

Speech by Prof. Said Irandoust, AIT President on the occasion of the inauguration of the Asia-Pacific International Model United Nations (APMUN) on 20 September 2012

Distinguished delegates

The UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has stated in May 2012 that the world needs a radical change of the priorities and models of global governance.

In this context I would like to refer to a quote which he made in which he mentioned the following:

“It is time to recognize that human capital and natural capital are every bit as important as financial capital;

...Let us face facts; the old model has collapsed. We need to create a new one, a new model for dynamic growth, a new paradigm based on stable economies and decent jobs and opportunities for all”.

Such an in-depth change, I would like to add is also quite urgent, if we consider the new challenges of a globalized financial crisis, of the climate change, of the digitization of social networks that inspire and dramatically accelerate the expectations of effective and participatory democratic systems.

The Planet Earth is no longer silent. It is now shouting -every day louder and louder- the evidence of the interdependence of every member of humankind, including the next generations, and that there is no longer any credible pursuit of happiness if it is not the happiness of every child, every women, every man on Earth. To understand and to act on our common destiny is the main ethical must of every responsible person.

Since last year’s UN declared “International Year of the Youth on Dialogue and on Mutual Understanding” the international community is attaching a special importance to youth’s participation in re-designing the vision of global justice, sustainable development and peace in the beginning of the new millennium.

In this very vision, the Asian Institute of Technology (AIT), is proud and honoured to have been able to lead the creation of the first Asia-Pacific International Model United Nations Conference at University level with the participation of university students from 46 countries with the main purpose to provide such a privileged atrium of consultation and debate on the culturally diverse aspirations of young leaders of the world.

The timing of the event is indeed an auspicious one for AIT since it marks one of the first major such event being convened under AIT's status as an international intergovernmental organization, which it attained on 30th January 2012. We are delighted that Cambodia is the latest country to ratify AIT's new charter, aside from Japan, Sweden, India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Nepal and Vietnam.

Youth understand easily what innovation and change means. They understand it also with idealism and a strong will to fight inequity. Should the future of the world be decided by youth only, surely peace, inter-culturalism and education would be the top priorities of global governance.

This is why Universities can and must play an important role beyond the traditional role of managing the advanced knowledge on global public goods through learning, applied research and outreach of best practices: Universities through the well designed Model United Nations can also provide a laboratory for students to test in reality their negotiation skills, their understanding of other peoples' aspirations through the practicalities of international relations.

We hear more and more from the leaders of the world advocating the concept that humanity is truly a global family. At the same time many of us are astonished of how much avoidable suffering, conflict, poverty, violence the world is witnessing today, which are largely due to lack of education and understanding. Nowadays we can watch live on our smart phones all of the world conflicts, disasters and crisis. We can read the comments by all the world leaders, we can Google the solutions proposed by the best experts' task forces. But are we really much better than 50 years ago in feeling the victims' sorrow, in listening to the destitute people's cry and in feeling the pain of every injustice like it would be our own family's problem ?

I am sure that you will exercise well your listening and feeling skills on some fundamentals of Human Rights and of U.N. Millennium Development Goals during these five days. I trust that you will be creative enough in this conference to find ways to listen also with inter-gender and inter-generational responsibility. Our, your, Model United Nations does not focus only on a promise to position you as better candidates for future careers of the United Nations, other International Organizations, or in the Diplomatic Services of your countries. We must promise each other that we will collectively deliver also on a much bigger change of attitudes in our own hearts: that we will truly listen and feel the other people's cry as our own.

AIT has joined hands with UN ESCAP, UNESCO, FAO, the Thai Conventions and Exhibition Bureau and the Royal Thai Government's Ministry of Foreign Affairs to pursue more and stronger institutional responsibility to contribute in youth's capacity building.

We wish to contribute to create better awareness among young people of international issues, so to contribute to a more equitable and sustainable human progress.

We are fully committed to facilitate and encourage the youth dialogue-oriented attitudes to foster a true extraverted cooperation between their countries and communities

AIT, in its special role as the first Institute of Higher Learning with the status of Inter-Governmental Organization, is glad to host and open today the first Asia-Pacific International Model United Nations in Bangkok and wishes that this appointment will become a regular opportunity of University level consultations on global peace, justice and sustainable development and a true Youth Summit every year in Bangkok.