

2016



BETTER UNDERSTANDING FOR A BETTER WORLD

Promoting Peace and Prosperity through Understanding in Central Asia

Leadership, Intercultural and Interfaith Conference in Bishkek



July 13-17, 2016
**Civilizations Exchange &
Cooperation Foundation**

CECF is proud to announce that we successfully conducted our first BUBW International-Kyrgyzstan Conference in Bishkek for the Central Asia Region. **100 participants** were **SPONSORED** from 17 countries around the world.

It is CECF's dream to see events like BUBW across the world. That is why the conference seeks to select individuals with not just a passion for humanity, but a drive to change their community.



***Diversity & Multi-Cultural Competency Training**
***Interfaith Experiences**

***Leadership Development**
***Conflict Resolution & Peace Building Workshop**



BACKGROUND

Better Understanding for a Better World (BUBW) was launched in 2006 to give American high school students and International exchange students of diverse cultural backgrounds and various faith traditions the opportunity to meet and learn from one another. The most pressing issue our youth face today is how they view the “other”, meaning people who are different from them. Through 1) Diversity & Multi-Cultural Competency Training, 2) Leadership Development, 3) Conflict Resolution & Peace Building Workshops and 4) Interfaith Experiences, BUBW aims to breakdown the stereotypes and the barriers that lead to fear and hate of the “other”.

Despite a surge in the use of social media, people still lack the face-to-face dialogue needed to foster understanding, respect, compassion and cooperation amongst the various nations and communities of our ever so intricate world.

The 25 BUBW Conferences in the USA, which were attended by students from 68 countries, have been full of incredibly rich discussions, removed many misconceptions about each other and positively impacted the participants, that CECF felt compelled to bring these conferences to the university students and young professionals around the world. **It is with great enthusiasm that we invite our fellow global stewards to attend the first-ever international BUBW in Bishkek this summer!**

VISION

A world of multi-cultural and inter-religious understanding and cooperation

MISSION

To provide multi-cultural youth-oriented leadership and interfaith programs for life transforming opportunities

GOALS

- Emphasize world-wide citizenship and cultural competency development
- Focus on leadership development and being ambassadors of good will, reconciliation and justice
- Become familiar with conflict resolution approaches and peace building strategies
- Encourage civic engagement among program participants

CONFERENCE OBJECTIVES

- To facilitate dialogue that fosters mutual understanding and cooperation between participants from diverse economic, social, religious, cultural and ethnic backgrounds
- To expose participants to the beauty of diverse faith practices in a pluralistic world with emphasis on respect, common values and our shared humanity
- To discuss the dangers and solutions for discrimination, radicalism, ethnic nationalism and religious extremism, which have historically been recipes for war and conflict for many civilizations
- To introduce various aspects of leadership including those central to entrepreneurship, innovation and social business
- To cultivate ties of friendship and encourage future leaders of tomorrow to foster and seek out a better world and a better future for all



Civilizations Exchange & Cooperation Foundation (CECF) held its first BUBW Conference for Central Asia in Bishkek - Kyrgyzstan.



More than 100 young leaders from around the world gathered together to promote security, peace and dialogue.


















These 5 days were full of examples of leadership, cooperation, discussions, workshops, peacebuilding activities, house of worship visits, cultural exploration & interfaith dialogue

WHO WERE THESE YOUNG AMBASSADORS?

Young leaders from 18-30 years old, current and post-graduate university students, YES, FLEX, CBYX and Global UGRAD Exchange Program Alumni and young professionals. These participants were “Ambassadors of their 17 Countries of Origin”, as well as “Ambassadors or their Countries of Residence”.

COUNTRIES OF ORIGIN

	Armenia		Georgia		Philippines		Tajikistan		Yemen
	Egypt		Kazakhstan		Russia		Ukraine		
	Germany		Kyrgyzstan		Scotland		USA		
	Ghana		Libya		South Korea		Uzbekistan		

COUNTRIES OF RESIDENCE

	Armenia		Georgia		Philippines		Ukraine		United Kingdom
	China		Kazakhstan		Russia		USA		Uzbekistan
	Czechoslovakia		Kuwait		Tajikistan		Turkmenistan		
	Germany		Kyrgyzstan		Turkey				

DAY 1: Wednesday - July 13, 2016

UNFOLDING OF THE
BETTER UNDERSTANDING FOR A BETTER WORLD CONFERENCE (BUBW)



During the first day of the BUBW conference, participants' staggered arrivals allowed them time to register and be welcomed by **Julianne Norman**, BUBW Development Coordinator, **Izat Osmonov**, BUBW Conference Coordinator-Kyrgyzstan, **Carolyn Dupont**, BUBW Volunteer and several of our **BUBW Alumni Volunteers**, check into the Jannat Regency Hotel, which is about 15 minutes from downtown Bishkek, and start meeting the other conference participants and CECF staff.



Everyone gathered for the Dinner Social, Ice Breaking Activities and Orientation. Between **Imam Mohamad Bashar Arafat**, President of CECF and Convener of our BUBW Conferences world-wide, **Julianne Norman**, **Izat Osmonov**, our **BUBW Volunteer Team**, the **Event Planners** and our **2016 BUBW-Kyrgyzstan Conference MC**, the conference began with an atmosphere of excitement, hope, laughter and sincere interest to gain knowledge, skills, perspectives and a better understanding about other peoples, cultures and religions that would enable the participants to return home and make positive impacts and contributions to their personal, educational and professionals communities.



DAY 2: Thursday - July 14, 2016

DIVERSITY & MULTI-CULTURAL COMPETENCY TRAINING, LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT, CONFLICT RESOLUTION & PEACE BUILDING WORKSHOPS

BUBW-Kyrgyzstan launched its first day of the conference with diversity and cultural competency training and a conflict and peacebuilding workshop. After *U.S. Ambassador to Kyrgyzstan, Ms. Sheila Gwaltney* and *Head of the State Commission of Religious Affairs (SCRA), Mr. Orozbek Moldaliev* provided opening remarks, BUBW Alumni Lea Kolsch gave a brief reflection on her previous BUBW experience and how it continues to shape her religio-political perspective as a young adult in Germany. Lea's presentation helped prepare the audience for what they would experience together as a group and on a personal basis over the next four days.



Imam Mohamad Bashar Arafat, CECF President then conducted the rest of the morning's sessions speaking on "Diversity and the Beauty Around Us" and "Conflicts and Causes: Radicalism and Terrorism throughout History." BUBW always begins on a topic of appreciation for diversity. Through his session, Imam Bashar takes participants on a journey that challenges them to think about the importance of diversity in our world, but more importantly, how crucial it is to actively acknowledge and appreciate our diversity. Imam Bashar's discussion segued nicely into his next session, where he engaged the audience in a discussion on roots of terrorism and the role religion plays in violent extremism. This discussion provided a safe space for participants to discuss stereotypes of those in the room in addition to their fears and presuppositions.

"As Imam Bashar talked to us about Diversity, and how some people don't value it, I caught myself and realized that I haven't done that from time to time. Diversity is what makes us truly valuable and unique. Simply, how beautiful it is!"

Lea Kölsch, (Germany)

"Religion is like running water, when it's pure, it can nourish you. However, after it has run through the streets of the city, it makes you sick and may even kill you."

Imam Mohamad Bashar Arafat (Syria)



During the afternoon, participants brainstormed and debated in two workshops on mediation and conflict resolution led by local stakeholders. **General Director, Mediator and Trainer of Centre for Mediation and Negotiation, Fidana Alieva**, led participants through a tutorial on uniting differences, diversities, and dissimilarities among us.



Ms. Akylai Karimova has worked for the youth-led organization, Youth of Osh, since 2008 from the very day it was created by a group of like-minded friends from local university. As they were driven by the idea that youth are a meaningful resource in the development of countries, they have engaged their peers in community service, decision-making processes, education and self-realization by implementing numerous projects throughout Southern part of Kyrgyzstan. Primarily, her job is to develop projects. Along with that, she mentors younger colleagues and provides educational trainings and consultations on professional development.

Guest speaker **Galina Kolodzinskaya, Executive Director of the Interfaith Council**, followed on Ms. Alieva's mediation approach as she challenged participants with a real-life scenario in her Conflict Resolution and Peace Building session. Ms Kolodzinskaya began her session by equipping the audience with techniques of conflict resolution. She used hypothetical scenarios to illustrate mediation in action. She then ended her session with an historical scenario. Each group had to choose a side and then they had to come to an agreement.

Ms. Galina Kolodzinskaya has a degree in Religious Studies with the UNESCO department of specialization in Religion and Law from the Kyrgyz Russian Slavonic University in 2012.

She has worked at the State Commission on Religious Affairs (SCRA) of the Kyrgyz Republic as an expert of the scientific-analytical department where she was involved in the process of inter-religious peace-building accompanied by SCRA and European Council of Religious Leaders (ECRL). In 2011, she was a consultant to facilitate dialog between various local religious leaders and their communities, ECRL, international organizations, civil society and relevant government bodies with the goal of establishing a permanent inter-religious platform in the Kyrgyz Republic.

In 2013, she was appointed Executive Director of the Interfaith Council in the Kyrgyz Republic, and in 2015, she joined Open Viewpoint Public Foundation for implementation of the project named "Human Rights Are Rights of Believers". Her work with SCRA, ECRL, Interfaith Council and Open Viewpoint exposed her to the challenges of religious communities and refine her knowledge of religious policy in the Central Asian region. She participated in development of the Alternative Report on the Kyrgyz Republic Implementation of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) Related to Freedom of Thought, Conscience and Religion and the Alternative Report on the Implementation of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICE SCR) in the Kyrgyz Republic in 2014 and 2015. In addition, she took part in the UN 110th Human Rights Committee's session, the UN 55th Economic, Social and Cultural Rights Committee's session. In 2015 she was nominated to participate in the U.S. State Department's International Visitor Leadership Program on Women Preventing Violent Extremism. She is currently working in Interfaith Council Public Association as the Executive Director and teaching Religious Studies at the Kyrgyz Russian Slavic University.



Day one of the conference concluded with a visit to the American University of Central Asia (AUCA) where participants sang, danced, and clapped during cultural performances of their peers. The list of performances included, but were not limited to, an Angolan dance, a traditional Kyrgyz dance, a group song on Kazakhstan, a presentation on Uzbekistan, and a Ukrainian song and dance. Before concluding the evening, local activist, and **Founder of Youth of Osh, Akylai Karimova** gave a brief address where she challenged the audience to be change makers in their communities and champions for peace and tolerance.

Are you asking: What happened next



Global Village

Global Village is a fascinating cultural event, which was organized by the 2016 BUBW-Kyrgyzstan participants and held in the **American University of Central Asia (AUCA)** auditorium.

The audience smiled and laughed with sheer joy - it was as if they were visiting every country separately. The young ambassadors showed off their talents by performing traditional and popular songs, dances and playing musical instruments. The most exotic show was given by the Ghanaian participant as he demonstrated the national dance of Ghana.

The audience also had the opportunity to hear one of the most famous Ukrainian songs “Chervona Ruta” (Red Rue), Kyrgyz and Tajik poems and see the Uzbek national dance performed by the young lady from Kazakhstan.

The concert was great! It proved once again that the world is just one “large village”.



INTERFAITH UNDERSTANDING AND APPRECIATION



"A person is like a bird with two wings, one is religion and the other wing is knowledge, open mindedness and love. If you don't have both, your flight won't be as successful as it could be."

Nuriya Nur (Kyrgyzstan)

Our "Interfaith Day" involved visiting three "Houses of Worship"

The large majority of people around the world do not normally visit any other houses of worship other than the one related to their own religion. Visiting houses of worship was a particularly unusual event hosted in Kyrgyzstan so religions that only some knew from books, were introduced in a more experiential manner.

Eastern Orthodox Christianity

The Russian Orthodox Cathedral is the most beautiful church in Kyrgyzstan. Orthodox Christianity is the largest Christian denomination in the Kyrgyz Republic with 1.1 million followers. It's the largest church in Central Asia and the height of the Cathedral (without the cross) is 34 meters. This church can house up to 2500 people.



The clergy talked about the history of the church, orthodoxy today and some important facts related to. While the session was especially informative for participants outside the Christian faith, it proved to spark discussion among participants of the Christian faith as well. Many of BUBW's Christian participants had little interaction with those of the orthodox faith. This particular visit provided them with an opportunity to reflect on the history and customs of their own tradition. Moreover, as outsiders to the orthodox sect, it helped Christian participants empathize with those that



are not of the Christian faith and few their religion almost from an outsiders' perspective.

Hidden Synagogue



The participants' experience with the Jewish community in Bishkek was the most exciting one. For many attendees of BUBW-Kyrgyzstan, this was their first visit to a synagogue and their first experience with Judaism. Participants showed their enthusiasm to learn as the questions to the Rabbi never ceased after his presentation. Though Judaism is of the minority in Kyrgyzstan, visiting a synagogue and interacting with the clergy provides participants with an opportunity to recognize and reflect on the religious diversity around them. Many participants hail from faiths in which they practice amongst a conservative culture. Engaging with a tradition unfamiliar to their own and perhaps rarely seen within their local communities, such as Judaism, gave participants an opportunity to practice the lesson from day one: appreciating the diversity around us.

Rabbi Arie told us that Jews have inhabited the region that is now called Kyrgyzstan since the 6th century. Today, it is a small community of about 500 Jewish citizens with a population of 5 million people in the country. It was the first time that such a large group of people visited the synagogue.



The Stunning Mosque in Bishkek

From a distance, the mosque's white minarets were rising gracefully..., and even though the visit to the mosque was last on the schedule, it certainly did not diminish its importance and benefit during the Interfaith Day.

The group was warmly welcomed by the clergy, who told them about some misconceptions of the most common religion in Kyrgyzstan. Their focus was apparent as they listened and broadened their perspectives while learning about the religion of Islam and the practices of Muslims. For many of our Muslim participants, which were the majority, the experience in the mosque provided them with an opportunity to answer questions about their own faith that their colleagues posed. Specifically, many participants had questions about gender roles and the stereotype of terrorism that appears to have a growing prevalence in the world. Muslim participants engaged with their non-Muslim peers in a healthy discussion over these perceptions.



Participants views about Religions:

“Living in almost mono-religious Ukraine, I never thought before about any other country's religions and problems possibly connected with this, never talked to Jewish, Middle East or Muslim people or even guessed what they had to endure every day, facing discrimination and misunderstanding...”

Olha Chychykalo (Ukraine)

“We were shown the true face of religions: fellowship, understanding, kindness, sincerity...”

Zhanna Zhurkabaeva (Kazakhstan)

Panel Discussion Conducted in the Jannat Regency Hotel

Following the Interfaith visits, a Panel Discussion took place at the Jannat Regency Hotel. It was an amazing atmosphere and filled with sincere interest to establish mutual understanding between participants from different religious and cultural backgrounds. They had the opportunity to engage in a dialogue with our esteemed panelists of clergy, community leaders and scholars to discuss sensitive issues, as well as ask questions about global problems.

We all want to live in communities where diversity of race, belief and ethnicity are appreciated. If 100+ people take the “inspiration candle” from this conference and spread these ideas, discussions and spirit of respect and cooperation to 100+ other people, we can build safer communities around us!

Dasmia Restaurant – An Amazing Cultural Cuisine Experience!

The panel discussion was followed by dinner in Dasmia Restaurant. The participants found themselves sitting inside a place that looked like a huge Yurt (a traditional house used by nomads) and eating flavorful local dishes. A fascinating cultural program

was performed by talented people of the region. One of them was Mariya Naumova. She is a ballet dancer, who is gifted not only in dance, but she also played 10 Kyrgyz musical instruments for us, one at a time, following the Russian National Dance! The 2016 BUBW-Kyrgyzstan participants were swept up in the moment and created a *flash mob* performing the Kyrgyz National Dance (Kara Jorgo) for a brief time. After enjoying the sumptuous dinner and performances, the group began preparing to leave as they took pictures to remember their time in the beautiful Dasmia Restaurant!



DAY 4: Saturday - July 16, 2016

UNITING AS ONE: GLOBAL CITIZENSHIP AND THE IMPORTANCE OF NETWORKING

Becoming a Global Citizen

The last full day was all about uniting with one spirit, despite our differences, and looking at people and issues around the world as a “Global Citizen”, as well as celebrating our diversity.

After Imam Bashar’s short morning session about the **Intersection of Leadership and Power of Networking**, we went to Koi-Tash village to enjoy Kyrgyz nature and culture. It is a place well-known for its underground sources of mineral waters and the beauty of Alamedin Gorge.

A positive and friendly atmosphere was a key component of that day. Although, participants varied in age, they had so much fun together. Some students were playing football and volleyball. Others went hiking and taking pictures.



Lunch at Supara Ethno Complex

Lunch was in a unique place, which engages every visitor with its history, culture and the daily life of ancient Kyrgyz in a real time format.

Participants sampled more of the traditional Kyrgyz cuisine, enjoyed the opportunity to swing on *selkinchek* (two-man swing), and buy amazing Kyrgyz souvenirs in Supara Ethno Complex.



Better Understanding for a Better World Banquet: Celebrating Our Diversity!

The banquet began with cultural performances by the 2016 BUBW-Kyrgyzstan participants.

Participants from the Philippines, Yemen and Ghana treated the guests with their National Dances.

Participants from Kazakhstan and Tajikistan sang songs and the young lady from Armenia recited a poem to thank our moms. Those performances set the tone for an evening where everyone felt like one family - **"The BUBW Family"**!



Afterwards, our honorable speakers gave shared their remarks. They talked about their experiences and set the goals for us as Global Citizens.



We had the Certificate Ceremony following a dinner. It was led by Imam Mohamad Bashar Arafat, the President of CECF. He also made Closing Remarks, which were full of inspiration and heartfelt words of appreciation for the effort and support of everyone, who helped to make this conference a success.





WRAP UP AND CONFERENCE REFLECTIONS



Participant Reflections on the BUBW Conference



*“The BUBW Conference in Kyrgyzstan was a SUCCESS! Every single day of the conference was educative and fun. Even though the schedule was so packed from morning to evening, I never got bored because I always got the chance to listen to other people’s opinions about making the world a better place... **Abdul-Kadir Ameyaw (Ghana – Living in Russia)**”*

“My participation was a bit different since I was represented as BUBW Alumni. BUBW is lifelong changing five (5) days which can never be learned in ten (10) years, because BUBW Kyrgyzstan (2016) guided me, inspired me, awarded me being a live piece agent no matter where I go...”

Ahmed Salem (Yemen – Living in the Czech Republic)

“BUBW is something very unique, interesting and useful for better understanding of a world especially on the background of what is going in the world. It gives us an opportunity to be Global Citizens, to think about our world, our home, care about it and make this world better...”

Nuria Nur (Kyrgyzstan)



THE AMBASSADOR'S APPRECIATION LUNCHEON

Ambassador Sheila Gwaltney generously invited CECF staff and some of our BUBW conference volunteers to join her, Mr. John Brown and other embassy staff for lunch to celebrate the success of the conference and listen to their thoughts and ideas.



AMBASSADORS APPRECIATION LUNCHEON & CONFERENCE FOLLOW UP



Students were encouraged to keep in touch with each other, spread the inspiration candle taken from the conference, sign up to help organize or participate in the BUBW Conference in Indonesia, Germany, Uganda or Tunisia and be an active Global Citizen no matter where they go.

SUSTAINABILITY PROJECTS

1. **POST-BUBW CREATIVE COMMUNITY PROJECTS CHALLENGE:** 2016 BUBW-Kyrgyzstan Alumni are challenged to engage their local community through a project, presentation or other creative way. They will then send us the information for judging. The CECF BUBW Development Team and Board Members votes will count for 50% of the score and the challenge will be opened up to a vote via social media in January 2017, which will count for 50% of the total score. There will be a modest prize of \$100 for 1st place and \$75 for 2nd place. For more information via www.cecf-net.org.
2. **BUBW BLOGGING CHALLENGE:** 2016 BUBW-Kyrgyzstan Alumni compete by writing blogs about “The first 6 Months After BUBW & How It Has Impacted Their Mindset”. CECF will create a page in January 2017 on the website (www.cecf-net.org) about the impacts and link the blogs. The judges will score each blog to identify the most inspiring. The CECF BUBW Development Team and Board Members votes will count for 50% of the score and the challenge will be opened up to a vote via social media which will count for 50% of the total score. There will be a modest prize of \$100 for 1st place and \$75 for 2nd place.