

Civilizations Exchange & Cooperation Foundation

2009 Better Understanding for a Better World

Youth Leadership and Interfaith Conference

Orlando, Florida - USA

February 11-15, 2009



SHARING ONE WORLD



Youth seeking to achieve better understanding and agreement as they prepare for positions of leadership



Youth striving to lay foundations for harmony and global peace



In just four days, youth representing 24 countries, were able to overcome many stereotypes, recognize the strength in diversity, develop friendships and experience a feeling of mutual respect and cooperation

Who were these amazing people?

International Exchange students currently in the USA through the State Department's YES, FLEX, CBYX and ASMYLE Programs and American high school students, who served as ambassadors, representing the twenty four (24) countries and cultures below:

AFGHANISTAN
ARMENIA
EGYPT
GEORGIA
GERMANY
GHANA

INDIA
INDONESIA
JORDAN
KYRGYZSTAN
LEBANON
MONTENEGRO

PAKISTAN
PHILIPPINES
RUSSIA
SAUDI ARABIA
SERBIA
TAJIKISTAN

THAILAND
TUNISIA
TURKEY
TURKMENISTAN
UNITED STATES
UKRAINE

The main conference day took place on the premises of the Epcot Theme Park in Walt Disney World. We began by participating in the Millennium Cultures Experiential Program. The objectives are for the students to discover, explore, and learn to recognize how the various aspects of culture are impacted by changes in technology, commerce, communication, and people.

Our students were broken into four groups for these activities. Each group had a Disney staff facilitator and at least one of our chaperones to accompany each of the four groups.

Millennium Cultures Program



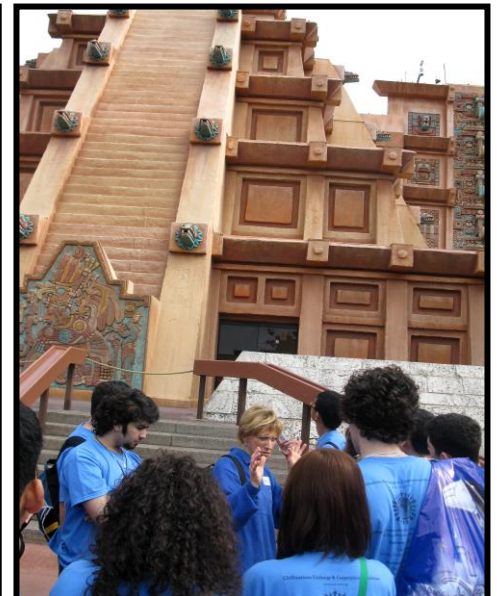
Spaceship Earth takes you through time to discover different methods of communication that has been used and the changes that have taken place in various parts of the world.

Non-verbal communication is an international method of conveying your feelings. Can you guess what she is feeling?

Visit Club Cool and sample products from around the world – we all have different tastes and backgrounds. What did you think of the different flavors from Germany, Italy, China, Japan, etc...?



Welcome to Disney's World Showcase! Eleven (11) countries are represented. Which of them are familiar to you?



QUESTION: Do you know how cultures come together and the different phases?

ANSWER: Assimilation – Accommodation - Cultural Displacement

THE AMERICAN ADVENTURE:

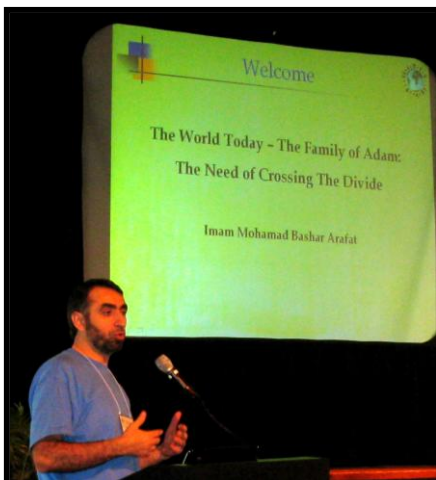


Let's Work Together to Stay Connected!

Where are you from and where are you now? What traits make up culture? Architecture, Food, Dress, Language, Traditions, etc..... [We are all interconnected!](#)



After a catered lunch in the Odyssey Pavilion, an afternoon of presentations and discussions followed.



- Welcome & Introduction to the conference by **Mr. Bassem Chaaban, Operations Director of the Islamic Society of Central Florida**, the co-sponsor of CECF's BUBW-Orlando Conferences.
- Main Address **"The World Today: The Family of Adam and Eve"**; elaborating on the need for "Crossing the Divide," while developing an atmosphere of belonging, as well as cultural understanding and sensitivity, which leads to successful interactions in whatever career you pursue by **Imam Mohamad Bashur Arafat, President and Founder of Civilizations Exchange and Cooperation Foundation.**



Presentations were given by students about Egypt, Russia, Thailand, Pakistan, U.S., Tajikistan, Indonesia, Georgia, India and the Philippines describing various aspects of their lives in these respective countries such as the people, living conditions, educational systems, history and the societal, cultural and religious practices. We were treated to a traditional Georgian dance that brought us to our feet for a standing ovation.



Breakout sessions and group discussions identifying problems facing the youth of today; ideas or activities for better cooperation on a personal, local and global level; opportunities and activities in which the youth need to be actively involved.



Sultana Ali's Presentation and exercises, "Leadership in the New World."



Visiting Religious Communities of the Abrahamic Faiths

- **Rabbi David Kay**, Ohev Shalom Synagogue
- **Imam Mohammed Musri and Mr. Bassem Cha'aban**, Islamic Society of Central Florida, Masjid Ar Rahman
- **Rev. Bryan Fulwilder and Rev. Talia Raymond**, First United Church of Christ in Winter Park

The leaders of these communities shared their respective practices, similarities and differences with one another, as well as their experiences living in a pluralistic society.

Congregation Ohev Shalom

Rabbi David Kay shared the teachings of Judaism and gave them an opportunity to take pictures of the Torah.



Islamic Society of Central Florida, Masjid Ar Rahman:

Imam Mohammed Musri spoke to the participants about various aspects of Islam, and took questions from the students. **Mr. Bassem Cha'aban** briefly mentioned practices and activities, which take place within the sanctuary of the mosque, as well as some of the misconceptions about Islam.



First United Church of Christ in Winter Park

Rev. Bryan Fulwilder and Rev. Talia Raymond discussed their church's perspectives on what it is to be a Christian. Who makes up the members of their community? And they also described some of their activities and goals. Their slogan, *God is not finished with me yet*, revolves around the concept of the "comma."



Lunch and Juma'ah Service at the Park

The Friday sermon and prayer was conducted by **Imam Mohamad Bashar Arafat** following lunch in a local park.



Panel Discussion conducted at Rollins College followed the Interfaith Visits:



The students enjoyed having an opportunity to engage our panelists in a dialogue about issues ranging from religion to societal difficulties to world peace. Many questions demonstrated the students' interests in events occurring around the world and what they will be facing in the future. They also took full advantage to ask questions of each panelist about religious issues and philosophies that may be misunderstood in their communities back home.





Better Understanding for a Better World Banquet

Walt Disney World's Odyssey Pavillion

The Potential for Youth in a Globalized World



The banquet began with a traditional Russian Folkdance performed by **Daria Alexandrova**, an exchange student, which set the tone of the banquet.

Then **Imam Darryl Wainwright, Executive Director of IACM**, lead an interactive discussion about the concepts and principles mentioned over the last few days. We all listened to touching and evocative comments from many of the students regarding what they learned during the conference and how it made them feel.



OUT OF MANY NATIONS COMES ONE FAMILY.....

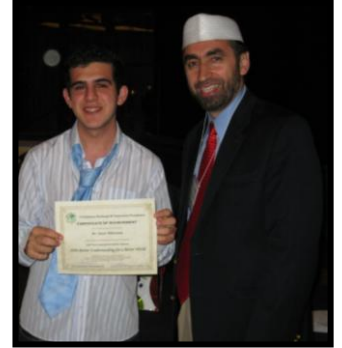




We were treated to a lovely Buffet Dinner "Custom Tastes of the World."



Our Key Note Speaker, Ms. Mahjabeen Rafiuddin, Director of Multicultural Affairs at Rollins College. Her personal and professional goals are to educate and empower youth and adults in the areas of cross-cultural understanding, appreciation for diversity, race-relations and active community involvement. Mahjabeen's speech was reflective of her experience as an immigrant, who became an American and learned to not only recognize the diversity she around her, but also appreciate and treasure it. The students seemed to relate to her experiences and valued her insights.



The Certificate Ceremony and Closing Remarks were performed by Imam Mohamad Bashar Arafat, President of CECF. He brought the banquet to an end with his heartfelt words of appreciation for the efforts and support of everyone, who helped to make this conference a success.

This inspiring evening concluded with a viewing of **Illuminations: Reflections of Earth**, a nightly laser light and firework show.

Sunday, February 15, 2009

- Brief discussion and reflection on the entire conference.



Appreciation and gratitude was expressed in a variety of ways for the open hearts and open minds of the participants. The success of this conference was largely due to their willingness to share their thoughts and opinions during the activities and listen respectfully to others.

FOLLOW UP AFTER THE CONFERENCE

Students were encouraged to maintain contact with at least one other person not from their country and also make a presentation in their schools or communities on the issues discussed during the conference

SUMMARY OF STUDENT TESTIMONIALS

“This experience not only introduced us to new cultures, but also taught us to respect them!”

CO-SPONSOR

Islamic Society of Central Florida - Center For Peace

PARTICIPATING INSTITUTIONS

Congregation Ohev Shalom

Ar Rahman Mosque / Center for Peace

First Congregational Church of Winter Park

Rollins College

SPECIAL APPRECIATION

The Grantee Organizations of the YES, FLEX, CBYX and ASMYLE

International Exchange Programs