



# Civilizations Exchange & Cooperation Foundation

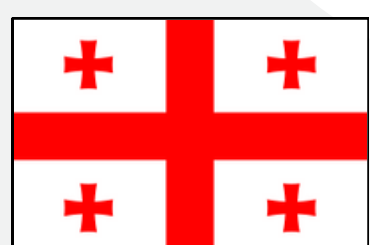
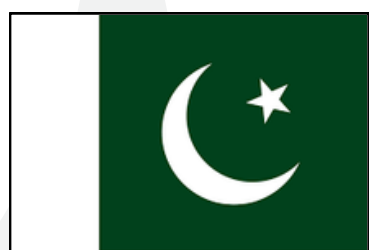


## **BETTER UNDERSTANDING FOR A BETTER WORLD CONFERENCE 2025- BALTIMORE**

Leadership, Intercultural, and Interfaith  
Program for Highschool Youth

**April 23rd-27th  
Summary report**





**Civilizations Exchange and Cooperation Foundation (CECF) held the BUBW conference in Baltimore, Maryland from April 23rd-27th where students, young leaders from different religious, economic, ethnic, cultural background were engaged in discussion on religion, culture, caring for humanity, international diversity, discrimination, radicalism and extremism, women's empowerment and global citizenship. We also engaged in an "Interfaith Program" by visiting Church, Synagogue, and Mosque on Friday April 25th.**

### **BACKGROUND - Baltimore, Maryland**

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", people who are different from them. Through:

- 1) Diversity & Multi-Cultural Competency Training.
- 2) Leadership Development.
- 3) Conflict Resolution & Peace building Workshops.
- 4) Interfaith Experiences.

BUBW aims to break down 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 55th BUBW Conference in the USA, which was attended by students from 19 countries, have been full of incredibly rich discussions, which removed many misconceptions participants had of one another through education and personal interactions. The positive impact sent a ripple effect that has made CECF feel compelled to bring these conferences to exchange students from all over the world. To hear from some of our participants, please check out the videos which was made by the BUBW participant from Kyrgyzstan Aizhanat Talantbekova, FLEX program:

- 1) <https://go.screenpal.com/watch/cZIOX2V8ooN>
- 2) <https://go.screenpal.com/watch/cZIOX2V8oos>

### **VISION**

A world of multicultural and interreligious understanding and cooperation.

### **MISSION**

To provide multicultural, youth-oriented leadership and interfaith programs for life transforming opportunities.

### **GOALS**

- Emphasize worldwide 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 practi in a pluralistic world with emphasis on respect, common values and our shared humanity.
- To discuss the dangers and solutions for discrimination, ces 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.



## Day 1: Wednesday 23rd

The Better Understanding for a Better World Conference, held on April 23-27, 2025 in Baltimore, Maryland, began with students' arrivals, ice-breaking activities, pizza dinner. Sponsored by Civilization Exchange and Cooperation Foundation (CECF), the event started with a warm welcome from Imam Mohamad Bashar Arafat, founder of the CECF, and other CECF staff.



Students instantly found a common language and were very friendly. Some people started building connections already in the airport when they realized a person sitting next to them might be going to the same conference.

While others started socializing as soon as they arrived at the hotel. Nobody felt left out because of how open and kind everyone was with each other.

**"I feel like Wednesday was the day where we all really connected with each other"**  
**Lujain - Kuwait**

That evening, participants gathered in the meeting room, playing games and getting to know each other. They had socializing activities and pizza for dinner. Imam Bashar welcomed everyone to the 55th BUBW Conference and gave an orientation about the importance of this event, its leadership, and intercultural and interfaith aspects. Every person introduced themselves, highlighting what brought them there, why attending this event is important, and how they want to implement the gained experience in their plans. In addition, they discussed established rules and plans for the following days of the program.



This day brought everyone together, allowing students to get to know each other, meet CECF staff, discuss their expectations, and understand the importance of the BUBW Conference and its history. Everyone looked forward to learning, sharing their knowledge, and becoming part of the BUBW Family.



## Day 2: Thursday 24th

### Brief CECF Program and BUBW Conference Reviews, IYS Sessions, UN Training Workshop, Dinner at Ruby Tuesday, Student Cultural Presentations

The second day of the BUBW 2025 in-person Conference in Baltimore, MD was filled with numerous insights explored throughout the International Youth Summit sessions, Genocide Prevention Training Workshop as well as diverse Student Cultural Presentations. Not only did the participants raise their awareness regarding the cross-cultural competencies but also fostered the newly-acquired friendships and enjoyed the variety of different cuisines.



Right after having breakfast, the participants proceeded to an incredibly enriching day. To begin with, President of CECF, Imam Mohamad Bashar Arafat, gave a brief introduction to Civilizations Exchange and Cooperation Foundation, history and roots of its creation. The first IYS Session was dedicated to learning about the conflicts around the world and the nature of their occurrence (Samples of Conflicts Around the World & Why?). The participants also got to learn about the main objectives of the program, its role in peacebuilding and the issues which are being addressed: conflicts around the world, lack of awareness about the international situation, racism, cultural disparity etc. "Not travelling means only reading the first page of the book" (Imam Bashar).



It is undeniable that hard work requires having a lot of energy. Therefore, the lunch break was really relaxing and casual. The participants enjoyed having lovely conversations in the fresh air and eating a delicious and nourishing meal of Afghan cuisine - maiwand kabob.

**"The newly acquired knowledge along with strong meaningful bonds between us and unlimited strive to keep on going for the world's prosperity." - Sofiia, Ukraine**

Shortly after the students were introduced to the importance of studying the reasons why numerous civilizations became extinct and the benefits of raising awareness on this account for our society's prosperity. Moreover, during the session the following topics were discussed: America and the Muslim World, US Policies towards multicultural society, the cruciality not restrict one's horizons with biased perception (a nice example may be The Dark Age in Europe which can actually be considered to be the Golden Age for investors and scientists of the Middle East). A quote which should be a motto of the day is "Diversity is not a curse but a blessing". Following this, the participants got to raise their awareness regarding the topic of leadership. Unconsciously each person acquired a new internal question: what will be my legacy? The key characteristics of a nice leader were discussed in a passionate conversation. Not only courage, but also integrity, sense of humanity, clear focus and many other traits all together make a difference. Furthermore, crucial recipes for success were explained in detail to make those easier to comprehend. "Don't wait for praise and be patient"





Soon, unarguably the most challenging meanwhile vitally important session took place. UN Architecture for Genocide Prevention and the Framework of Analysis. Training Workshop and Breakout Session was guided and conducted by a speaker Dalila Sadinlija, a Special Trainer from the United Nations. She introduced the participants to the structure and functions of the UN Office of Genocide Prevention. Consequently, a brief history of the UN's creation, origins of the mandates and the documents ratified were discussed. The participants got to find out about the system of the Global Monitoring oriented towards genocide prevention. It was learnt that countries with unstable or life-threatening international relationship situations are divided into 3 main groups what helps to determine which actions are to be taken in order to tackle the problem. The groups are: Watch-List, Early Warning and Preventive Action.

Meanwhile, Framework of Analysis for Atrocity Crimes guiding pamphlets were given to all the participants. The booklet contains detailed and profound analysis of ways to determine the factors pointing on the potential genocide occurrence and explains the use of tools for its prevention. The way the UN takes actions in this regard was described there in detail too. Afterwards, an incomparably educational experience followed. The participants were divided into 4 groups and the task for each group was to pick a country which is currently being threatened to face genocide or already suffers from its devastating consequences.





The issues chosen were: genocide in Balochistan, russian war against Ukraine, russian occupation of Abkhazia and South Ossetia in Georgia, Soviet Union's assimilation policy against all the nations except russians leading to genocide of nationalists and patriots of other ethnic origins. The aim was to identify the red flags which indicate that the issue can be considered to be a genocide. The participants were given an hour in order to do a research, analyse the genocide factors described in Framework of Analysis for Atrocity Crimes and prepare to present their work. The workshop time was really productive and each and every participant did an outstanding job demonstrating their research skills, critical thinking and the ability not to be indifferent. The session definitely cannot be described as an easy one: some of the participants were proving the point regarding their own countries what was exceptionally hard as it not only awoke a strong feeling of compassion but sore and hurtful memories.

*"The UN training Session regarding genocide prevention held by Dadila Sadinlija was one of the most awaited while the most challenging parts of the Conference for me. Not only does it have a direct correlation with my future career which is the path of Diplomacy and International Relationships but also it did touch my sore point as my home country has been suffering from russian aggression for over 11 years now. The session provided me with a deeper understanding of the principles of the measures the UN takes when addressing potential or ongoing genocides around the world. Honestly, it was really hard for me to keep my mind cool because I understand how much injustice is still going on around the world but talking to the speaker really did clarify my vision and gave me a comprehension of the steps I myself am capable of taking in order to promote the process of russian aggression against Ukraine finally being declared as genocide so that the world recognizes Russia as a terrorist state and takes actions not to satisfy putin's imperialistic delusions but to preserve Ukraine's integrity and save its independency. I also really want to mention how grateful I am for Dadila Sadinlija for her deeper understanding of the current international situation, her compassion and sincere desire to help aspiring youth to make the world a better place." (Sofiiia, Ukraine)*



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GENOCIDE PREVENTION AND THE  
RESPONSIBILITY TO PROTECT

Afterwards it was time to relax and have some dinner. The staff and the participants got to enjoy a delicious meal at Ruby Tuesday. The dinner time was enhanced with lively conversations and lots of good laughter.



# CIVILIZATIONS EXCHANGE & COOPERATION FOUNDATION



55th Better Understanding for a  
Better World (BUBW)- Baltimore  
April 23-27, 2025

Universitas  
Darunnajah



Guest Speaker:  
Dalila Sadinlija,  
Special Trainer,  
United Nations  
April 24, 2025  
1:30-5:30pm



Guest Speaker  
Rizma Ilfi Yahya  
Lecturer of  
Business  
Administration  
Study Program -  
Darunnajah  
University,  
Jakarta Indonesia  
April 26, 2025



## INTERNATIONAL YOUTH SUMMIT (IYS) SESSIONS

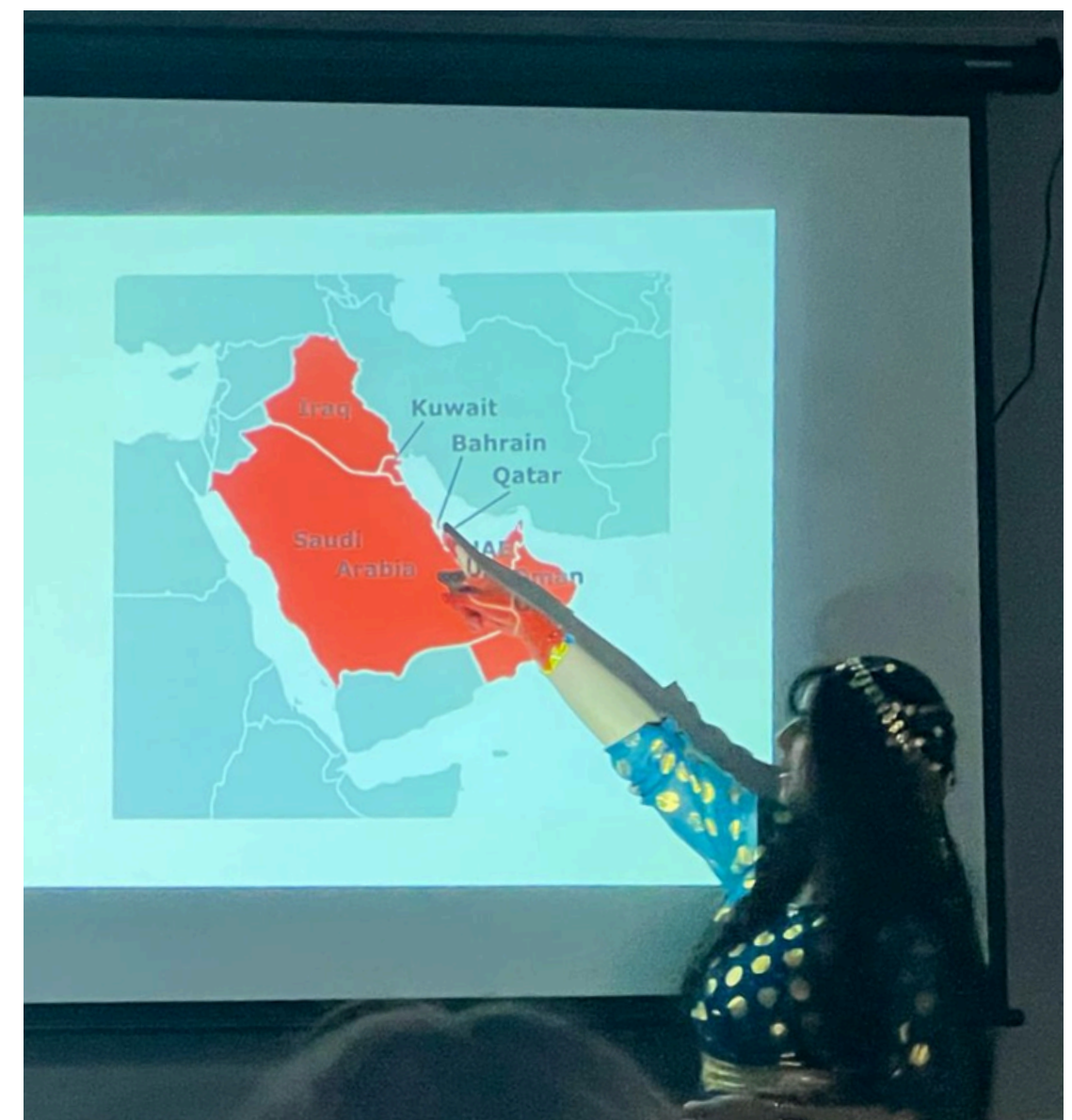
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Linthicum Heights, MD 21090

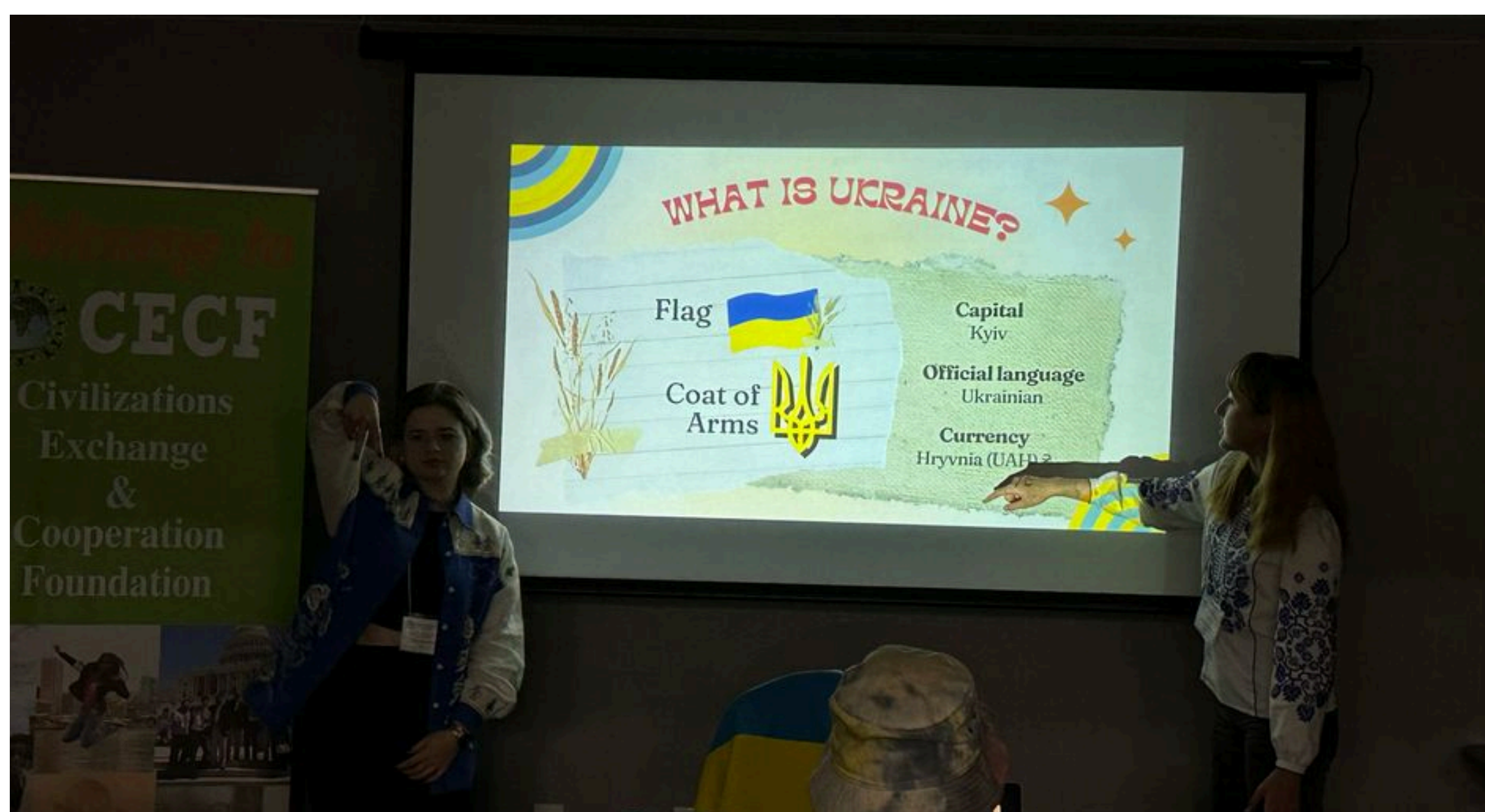




Following this, the most awaited part of the day arrived. The participants were unarguably thrilled as it was the time for the student cultural presentations. 8 countries were presented by their passionate enthusiasts that night. The experience was incredibly educational, mind-opening and exciting for each and every single person in the room. National cuisines, clothing, architecture, a pinch of geography, history and tons of other precious knowledge were introduced that night.



"I realized the vastness of the world while listening to the insightful presentations of my fellow friends during the BUBW conference. For instance, I did not know that the origin of wine dates back to Georgia, that in Kuwait there are more Non-Kuwaiti people than ethnic Kuwaitis or that Indonesia is so incredibly diverse both in language and religion! I find this exchange to be so beautiful and every time I get reminded that although we all speak different languages and come from such different parts of the world, at the end of the we are all one, all members of the human race." (Nushin, Tajikistan)



Lots of excitement and memories which will remain in the memories forever - that was all about April 28th. Really sleepy but cheered with the bright spirit the participants were looking forward to the upcoming day while cherishing Thursday.



## Day 3: Friday 25th

**Interfaith program: Church, Synagogue and Mosque visit, followed by an Interfaith panel discussion “Moving Forward in the World Together” & Baltimore Harbor and Aquarium visit.**

The Interfaith visits were a powerful and essential part of the BUBW Conference, fostering deeper understanding of people with different beliefs. This is the first step to building bridges between cultures and religions that provide for a better and more peaceful world. The participants had the opportunity to visit a Church, Synagogue and a Mosque, as well as experience an interfaith panel discussion that addressed real-world problems, and provided attendees the chance to reflect on the visits. Following the Interfaith visits, participants enjoyed exploring the Baltimore Harbor and Aquarium, a fun and relaxed environment that encouraged socializing and the formation of lasting friendships that will come in handy for future projects and activities.



Attendees were given a summary of the Christian beliefs, followed by an opportunity to ask questions that promoted Interfaith understanding.



Our journey began with the visit of Our Lady of the Angels Church. Everyone was welcomed by Fr. Leo Larrivee and Fr. William Au, who gave a brief introduction of the community life, as well as the architecture and history of the building. Participants noted how picturesque the design of the church was and how tightly-knit the community was.



**"What every religion had in common was the pursuit of peace and human well-being, even if the path differed. During the Interfaith discussions I discovered that religion can be influenced by culture, and the stereotypes our society holds are false and based on misunderstanding."  
-Raivo Zimelis (Latvia)**



Next, we continued the Interfaith program with Oseh Shalom Synagogue. Rabbi Daria Jacobs-Velde started the visit by welcoming the BUBW participants, and inviting us to a mediation ritual. The attendees were told about the religious practices in Judaism, and customs that accompany the religion. Rabbi Daria Jacobs-Velde demonstrated the Torah scrolls, and answered questions that concerned the participants. What followed was an eye-opening and respectful conversation that effectively portrayed the Rabbi's message of global peace and understanding about problems faced in international politics.



After having lunch, participants visited the Diyanet Center of America, which is a community centered around a magnificent Mosque. The attendees got to observe or participate in the Friday Jumu'ah Prayer, which was a unique experience that gave an insight in Islamic religious practices. Dr. Fatih Kanca and Imam Mohamad Bashar Arafat gave the participants a presentation about the community and the Mosque, as well as organised a question session. This effectively broke pre-existing biases and addressed false stereotypes, which fostered meaningful discussions that helped to build bridges of understanding.





*"Interfaith experience was one of my remarkable experiences. It was eye-opening to see how different every religion beliefs.*

*Even though each religion follows a different path to faith, I realized that we are all searching for meaning, purpose, and compassion. We may pray differently or have different traditions, but at the heart, we all believe in love and kindness. That experience deepened my respect for other religions and made me even more confident and proud of my own as a muslim."*

*Azel (Indonesia)*



Finally, we concluded the Interfaith program with the panel discussion "Moving Forward in the World Together" that took place in the Diyanet Center's auditorium. Fr. William Au, Dr. Faith Kanca and Imam Mohamad Bashar Arafat discussed and shared the importance of mutual understanding in this ever-changing world. Participants listened as the religious leaders explained their thoughts on cooperation, and peace building that supplemented yesterday's United Nations session. Students had the chance to reflect on the experience and formulate the main takeaways.



*"I realized that everything in this world is built in love. To love means to care and to be afraid of losing, and every religion and culture is built in love. Love the world and peace in it. Being a global citizen means protecting and taking care of the rights of every person, despite diversity, because in the end we are all people."*

*Leila Zharashbekova (Kyrgyzstan)*



As a result of the Interfaith program, participants gained valuable lessons from this discussion that will guide them as future leaders in addressing real-world issues of religious or cultural significance. This was an eye-opening experience, as most BUBW attendees had never visited a place of worship outside their own faith before. Exploring different religions and cultures builds bridges of understanding for a better world.

To end the day on a high note, the BUBW attendees visited the Baltimore Harbor and Aquarium. Participants could socialize and enjoy exploring the sights, knowing that - just like Baltimore's harbor has long welcomed people from diverse backgrounds and served as a gateway to new opportunities - the BUBW Conference opens minds and hearts to fresh perspectives and meaningful connections, connecting people from all across the globe.





## Day 4: Saturday 25th

### **Leadership, Youth Involvement, and Global Citizenship, Trip Exploring Washington D.C, followed by Banquet, Cultural Performances, Certificates Ceremony, and Last Goodbyes.**

On the last day, the students began the day with a Leadership, Youth Involvement, and Global Citizenship Session with Imam Mohamad Bashar Arafat featuring guest speaker Rizma Ilfi Yahya (Lecturer, Darunnajah University, Jakarta, Indonesia) in which they briefly reviewed the activities of the previous days, discussed the significance of their roles as cultural ambassadors of their countries to spread the knowledge they've gathered from the conference, and how to spread the message of a better understanding for a better world with guest speaker Rizma Ilfi Yahya also emphasising more about those topics and BUBW in general.



After that, the students got ready to go to Washington, D.C and explore all the wonderful places there. First, they went to the White House, then the Washington Monument, and lastly, Capitol Hill. They took many photos of those places, especially with their flags and other students, to capture those beautiful memories and moments together. Later on, it started raining, so they came back to the hotel to have a quick meal and a Meeting with the 2025 Virtual BUBW Alumni who had a virtual BUBW the month before. The virtual alumni were very excited to meet the current students and shared their experiences whilst also answering their questions. Overall, it was a very pleasant meeting between the virtual and in-person BUBW participants, but soon after, the students had to get ready for the banquet, which was the highlight of the day.





When all the students arrived at the Zaqia Restaurant for CECF's 55th BUBW Banquet Program, it started with reflections from 2 students and some Tajik poetry from one of them. After that, they had 9 Student Cultural performances, including Indian & Romanian songs, Ukrainian & Kazakh poetry, and lastly Kyrgyz, Georgian, Egyptian, Pakistani, & Indonesian dances. The cultural performances were so impactful that while the students were supposed to be eating, students from Moldova and Ukraine taught and shared dances from their countries, which made all 22 students participate, so it was such a beautiful and amazing part of the evening, showcasing the power of cultural exchange.



Soon after, the BUBW and Cultural Exchange Experiences and Impact Student Panelists were asked to answer questions related to the conference, and lastly, the Certificates Ceremony was held before the students returned to the hotel for Program Evaluations and a Departure Session. The students were overall so impacted by the banquet because it was such an unforgettable evening and night filled with amazing cultures and people, making it the best way to officially end the conference.







Finally, the students were emotional as it was time to say goodbyes, but then were surprised to find a bunch of board games so that they could spend their last hours together making even more beautiful memories and strengthening bonds. This was such a precious surprise to the students, so they cherished every moment they were Spending Time with Each Other Before Departure, from playing board games and charades to doing group dances. That night and morning really showed how close all the students became, even after just 4 days of the conference. Soon after, tho, everyone finally said their goodbyes to each batch of students leaving for the airport on Sunday, which was a very emotional moment but overall such a rewarding experience to be a part of, and that was the end of the 55th Better Understanding for a Better World conference in Baltimore, Maryland.





## Student Testimonials:

***"I feel like the last day truly solidified all of our connections. It helped in building bridges between the different cultures and mindsets." (Leen, Lebanon)***



***"In just a few days, I built friendships that I know will last a lifetime. I became part of the BUBW family - a network of like-minded people from all over the world who inspire me and push me to keep working on projects that matter. I also took my place, with my new friends, as a global citizen - which is an invitation I will now extend to all. We are the next generation of leaders, and it's up to us to shape a better world." (Raivo Zimelis, Latvia)***

***"BUBW broadened my outlook in ways I never expected. I embraced new cultures and religions, realizing that many share more similarities with mine than I had assumed, whether through cultural food or dance. The most rewarding aspect, however, was the people. Though we were 22 students from 18 different countries, we emerged as one community united as one heart." (Lujain, Kuwait)***



***"And even though this conference lasted only five days, the connections I made felt incredibly deep, like I had known these people for my whole life. The BUBW community truly became my second family." (Olha, Ukraine)***

***"I am convinced that the connections which were passionately fostered during the past five days will make a humongous impact on remediation the further international relationships worldwide. It is truly empowering and fascinating to comprehend that all of us, having entirely different cultural, historical, ethnic and religious backgrounds, share the same mindset, core values and intentions regarding societal growth." (Sofiia, Ukraine)***



# SPECIAL THANKS

We are thankful to the following institutions for their support and partnership:

## CO-SPONSOR

CECF International, Inc.

## PARTNERING INSTITUTION

The United Nations (UN)

Al Basheer Seminary, Interfaith Centre, and Institute

## CELEBRATING CECF'S 55TH BUBW CONFERENCE

April 23 - 27, 2025

Since 2006, CECF has been delighted to welcome YES, FLEX, A-SMYLE and CBYX students to our Better Understanding for a Better World (BUBW) Conferences. These students are part of the U.S. Department of State's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs' Exchange Programs.



U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs  
<https://eca.state.gov/about-bureau>

Over the years, CECF has been delighted to welcome students from the following Placement Organizations:



AFS  
<https://www.afsusa.org>  
<https://www.ciee.org>



American Councils for International Education



Youth For Understanding (YFU)  
<https://www.americancouncils.org>



PAX Academic Exchange  
<https://www.yfuusa.org>



CIEE  
<https://pax.org>



ASSE  
<https://asse.com>



Academic Year in America (AYA)  
<https://www.academyyear.org>



American Cultural Exchange Services (ACES)  
<http://www.explorettheworld.org>



World Link  
<https://worldlinkinc.org>



AYUSA  
<https://www.ayusa.org>



Greenheart Exchange Area  
<https://greenheartexchange.org>



St. Andrew's School  
<https://www.standrews-de.org>



Shrine of the Sacred Heart  
<https://www.theshrine.org>



Oseh Shalom  
<http://iswa.org>



The Islamic Society of the Washington  
<https://www.oseh-shalom.org>

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