cultivated skills in professional lighting and editing. He moved on to become an intern at UNDPI, utilizing the skills he learned from his time in the private sector. Following his internship, Nathan was offered a retainer contract as he had a unique understanding on what the media department does and how they want to be perceived.

Nathan served as UN Women’s lead digital producer from 2015-2017 in which he worked in virtual reality production. He explained how impactful virtual reality is in putting the viewer in a first-person viewpoint. The example he gave was his first video shot in Congo of the first-person perspective of a woman refugee crossing the lake from Burundi. Virtual reality gave people a chance to see life from inside her eyes, a lens that is impossible to access otherwise. Diplomats rarely have the occasion to witness the conditions on the ground, so it brought out intense emotional reactions from those who viewed the video at the UN. Virtual Reality tricks the brain into thinking it is in the place that the film took place, a step-up from the 360 views available on YouTube and Facebook.