

Written Statement • Jessica Rimington • One World Africa Youth Summit

Background: After I was accepted to Georgetown University, I took a year off from school in attempt to launch a pilot educational program to prove the thesis that cultural exchange among youth could lead to positive action. During this year I founded One World Youth Project (www.oneworldyouthproject.org) – a unique sister-school program for middle and high school youth, linking groups in the US/Canada with groups from around the world together in learning partnerships for the purpose of community service toward the achievement of the United Nations Millennium Development Goals. What began as a small pilot program has grown into a 501(c)(3) nonprofit run entirely by a volunteer staff of 23 young people (ages 17 to 24 in 7 countries) who serve 44 middle/high schools in 17 countries and 12 USA states. I believe that if youth reach out and understand their peers overseas, they feel a connection. If they feel a connection, they care. If they care –if we care –then how can we continue to make wars on each other when it is our *friends* on the other side of the battle line? As One World Youth Project gains more respect in the international NGO community, I have the opportunity to expand its scope and implement exciting initiatives like the One World Africa Youth Summit.

Why a One World Africa Youth Summit?: Ask anyone what they see wrong in the world and they will say things like: “*Too much talk and not enough action*” “*So many problems and limited resources to meet them.*” Ask them if they think a solution is possible to many of the world’s problems and they will invariably say, “Yes!” Yet, ask a person if they can create this solution and make it a reality and they will waver. Why does this disconnect exist? I believe it stems from a profound disempowerment –a feeling that problems are too many in number and too grand in scale, that solutions are too distant and complex, and therefore, that it is not possible for the individual to take action for change. Ironically, it seems that our collective hope for a better future lies in the untapped power of individuals –of civil society. I believe it is through empowering individuals to meet local challenges with innovative solutions that we will work toward a more peaceful world.

We face a number of serious challenges in the 21st century –some of which are outlined in the UN Millennium Development Goals. We are often restricted in solving these challenges by limited resources. This combination of limited resources and severe challenges is an incubator for conflict and in some cases widespread war. Yet, as we enter the 21st century we have in our possession new resources (e.g. increased information-communication-technology) for creating change and building a global community of positive action. The challenge of the next generation will be to take advantage of these new resources to meet the greatest needs of our era and thus create a more peaceful future.

To do this I believe we must develop new ‘models of change-making’. I define a ‘model of change-making’ as a replicable process that allows local communities to utilize innovative modes of thought and practical organization to employ resources for specific, relevant, and necessary change with measurable results. Through its sister-school program, One World Youth Project has formed a collaborative, global community of youth action. As this community grows and develops it is becoming a hotbed of change-making ideas. Through One World Youth Project I hope to implement ‘models of change-making’ in the form of international youth summits. The first of these will be the One World Africa Youth Summit (OWAYS) to be held in Aburi, Ghana July 26th – 31st 2007.

What is the One World Africa Youth Summit? The One World Africa Youth Summit (OWAYS) is an initiative of One World Youth Project (OWYP) hosted by the RESPECT Intellectual Club with support from RESPECT Ghana. The RESPECT Intellectual Club (RIC) is a youth group of 150 members based in the Buduburam Refugee Camp (populated primarily with Liberian refugees) with the motto: *Connecting and Enhancing Communities for Youth Action*. RIC has been a participant group of One World Youth Project since summer 2005 and is paired with a sister-school in San Diego, California. RIC includes youth leaders from various refugee schools in the biggest refugee settlement in Ghana.

The One World Africa Youth Summit (July 26th – 31st 2007) will be held at the Aburi Botanic Gardens facility of Ghana - approximately 39 kilometers northeast of Accra. The youth summit will mark One World Youth Project’s launch of an innovative social venture with the goal of empowering youth to prioritize local challenges for local action. The summit will bring together over 60 OWYP youth participants from 7 African countries to Aburi, Ghana for a unique chance to be decision makers and effect tangible, local change. Youth will spend 6 intense and exciting days exploring 5 local challenges in the community of the host group, discussing solutions, participating in a prioritization process, and ultimately deciding as a group how to allocate funding to solve one or more of the identified challenges. The summit will also feature workshops regarding 21st century skills necessary for youth to become active citizens and meet the unique challenges of our era with innovative solutions. Prior to the July summit, youth of the host group, the RESPECT Intellectual Club of the Buduburam Refugee Camp, will spend 5 months participating in an in-depth preparation and learning process. Following the summit, the RESPECT Intellectual Club will have the opportunity to make the solution decided upon at the summit a reality.

Why is OWAYS important? In a world overwhelmed with challenges and occupied by a populous with restricted means, the One World Africa Youth Summit (OWAYS) will create the framework for a community leadership model which others could enact in an effort to find specific, tangible solutions for local challenges. OWAYS 2007 will: leave a lasting positive impact on the local host community, inspire youth across Africa to take leadership and action, empower participants with necessary 21st century skills, and make an important contribution to the development and advocacy field.

How will OWAYS work?

Pre-summit preparation: a unique process model: Prior to the summit, members of the host group of the RESPECT Intellectual Club will identify 5 challenges that exist in their local community of the Buduburam Refugee Camp. These challenges will be specific but connect to a larger global context. . For instance, they may identify the fact that "the books at school are outdated", which would connect in a larger context to "educational challenges in refugee communities". Volunteer professors from Georgetown University will act as mentors (by email), helping the youth members draft papers explaining each local challenge and placing it in a greater global context. Youth will also examine the roots of the challenges. In addition, youth members will identify 5 resources in their community that may be helpful in solving these challenges. Members will be asked to write a paper on each resource. For example, a resource may be: human capital. After the papers have been written, experts in the development and advocacy fields and RESPECT Intellectual Club members will work together to draft proposed solutions to the outlined local challenges. In addition, the entire One World Youth Project community of 44 schools in 17 countries will have the opportunity to contribute solution ideas via a wiki linked to the OWYP website (*a wiki is a website that allows the visitors to easily post content and comments. This ease of interaction and operation makes a wiki an effective tool for mass collaborative authoring*). Participating experts and RIC members will be asked write brief papers outlining potential solutions and include a 'price tag' explaining how much each would cost for implementation. In total there will be approximately 15 proposed solutions -each with a price tag. With sponsorship from the corporate/development sector, youth will have the opportunity to implement one or more of the solutions.

The summit: an innovative, collaborative and action-orientated experience: At the summit 30 youth delegates from RIC and 32 visiting youth from 7 African nations will explore the 5 local challenges identified by the host group, discuss the proposed solutions, and participate in a prioritization process. In addition, workshops regarding 21st century skills necessary for youth to become active citizens will be integrated throughout the summit program. Ultimately youth will be asked to come to a consensus on how to allocate funding to solve one or more of the identified challenges. In other words, with the specific amount of resources provided, which solution(s) would they choose to be implemented? Finally, youth will work together to write an action plan describing in detail how to implement the chosen solution(s). Their response will be an important contribution in finding relevant and practical solutions for local challenges –and a tangible step toward creating empowered and peaceful communities. Participants will be asked to present their findings and decision in a public forum at the end of the summit.

Post-summit implementation: making a real, tangible difference: For the 2007/2008 program year (September-June), the RESPECT Intellectual Club (host group of the OWAYS) will implement the chosen solution from the One World Africa Youth Summit, using the allocated resources. This will serve as their annual One World Youth Project community service project. In addition, all youth participants of the summit will receive information to help them implement a smaller-scale version of the 'model of change-making' illustrated through the One World Africa Youth Summit. Following the summit, the 5 youth-written challenge papers, 5 youth-written resource papers, compilation of solution ideas submitted via the OWYP wiki, approximately 15 expert-prepared solution papers, and documentation of the One World Africa Youth Summit will be published in print form. This document will offer an important contribution to the development and advocacy field as well as provide a replicable process model for other communities. The document will be distributed to key figures throughout the world and presented at various events/forums.

Impact? The One World Africa Youth Summit will leave a lasting positive impact on the local Buduburam Refugee Community, inspire youth across Africa to lead and take action, empower participants with necessary 21st century skills, and make an important contribution by providing a replicable, innovative process model for local community action toward the alleviation of conditions which cause conflict. OWAYS creates an opportunity for an institution of higher education (Georgetown University), the corporate sector, development experts, and a diverse group of individuals to see the power of their collaboration take tangible form and make a positive, measurable impact. This type of innovative, community-based collaboration is necessary to make this century more peaceful than the last.

Inspiration? The process model for the One World Africa Youth Summit was inspired by the Copenhagen Consensus 2006 held at Georgetown University and chaired by Dr. Bjorn Lomborg of the Copenhagen Consensus Center. The Copenhagen Consensus Center (CCC) promotes an often neglected idea: when financial resources are limited you need to prioritize your effort. CCC carries out a number of thought-experiments involving this concept of prioritization. Inspired by the CCC prioritization focus –One World Youth Project has placed the idea of prioritization into a real-life context with life-altering results. Unlike past prioritization processes, OWAYS is not a hypothetical thought exercise –but, rather a tangible, 21st century model for meeting unique challenges with innovative solutions.