

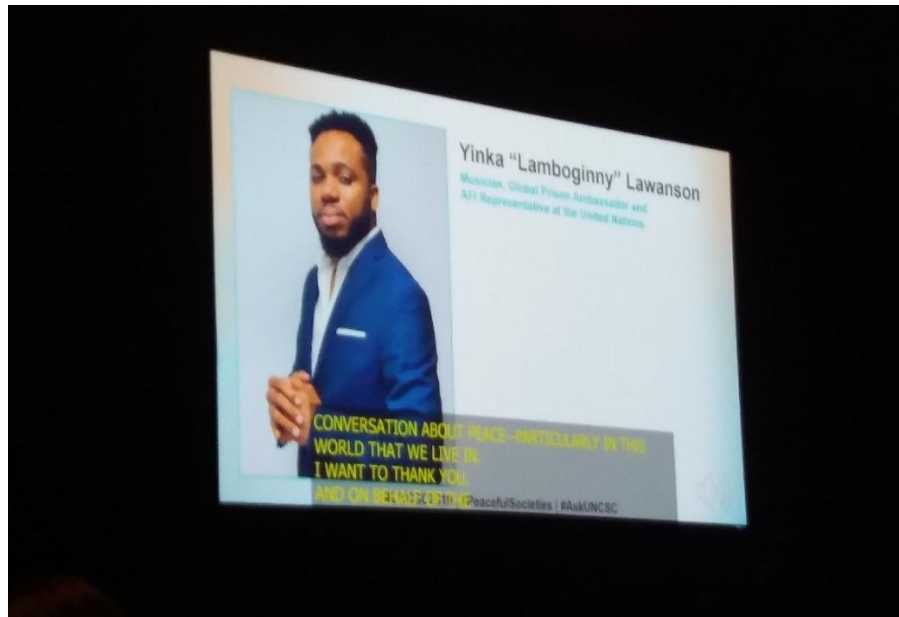
## Attending Thematic Session on Peaceful Societies at the 68<sup>th</sup> United Nations Civil Society Conference

Thematic session on the topic of “Peaceful Societies – Recovering from Conflict and Nurturing Peace” took place on August 28<sup>th</sup> in Salt Lake City as a part of 68<sup>th</sup> United Nations Civil Society Conference. The number of UIMF representatives (Utah International Mountain Forum – a coalition of student clubs in Utah Valley University) attended the event and even got a chance to talk with the speakers after the end of session.



*Speakers of thematic session “Peaceful Societies – Recovering from Conflict and Nurturing Peace” delivering their key remarks*

During the event, a panel of the speakers from different backgrounds and experiences talked about their approaches to implementation of sustainable development goals 11 and 16, which aim at building inclusive and sustainable cities and communities, as well as promotion of peace, justice and strong institutions. The moderator of the panel, Ms. Alejandra Y. Castillo, CEO of *Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA USA)*, moderated the panel under the slogan of her organization “eliminating racism, empowering women”, and engaged with a panelist through the round of questions concerning sustainable development in modern societies.



*Introduction of speakers of thematic session on “Peaceful Societies – Recovering from Conflict and Nurturing Peace”*

The first speaker, Ms. Samira Harnish, the Founder and Executive Director of *Women of the World*, shared the personal stories of female refugees (such as Ms. Sarah from Democratic Republic of Congo) her organization provided assistance to, including the help in learning the language and integration in the local communities, which in turn provides women with self-reliance and necessary economic opportunities. Ms. Harnish also discussed the difficulties immigrant parents face when their US-born children adopt local culture and language as primary, which results into parents losing the connection with their children and severe miscommunications, especially when the children get in trouble.

The next speaker, Ms. Mirella Dummar-Frahi, Civil Society Team Leader, United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), talked about the issues of crime, terrorism, rule of law and corruption, with last one serving a major obstacle in fighting transnational crime. Meanwhile, Ms. Dummar-Frahi emphasized the importance of cooperation and constructive dialog between governments, civil societies (NGOs), private businesses and international organizations in order to battle corruption. When asked on the issue of instability as related to corruption and crime, Ms. Dummar-Frahi stated that poverty is the key source for the instability, disparity, inequality and conflict in modern societies. Therefore, as poverty is born from denying access to opportunities needed for community economic development, corruption is one of the key cause of poverty and thus crime, which could be stopped only via cooperation between the government, private sector and civil society. Third and last, Ms. Dummar-Frahi pointed out that poverty and corruption also stimulate migration, which often results in human trafficking and other mass-exploitations of migrants.

The third speaker, Mr. Yinka Lamboginny Lawanson, is the Founder of *Saving All Lives Together* (SALT) and singer from Nigerian, who advocates for the prison reform via United Nations platform. Of all the speakers, he has shown the highest engagement with the audience due to his passionate speech and comments on the issues, his outfit - orange jumpsuit with a slogan “I Believe in Prison Reform”, meant to show the solidarity for prison inmates; as well as his music performance at the end of the session, song “We Are the United Nations” which artist composed a week prior, being inspired by the efforts of 68<sup>th</sup> UN Civil Society Conference. Overall, Lamboginny’s statements were focused on the issue of segregation and stigmatization of prisoners and required efforts of their reintegration in the society (as about 80% of prisoners leave the prison after serving their term). Mr. Lawanson called for solidarity for prison inmates, which he personally ensures through his performances in prisons for fellow “brothers and sisters”, which not only serves as music therapy for prisoners, but also bridges the distance between them and civil society, as the public begins to perceive them differently in light of Mr. Lawanson’s compassion.



*Mr. Lamboginny Lawanson displaying his statement “I Believe in Prison Reform”*

Finally, Mr. Manav Subodh, Co-founder of *IMIB* and Global Senior Fellow, UC Berkley (India), shared the mission of his organization, which focuses on activation of 1 million leaders

for 1 billion people to promote the development of the sustainable societies. Mr. Subodh views local entrepreneurship as a key solution for the control of migration and management of the security risks, as it would provide people with employment and necessary economic opportunities - without them having to leave their families and communities. This initiative could be done with assistance of non-profit sector via AI platform which helps the youth – who can't access standard entrepreneurial programs, and often are susceptible to poverty and crime - to acquire credit history and bank connections necessary to start their own businesses. Mr. Subodh noted that such initiative might be particularly relative to the number of Asian, Middle Eastern and African states, where due to the high unemployment levels among youth, people are leaving their homes in search of better opportunities, which results in fragmentation of their communities.

Employment proved to be an area, which not only the panelists but audience thought to be the most important in ensuring the sustainable development of the communities. When polled on the question: “Which issue do you believe are necessary to creating more sustainable and inclusive peaceful solutions?” majority of the audience stated job creation as the most important, with panelists pointing out that corruption goes hand-in-hand to job creation when it comes to the employment.



*Nigerian singer Lamboginny getting interviewed on stage on his prison reform activism*

Lamboginny added that an institutional issues of denying access to employment for ex-prisoners makes it impossible for them to reintegrate into society and exposes them to more negative influences. In addition, Mr. Subodh stated that jobs provide people not only with money, and ensures their pride and dignity, which are necessary for sustainable way of life. One of the ways to ensure it is the accountability of finance, where people would know which kind of impact their money can have on someone's life – concept especially applicable to village

communities. Also, Mr. Subodh talked about the opportunities of teaching young people skills outside of current education system to make them more compatible and equipped for their jobs – initiative requiring active engagement of technology, which actually is a focus of Mr. Subodh’s non-profit activities.

As the conclusion, moderator asked the speakers to share with the audience key take-aways from this session. Ms. Harnish encouraged attendants to be more engaged with your communities, to talk with and support your neighbors, as well as to seek out the financing which would help the implementation of NGO’s programs aimed at community sustainable development. Ms. Dummar-Frahi emphasized the importance of civil society, while Mr. Lawanson once again called out the need for prison reform (including promotion of this objective via social media) and importance of finding the place in our hearts for forgiveness. Finally, Mr. Subodh asked the audience to remember that we should allow failures to happen and that “small is the new big”, that is impact on the small level is extremely important.



*UIMF representative Ms. Bahrii taking picture with Nigerian singer Lamboginny*

I personally had a chance to talk and take pictures with both Mr. Lawanson and Mr. Subodh after the event. I was strongly impressed by the strength of Mr. Lawanson’s convictions and the scale of his activism, however so were impressed the attendants of the event – so much so that several news outlets took the interview with him while on stage, all while numerous representatives of civil society were taking pictures with him and discussing his activism on criminal justice reform.



*UIMF representative Ms. Bahrii discussing institutional approaches to stimulate development of youth entrepreneurship in local communities with Mr. Manav Subodh*

Also, I got a chance to talk with Mr. Subodh about the ways to implement his program in war-torn communities of Middle East – my area of academic studies – where he pointed out that engaged of entrepreneurs from local communities via NGOs connected to local academic institutions is the best way to ensure economic development and stability of such communities.

***Ms. Viktoriia Bahrii, Vice-President of Logistics, UIMF***