

# Inspiring Voices: Transforming the World, Lives and Communities

January 22, 2015, Dag Hammarskjöld Library

Attending the UN DPI/NGO inaugural briefing with the Women's Caucus for Art's two new Youth Representatives, Soha Farooqui and Miranda Barnes (both interns from the Department of Art and Design at Queensborough Community College, CUNY) made for a memorable and particularly inspiring day. Jeff Brez, UN DPI Chief of NGO Relations, Advocacy and Special Events, began the event with a warm welcome and a preview of the year ahead for the NGO community. He noted that this year marks the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding of the United Nations, and quoted Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon's observations that "the year 2015 is a once in a generation opportunity. Our goal is to put people at the center, and protect our one and only planet. Our duty is to end poverty, leave no one behind, and build lives of dignity for all.



Photo by Darcy Neill

**Queensborough/WCA Interns Miranda Barnes (l.) and Soha Farooqui (r.) with Professor Liz Di Giorgio.**

Jeff Brez noted that the upcoming year would include many opportunities to commemorate the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding of the United Nations. The highlights include making final efforts toward achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDG's), and the UN Summit for the adoption of the Post-2015 Development Agenda, which will take place in September. In December the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) Conference of Parties will lead a global effort toward a commitment to limit climate change to less than a two

degree rise in global temperatures. He also reminded all to make use of the NGO Conference Declaration, which is found at the UN DPI/NGO Facebook page.

The panelists shared stories that included multicultural living, a journey from surviving terrorism to then working with the UN to counter it, and the story of a young man who discovered ways for communities to help themselves through ingenuity, social media, and the goodwill that is found both within and outside of communities in need.

Imani Woomera, a lyricist, poet, and the mother of co-panelist and young poet Zion Miyonga, shared hip-hop poetry that reflected their multicultural lives and global concerns. Ms. Woomera described growing up as a native Hawaiian, spending many years in Kenya,

where Zion was born, and then returning to the US. Their poetry, including a wonderful duet, spoke of sustainability, equality, Jimi Hendrix, Mother Teresa, Nelson Mandela, Martin Luther King, Jr., and peace. Many words resonated, such as the call for “consuming less junk,” and “producing more quality.” Perhaps most relevant to the UNDPI/NGO community was the advice that “If you ever feel like you are too small to make a difference, try sleeping with a mosquito.”

Roszel A. Morris shared her story of escaping from the North Tower on 9/11 and trying to get through the chaos that followed its collapse. She recounted how, in the midst of the fear and chaos, a stranger smiled and called to her from a car, offering to help. She learned that the woman worked for the UN, and asked if she would drive her to collect her daughter from daycare. Ms. Morris eventually came to work for the UN Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate (CTED), whose work includes thwarting support (financial and otherwise) for terrorism. Although she never found the woman who helped her that day, Jeff Brez invited Ms. Morris to speak directly to the camera in the hope that the message would eventually find its way to the woman. Ms. Morris finally had the chance to express her gratitude.

Panelist Karim Abouelnaga, the young founder and CEO of Practice Makes Perfect, told his impressive story of growing up in an immigrant family from Egypt, and overcoming the obstacles that his family faced, including the death of his father while he was still in his teens. His resilience and his ingenuity in raising support for his foundation, at first \$2,000 from friends, and then millions from others, resulted in a program that provides over 500 low income children with education enrichment. He noted with conviction that the next 15 years will not be defined by 193 heads of state, but by the 7 billion people who inhabit the world. His foundation arose from the idea of communities and people, even the poorest, finding ways to help each other. For Mr. Abouelnaga, compassion, empathy and kindness are key to finding solutions and bringing about change. He emphasized his belief that “the poor are the best equipped to help themselves.” His goal is to support those internal systems of change.

– Liz Di Giorgio