



**THE
MOSAIC
INSTITUTE**

www.mosaicinstitute.ca

Issue 10: Fall 2011

THE MOSAIC DISPATCH

HARNESSING CANADA'S DIVERSITY FOR
PEACE AND DEVELOPMENT ABROAD

The Mosaic Institute Heads Back to School in Toronto

In late October, the Mosaic Institute launched its “South Asian-Canadian Global Citizenship Project” (SACGCP) at Etobicoke’s West Humber Collegiate Institute in cooperation with the Toronto District School Board (TDSB.). More than 75 young people ages 15 to 18, from 3 different high schools, participated in Day 1 of this exciting initiative that looks at the privileges and responsibilities of Canadian and global citizenship through the lens of Toronto’s thriving South Asian communities. Most of the participating students identified a personal or family connection to India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and Afghanistan.

The program is following a plan set out in an innovative set of curriculum materials specifically developed by the Mosaic Institute for this project. On Day 1, entitled *Legacy Building at Home and Abroad*, they learned about the role that the values of pluralism and diversity play in the Canadian mosaic, studied the Canadian Constitution and the Charter of Rights, and discussed Canada’s contribution to the establishment of such international organizations as the United Nations and the International Criminal Court. In the middle of December, these students from West Humber C.I., Thistletown C.I., and north Albion C.I. also participated in workshops on such topics as *Examining our South Asian Heritage*, *Examining Possibilities for Peace in South Asia*, and *Investing in Our South Asian Communities*.

Throughout the duration of this this program, students are becoming actively involved in Community Service Projects that reflect the SACGCP’s emphasis on constructive “global citizenship.” The International Development Relief Foundation (IDRF), BuildChange, and One Child are all working closely with the students, who also have the opportunity to develop and deliver service projects that serve communities in Toronto.

This initiative is the follow-up to successful Mosaic programming that was delivered in the Peel District School Board last spring. The students, who are Canadians of South Asian descent, completed a number of projects including a number of “Community Service Projects” in support of Canadian NGOs doing essential work to help build communities and enrich the lives of people across South Asia, such as PLAN Canada, Human Rights Watch, the Water and Sanitation Rotarian Action Group (WASRAG), Amnesty International, Kahaniya and the India Village Poverty Relief Fund.

With the generous support of Citizenship and Immigration Canada and the RBC Foundation, and working in partnership with Canada’s largest public school board, the Mosaic Institute has an opportunity to bear witness as young Canadians are woven ever closer into the fabric of the Canadian mosaic, and as they are transformed from skeptical teenagers into eloquent ambassadors for Canadian global citizenship.



Dil Alvi, Principal of Humber C.I., talks to eager students on Oct. 28th

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Mosaic Institute: What We Do

The Mosaic Institute is an action-oriented think tank that harnesses the connections, knowledge and resources of Canada’s ethnocultural communities to advance Canadian solutions and promote peace and development in conflict-ridden or under-developed parts of the world.

Canada and Sri Lanka: A New Kind of Diaspora Politics

by *Natale Dankotuwage*
& *Jothi Shanmugam*



Natale Dankotuwage (left) is a senior undergraduate student of Political Science at the University of Toronto. Jothi Shanmugam (right) is a senior undergraduate student of Peace & Conflict Studies and Criminology at the University of Toronto and a former Mosaic Intern. Both have served on the Steering Committee of the “Young Canadians’ Peace Dialogue on Sri Lanka”, convened by the Mosaic Institute in partnership with the Trudeau Centre for Peace & Conflict Studies at the Munk School for Global Affairs.

The term “diaspora politics” takes on multiple meanings where Canadians of Sri Lankan background are concerned. With a population of 200,000 or more, those in Canada’s Tamil community are by far the largest diaspora group in Canada with its origins in Sri Lanka. A fraction of that number of Canadians is of Sinhalese background. By contrast, in Sri Lanka itself, Tamils represent around only 20% of the population, with the majority Sinhala community dominating the country’s government, military, and public institutions.

Relations among the various communities of Sri Lanka who now call Canada home understandably intensified during the final days of the Sri Lankan civil war in 2009. At the time, the prospect for reconciliation between Canadians of Tamil background and those from Sinhalese or Muslim Sri Lankan backgrounds seemed unfathomable. Tensions heightened with stories of inter-community violence in suburban Toronto, the provocative use by some street protesters of the Tamil Tiger flag, and the distribution of hate messages in all directions using social media tools.

During this time, we and a small group of Tamil, Sinhalese and Muslim youth came together seeking to find common, Canadian ground among our communities. Our goal was to engage in constructive dialogue focused on ways to promote reconciliation and development in Sri Lanka and help rebuild the country where many of us and our parents had been born. Yet when we approached our own community organizations to undertake such a project, we were turned down and advised to drop the plan for our own safety. Fortunately, through the efforts of The Mosaic Institute, we ultimately succeeded in launching a two-year “Young Canadians’ Peace Dialogue on Sri Lanka” in the summer of 2009.

After spending several months drafting a statement of “Guiding Values” which would set the rules of engagement for our future public discussions, we assembled about 100 like-minded young Canadians of Tamil, Sinhalese and Muslim Sri Lankan background to learn about each other and to try and agree on a constructive course forward both for our relationships here in Canada, and for our families still living in Sri Lanka. Our views of the geopolitics of Sri Lanka were at times widely divergent, but we were all convinced that reconciliation between our communities here in Canada was imperative if we as Canadians wanted to have the credibility to promote peace, pluralism and democracy for all the people of Sri Lanka.

In the end, we drafted and submitted a set of policy recommendations to the Governments of both Canada and Sri Lanka. We also formed ourselves into an ongoing fundraising organization called Build Change (www.buildchange.ca), under whose banner we are now working with the Canadian Rotarian Water Foundation to help build residential water wells for the families of internally displaced persons (IDPs) in the Vanni region of northeastern Sri Lanka. With the encouragement of Canada’s Department of Foreign Affairs, a “Reconciliation Tour” of Sri Lanka is also in the planning stage.

Through our Peace Dialogue, we have been engaging in a new kind of “diaspora politics” that are wholly consistent with Canada’s foreign policy principles. Rather than holding on to entrenched views imported from the country that our parents had left for the promise of a better life in Canada, we have been working together to try and identify common strategies for supporting all the people of Sri Lanka in their efforts to rebuild their country. In that effort, we have been inspired by the example of peace-focused civil society organizations in Sri Lanka and by officials of Canada’s own Department of Foreign Affairs to help advance a vision of peace and pluralism for Sri Lanka that is reflective of the best of Canada’s core values.

Given our close connections back to the people of Sri Lanka and our shared commitment to living out such values, the diverse members of our community here in Canada –Tamils, Sinhalese, Muslims and others among them – have a tremendous opportunity to demonstrate to the Government and people of Sri Lanka how reconciliation can be achieved and pluralism can be practiced.

New Faces and Changing Roles at the Mosaic Institute

There are some new faces and some familiar faces with new roles to be found at The Mosaic Institute this year.

Mike Morden, who moved to the role of Special Advisor for the UofMosaic program in September, Mike is now at the stage of doing field research for his Ph.D. in Political Science at the University of Toronto.

Lorenzo Vargas, is the new part-time Program Coordinator for the UofMosaic and is Replacing Mike as part-time Program Coordinator for the UofMosaic and is overseeing the delivery of the UofMosaic Dialogue on the Middle East. In 2010, Lorenzo completed his B.A. in Development Studies at York University.

Sheara Guttman, a senior undergraduate student in history at Ryerson University, is the new Program Assistant for the UofMosaic initiative.

Herveen Singh left the Institute at the end of the summer to assume an academic position with the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education.

Gina Csanyi-Robah, has replaced Harveen as Program Manager for our South Asian-Canadian Global Citizenship Project(SACGCP). Gina is an experienced educator and human rights advocate, and also the current Executive Director of the Roma Community Centre in Toronto.

Isra Rafiq has served in many capacities for the Mosaic Institute. She recently left her role as Program Assistant for the SACGP to assume teaching positions with Pathways to Education and the Toronto District School Board.

Steven Wang assumed the role of Program Assistant for the South Asian-Canadian Global Citizenship Project. Steven is a recent graduate of the University of Toronto's International Relations specialist program.

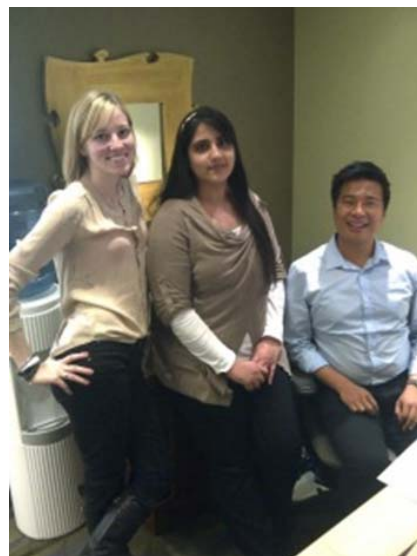
As in past year, our volunteer interns provide valuable support to our paid contractors. Each of the following women is volunteering with Mosaic for one day each week, and each is already making an important contribution to our work:

Anam Ansari is studying Peace and Conflict Studies and Near and Middle Eastern Civilizations at the University of Toronto. She represents Mosaic's continuing tradition of receiving interns each year from the Trudeau Centre for Peace & Conflict Studies.

Gabriella Siciliano is a bilingual Masters Candidate at the Glendon School of Public and International Affairs at York University. She has her Bachelor of Arts Honours degree in Global Development Studies from Queen's University.

Rabea Sultan is an undergraduate student at the University of Toronto, currently pursuing a specialist degree in Political Science and a minor in French.

The Mosaic Institute is fortunate to have these contractors and interns working with us this year.



*Gabriella Siciliano, Rabea Sultan
and Steven Wang (l to r)*



Discussing the Changing Face of Canadian Citizenship at Roadmap 2030

The Mosaic Institute's Executive Director, John Monahan (pictured near left, with Uzma Shakir, Director of Equity, Diversity & Human Rights for the City of Toronto), was on the opening panel entitled "*Diversity, Citizenship and Canada*" at the Roadmap 2030 conference that was held in Toronto on October 25-26. In addition to Ms. Shakir, he was also joined by Gillian Hewitt-Smith of the Institute for Canadian Citizenship; Karen Stewart, of the Assembly of First Nations; Phil Triadafilopoulos of the University of Toronto; and moderator Hamlin Grange. Roadmap 2030 focused on how we envision active citizenship in a changing and diverse Canada.

Specifically, it examined how the engagement between the public and political sectors and diverse communities support active citizenship. From balancing rights, to diversity in politics, to accessibility, to the role of faith in public policy, the Roadmap 2030 conference shed light on many of today's "big issues", gaining insight and perspective on the way forward.

The UofMosaic Launches Dialogue on the Middle East at York University

The first session of the UofMosaic Dialogue on the Middle East took place at York University on October 3, 2011



The Mosaic Institute's UofMosaic program convened its first dialogue event of the school year at York University on October 3rd, 2011. The topic of discussion was the "Arab Spring" and its likely influence, if any, on the prospect of a comprehensive peace between Arabs and Israelis in the Middle East. The event was a great success as 25 York University students engaged in a constructive and respectful conversation about the effects of the ongoing uprisings in the Arab world. York University Professor of History Thabit Abdullah and Toronto Star journalist Jayme Poisson served as the lead panelists for the event, which was moderated by Noel Badiou, York's Director of Human Rights. The Mosaic Institute's Executive Director, John Monahan and UofMosaic Program Coordinator Lorenzo Vargas, opened the dialogue with words of welcome.

This session at York University is the first of many that will be held across three different universities for the 2011-2012 school year. UofMosaic has planned a year-long series of sessions focused on geopolitical issues in the Middle East, with three or four sessions being organized by each of our student chapters at York University, the University of Toronto and Ryerson University. Topics will range from Canada's connections to the Middle East to the role of the media in covering the region.

"The inaugural event of U of Mosaic@York is an example of how peaceful, respectful conversation about participants' connections to the Middle East can take place on York's campus. The program provides a platform for participants to express their personal opinions, as well as their emotional connections to the region," said Maxa Sawyer, one of the UofMosaic student leaders at York University.

Dialogue participants from the three campus chapters will come together for a day-long conference called *Citizen Summit: Young Canadians' Day of Dialogue for Peace in the Middle East*, on March 16, 2012. This will be an opportunity for young Canadians who are committed to achieving peace and have a personal connection to the Middle East to come together, listen to expert speakers and engage each other respectfully in mediated dialogue. Students will also be encouraged to commit to working on a shared "community service project" to further promote inter-community cooperation both in Canada and in the Middle East itself.

The UofMosaic is an initiative of the Mosaic Institute to encourage Canadian university students to confront old conflicts and strengthen our Canadian commitment to fostering peace, pluralism and good government around the world. Each year, UofMosaic chapters focus on different conflict zones and work with different communities. The lead funder of this initiative is the BMO Financial Group.

The UofMosaic hopes to build bridges of understanding between campus-based ethnocultural communities via student-run chapters and an online presence (www.uofmosaic.ca) in order to create a critical mass of Canadian students working together for peace and development. By providing university students with a safe forum for fruitful dialogue, and an alternative to the campus politics of confrontation, we hope to encourage joint action for peace, greater inter-cultural understanding, and ultimately, a stronger Canadian mosaic.

by Anam Ansari & Lorenzo Vargas

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