UN STUDIES COMMEMORATES THE UN AT 70
UN STUDIES SPECIALIZATION CELEBRATES INAUGURAL YEAR

“VOICES FROM THE FIELD” AT SIPA

Robert Serry, UN Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process. Photo courtesy of Ryan Berger.

Said Djinnit, Special Envoy of the Secretary-General to the Great Lakes Region. Photo courtesy of Ryan Berger.

Parfait Onanga-Anyanga, former UN Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Burundi. Photo courtesy of Odharnait Ansbro.

Staffan de Mistura, UN Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria. Photo courtesy of Kelly Joseph.

See Pages 12 & 15 for More on “Voices from the Field”
By Stephanie Martinez

“I like to think that I was not only placed at the United Nations, but I was placed on a different planet,” Marcello Bonatto began as he recounted his experience visiting UNICEF’s Innovation Division. Mr. Bonatto, a second year Master of International Affairs candidate at Columbia University’s School of International and Public Affairs, was one of 37 students chosen to take part in the “Day(s) at the UN – A View from Inside” initiative. Spearheaded by Professor Elisabeth Lindenmayer, Director of the UN Studies Specialization at SIPA, the initiative now in its fifth year matches students with different departments at the United Nations and provides them the opportunity to experience a typical day at the UN, observe the complexity of a multilateral organization, discover the human face of the UN, find mentors and establish networks.

The program culminated in a special, celebratory event “A Day at the UN: A View from Inside,” held on the Columbia campus on April 22nd. The special event is an opportunity for the students to thank their UN hosts and share their experiences, for their hosts to explain why they open their doors to the students and for both to share how they benefit from the exchange. The panel discussion included seven UN hosts, including Michael O’Neill (Assistant Secretary General, UNDP), Jo Scheuer (Director, UNDP), Agnès Marcaillou (Director, UNMAS), Chitose Noguchi (Deputy Director, UNDP), Claudia Banz (Senior Political Officer, DPKO), Norah Maki (Academic Partnerships Lead, UNICEF), Stéphane Dujarric (Spokesperson of the Secretary-General, DPI), and six students, including, Lanna Walsh, Sama Habib, Rhea Gupta, Affan Javed, Alexandra van Nievelt, and Marcello Bonatto.

Ms. Agnès Marcaillou, Director of UNMAS, who has been involved with the initiative for several years, provided an opportunity for a special moment of recognition as her office broke A Day at the UN’s record for the longest visit: 8 days! “What is important for us is really to make sure that you feel it,” remarked, Director of UNMAS. “This is about tasting it. This is about being part of it. It is to make it real.”

First year Master of Public Administration student Rhea Gupta, who spent the unprecedented 8 days at UNMAS was involved in the set-up of the “More Than Mines” exhibit, where she watched Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon walk through a digital minefield exhibit. She was also given the opportunity to work on a project for Director Marcaillou, and met actor Daniel Craig, who will be serving as the first UN Global Advocate for the Elimination of Mines and Explosive Hazards. “Overall, my time at UNMAS was truly incredible,” said Ms. Gupta. “It’s a staff that is very dynamic and works under an extreme time crunch on issues that really are a matter of life and death.”

Michael O’Neill, Assistant Administrator and Director of the Bureau of External Relations and Advocacy at UNDP, commented on how the United Nations benefits from programs such as A Day at the UN, which allows the organization to share its message. He also noted SIPA’s unique relationship with the UN. “I’ve only been in UNDP for 14 months,” said Director O’Neill. “But I know just from those 14 months in my bureau, and I’m sure in other parts of the UN system, that we benefit enormously from the relationship with the UN Studies Specialization at SIPA.” “We get a lot out of it, and it’s great to have students with us,” said Claudia Banz, Senior Political Affairs Officer in the Department of Peacekeeping Operations. Jo Scheuer, Director and Chief of Profession, Climate Change and Disaster Risk Reduction at UNDP added that he hoped that the program offered a chance to demystify the UN.

From the time that the students were given their placements in the beginning of 2015, they have visited 34 divisions and sections across more than 12 departments and agencies, including: the Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO); the Department of Political Affairs (DPA); Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA);

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Thank You To Our Gracious Hosts of “A Day at the UN!”

You have given our students such memorable experiences and we are looking forward to seeing you again next year!

Congratulations to UNMAS who hosted a SIPA student at the UN for a record breaking **eight** days!
“During the day, I met with various people from AMED, the Counter-Terrorism Implementation Task Force, or the Security Council Sanctions Committees. I also attended the noon briefing of the Secretary General’s spokesperson.” ~ Jirka Jelinek, SIPA

“I was told that Director Marcaillou would like for me to sit in on her meetings all morning and she would like me to work on a research project which I did on my last few days at UNMAS.” ~ Rhea Gupta, SIPA

“I was really surprised by the fact that I had not only the opportunity to shadow ASG Mulet, but also to have individual conversations with the heads of different offices.” ~ Franziska Seethaler, SIPA

“I had most hoped to gain professional role models and mentors. The meeting had not even started and I was already receiving valuable professional advice!” ~ Alexandra van Nievelt, SIPA
the “Day at the UN”

“It was a valuable lesson for me to learn how ASG Martinez-Soliman incorporated his professional and personal experience into the work he did.”

~ Supharin Chattaworn, SIPA

“It was incredible for me to see SRSG Bangura in action; She had just participated for an entire day at the Open Debate without rest. I learned a lot about the amount of passion and energy it takes to meet so many responsibilities and demands in such a busy office. She was tireless.” ~ Wenyue Chen, SIPA

“I realized to have a successful career in the UN, one has to be a certain kind of person with a genuine passion for the work. The ambition to achieve contrasted with the stark reality of limited resources, but the motivation of the team did not falter. It was very inspiring.” ~ Affan Javed, SIPA

Mr. Magdy Martinez-Soliman, Assistant Secretary-General and Director of the Bureau for Policy and Programme Support (BPPS) for UNDP and Supharin Chattaworn, SIPA Student.

Ms. Zainab Hawa Bangura, Special Representative of the Secretary-General on the Prevention of Violence Against Women and Wenyue Chen, SIPA Student.

Mr. Jo Scheuer, Chief of Profession, Director, Climate Change and Disaster Risk Reduction, Bureau for Policy and Programme Support, UNDP staff team and Affan Javed, SIPA Student.
"My days at the UN opened the doors to a world I knew little about and now I know what I want to do and where I want to be." ~Marcello Bonatto, SIPA

Mr. Christopher Fabian, Head of the Innovation Division, UNICEF and Marcello Bonatto, SIPA Student.

"I am grateful for the wisdom Deputy Director Gerard imparted when he took the time to meet with Vijay and myself. I appreciated gaining insights into the difference between field and HQ work." ~ Kelly Joseph, SIPA OCHA External Relations and Partnerships Division Team, Vanessa May, Ylva Blondel, Kelly Joseph (SIPA Student) Laura Rodriguez and Veera Haapaniemi.

"It’s amazing how much thought and preparation goes into 4-5 sentences. The note I wrote was read by the Spokesperson for the SG, Mr. Stephane Dujarric during the noon briefing.” ~ Lanna Walsh, SIPA Mr. Stephane Dujarric, Spokesperson for the Secretary General, Department of Public Information (DPI) and Lanna Walsh, SIPA Student.

"As I stand on the other side of the journey, as someone who had the unique opportunity to be interact with you, I am extremely grateful for the exposure, learning and enjoyment."~ Srujith Lingala, SIPA Srujith Lingala, SIPA Student and Finbar Hefferon DPKO Somalia Intern.
“The best part of the entire experience was being able to meet with others who were just as passionate about working to improve the state of global reproductive and maternal health. I left feeling energized and fully invested. Thank you for this once in a lifetime opportunity!”

~ Stephanie Martinez, SIPA

“I remember looking around for a moment and thinking to myself - this is the United Nations - it’s people.”

~ Monica Bernardo, SIPA

“I deeply admire the work of the Secretariat. I was impressed by the fact there are only 25 officers passionately and tirelessly working to make a positive change. I left feeling encouraged and inspired to journey on with my decision to make a career switch to humanitarian action.”

~ Vijay Liew, SIPA
By Kelly Joseph and Ryan Berger

The UN Studies Specialization at SIPA has just brought to a close its first year. The specialization has attracted students from across the globe with an interest in gaining insight and access to the United Nations. In honor of this achievement, we introduce you to two students who came to SIPA to do just that.

Rhea Gupta (MPA ’16) is part of the inaugural class as a UN Studies Specializer at SIPA. In undergraduate she studied Political Science and Global Studies at UNC Chapel Hill in North Carolina, where she is from. Before coming to SIPA, Ms. Gupta worked as a high school teacher for Teach for America in Atlanta, GA. Through her teaching she continued to explore current global issues which kept a passion burning to learn more about the world. When she made the decision to return to graduate school she had many options, yet only SIPA provided the opportunity to focus her studies on the United Nations.

She had applied for hundreds in UN jobs and it seemed daunting, she was seeking a program that would provide a gateway to learn more about the United Nations and what it means to work there. Her experience through the Day at the UN Program, has not only led her to an internship with the UN, it has also unlocked the door to her future within the UN. Gupta said, “The reception of the Day at the UN event was a great example of how Professor Lindenmayer was able to attract so many high level people from the UN to attend and connect with students. This is the reason I am at SIPA and part of the UN Studies specialization.”

Another specializer in the inaugural UNS specialization class is Hanno Focken (MPA ’16), who is from the small German town of Dettingen. He focused his undergraduate studies on international management, and came to SIPA having interned at the Red Cross, L’Oreal and the German Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Focken chose to enroll in SIPA in part because of the school’s close connection with the United Nations. He adds, “Before SIPA, the UN seemed very impenetrable to me as a potential employer as well as a political institution. UNS seemed to provide me with the access that I could not reach on my own so far.”

As his first year of the MPA program comes to a close, he notes, “The UNS privileges are simply unique. What my first year at SIPA taught me about the UN would not fit into any formal curriculum: I shadowed a high-ranking UN employee during the negotiations on the post 2015 development agenda; listened to an incredible variety of panels; had a beer with the former Indian and current Swiss ambassador to the UN during the UNS retreat; and last but not least gained a lot of valuable knowledge from Professor Lindenmayer’s personal experiences that she shared with us on many occasions.”

Department of Public Information (DPA); Office of the Commissioner of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA); Office of Disarmament Affairs (ODA); Office of the High Commissioner of Human Rights (OHCHR); United Nations Development Program (UNDP) including the Bureau for Crisis Prevention and Recovery (BCPR), Bureau for Policy and Program Support, Bureau of External Relations, and the Global Environment Facility (GEF); United Nations Women (UN Women) including the Leadership and Governance Section, Trust Fund to End Violence Against Women, and Peace and Security Section; United Nations Children Education Fund (UNICEF) including the Innovation Unit, Adolescent Development and Partnerships Section, and Health Section, United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA); Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary General on the Prevention of Violence Against Women; and the Peacebuilding Commission Support Office (PBSO).

The event provided several lighthearted opportunities. One particular observation that was met with smiles and laughter came when Affan Javed, a first year Master of Public Affairs student who was placed in the Office of the Director for the Bureau for Policy and Programme Support at UNDP, shared what he took away from his experience. “One thing that I caught onto very early on was that the bad news is that you don’t have enough resources, but the good news is that there’s a lot of ambition to do more. So even the good news at the UN means more work, and people seem to celebrate that, and that was interesting,” Mr. Javed said.

It was clear by the end of the event that while each student’s experience was unique, the person-to-person approach of the program allowed the SIPA participants to experience the UN on a more personal level. “I think I understand more the kind of perspective you have to maintain while working at the UN,” said Alyssa Gutnik, who visited the Health Section of the Innovation Division at UNICEF.”You need to be able to see the big picture, not be overwhelmed by it, and understand that the little day to day actions eventually contribute to the big picture.”
By Aimee Wenyue Chen

On March 11, Zainab Hawa Bangura, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General (SRSG) on Sexual Violence in Conflict, highlighted the United Nations Studies (UNS) Specialization’s annual commemoration of International Women’s Day by speaking to dozens of SIPA students. The result was an intimate conversation on women’s leadership and SRSG Bangura’s personal journey from human-rights activist in Sierra Leone to working for her government and then for the UN.

SRSG Bangura was born in Sierra Leone to parents who were both illiterate. Her mother was not allowed to go to school because she was a woman and the SRSG credits her as her inspiration for her incredible journey. When the future Special Representative was only 12, her father wanted her to get married. Her mother refused and kept sending her to school, despite extremely difficult circumstances. Ms. Bangura spoke of her extraordinary personal journey and gave three important pieces of advice to the audience members, many of whom were female.

The first and most important is education: “It’s the golden key, it pens the world [to women] and gives you self-confidence and unleashes your potential.”

The second is that knowledge is power. She explained to SIPA students that she will not “fly in and fly out” of a country, but always go visit the worst of the conflict areas, so that she can learn firsthand about the area. Then, she can use that information and knowledge in order to negotiate with government leaders.

The third is self-confidence and preparation. She recounted a meeting she had with former Secretary-General Kofi Annan: in order to prepare for it, she memorized information about a vast multitude of militias in a certain region. She found out their leaders, locations and interests. She did all this just in the chance that Mr. Annan would ask her about them. She also mentioned that she always sits front row and center stated, “You must fight to make yourself visible.”

For the SRSG, leadership is a technique cultivated by years of learning from others and practice. “Leadership is not by accident... The world is a marketplace. You have to package and sell yourself. As well, I say the world is a classroom. You learn. All the techniques and things I learned, I learned them through people... that’s what you need as a leader.” For SIPA students, it was inspirational advice and again reminded students that much progress remains before attaining full gender equality.

SRSG Bangura spoke of the difficulties she encounters in conversing with leaders to address sexual violence and gender inequality in conflict. She explained, “The lower the status of women in society, the less educational and economic opportunities she has, and the more likely to face sexual violence.” Poverty, sexual violence, and lack of access to justice — these are all part of a vicious cycle that must be broken. Thus, she uses many kinds of strategies in order to dialogue with leaders in such a sensitive and often stigmatized subject matter.

The most important things, she said, are to make sure that you have respect for the other person, and try to engage them. “Don’t confront. Start with putting someone at ease. Then I say, ‘I need you to help me.’” The SRSG often tries to put someone at ease and build a common connection through shared identities.

This sparked questions among students. One brought up the point that commonalities in identity can help in bridging differences, but sometimes can also be a barrier. SRSG Bangura gave the example of when she works with male militia leaders. She often asks them to imagine if it happened to their daughter, and uses that as an entry point.

Discussion moved further, to tactics for dealing with extremists and how to engage with them. Throughout the lively evening, SRSG Bangura gave inspiring guidance to the impassioned SIPA students that participated — and was a fitting choice in both profession and character to commemorate 2015 International Women’s Day.
By Isabela Cunha

On March 30th, SIPA students were welcomed to a working lunch at the Brazilian embassy, where they were received by Ambassador Antonio Patriota, the Brazilian Permanent Representative to the UN. The lively conversation addressed the United Nations at 70, the reform of the organization's security arrangements and a call for creative diplomacy in protection of civilians.

The Ambassador addressed the Security Council's current deadlock, which he believes is due to a division among permanent members and a general lack of effective leadership. He underscored that the council was reformed and expanded (from 11 to 15 members) 50 years ago. The international community does not have much experience in creating cooperation in times of peace. However, he considers this to be an ideal moment to change this configuration, as the new patterns of conflict have the potential to degenerate with an unpredictable future.

Nonetheless, the tone should be of optimism. The UN has proven its capacity of innovation and consensus building in instances such as the Rio+20 Conference and even within the Council, with the establishment of intervention brigades. When decisions are perceived as necessary and legitimate, they can work. In this sense, the UN 70th anniversary is the perfect occasion for structural change in the Security Council.

According to Ambassador Patriota, this change to be necessary because something is intrinsically wrong with the way the UN Peace and Security structure is operating. Conflicts such as the ones in Ukraine and Syria could have been prevented if more intelligent diplomacy had been employed, instead of investing so much faith in military means. He argued that the US alone will not succeed to shape action and carve out a stabilizing agenda that is effective. As the UN membership has doubled since the last UNSC reform, in the 1960s, it is again time for reform, which would renew the Council's internal dynamics.

When it comes to the contribution that current non-permanent members can have to the Security Council's agenda, Ambassador Patriota argues that some of them have the capability of invigorating and showing ways out the current deadlock. An example of that is the Responsibility while Protecting (RwP) doctrine, which has been championed by Brazil since the current crisis emerged from NATO's intervention in Libya. The RwP is just one of the examples of constructive alternatives that a non-permanent member can bring to the UNSC during its 2-year-long tenure. Examples like the RwP could be more frequent and should more countries be allowed as permanent members of the Security Council.

On RwP, Ambassador Patriota noted that a number of civilians were killed in the NATO-led UN-authorized intervention on Libya and that the extrapolation of the UNSC resolution mandate establish a problematic pattern to R2P-based interventions. The Ambassador considers RwP to be necessary for R2P to work. He invited countries to exercise leadership and suggest new solutions. Finally, Ambassador Patriota reaffirmed his belief and trust in multilateralism and its capacity to develop and evolve. According to him, Brazil would like to see the existing powers abiding by the multilateral rules and working collectively.
By Celina Hübner

On February 26, UN Deputy Secretary-General (DSG) Jan Eliasson was the guest of UN Studies at SIPA to reflect on the United Nations’ 70th anniversary. This highly anticipated event, which had been rescheduled due to a blizzard in late January, saw the enthusiastic participation of the Columbia community. United Nations Studies (UNS) Director, Professor Elisabeth Lindenmayer, organized the discussion and served as its moderator. Students were given the rare opportunity to learn more in an intimate setting about the mandate of the UN and high-level global issues from the organization’s second in command.

Prior to his March 2012 appointment to his current role by UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, DSG Eliasson held various high-level positions throughout the UN and the Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs. He served as the lead mediator in six major conflicts including the Iran-Iraq War and the Darfur Crisis, as well as Sweden’s permanent representative to the UN, chairman of the UN General Assembly’s working group on emergency relief, vice president of the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) and the first-ever appointed UN Under Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and involved in operations in Somalia, Sudan, Mozambique, and the Balkans.

Through a mix of light-hearted anecdotes, personal experiences and analytical reflections, the DSG encouraged SIPA students to “never lose the perspective of how the world should be.” In his address, he identified some of the key challenges that characterize the new global landscape in 2015. Of particular importance is the challenge of what he calls “the communication revolution.” The Deputy Secretary-General illustrated this fact by noting that, “there exist more cellphones than toilets in today’s world.” This point reflects the changing nature of communication and technology and the challenges that these new advances bring.

As the first UN Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, Deputy Secretary-General Eliasson, he understands the need for stronger engagement in post-conflict countries. Without this engagement recurring conflict is a reality, moving post-conflict countries back to conflict states. The horizontal focus of conflict response should be significantly expanded and efforts to strengthen peace and security, development, and the respect for human rights equally increased. Other topics addressed upon included the need for further empowerment of women, addressing the vast unemployment of youth, urbanization challenges, new geopolitical and geoeconomic struggles, and climate change.

SIPA students were grateful for the unique opportunity to meet with Deputy Secretary-General Eliasson and learn from his valuable remarks. This became particularly evident in the lively question-and-answer session in the second half of the event, during which the DSG attentively answered every question.

DSG Eliasson’s thoughtful reflections on the UN’s 70th anniversary mirrored his strong belief in multilateral organizations and the UN in particular. According to the Deputy Secretary-General, in today’s world “any good international solution should be in the national interest” of each and every state. Jan Eliasson concluded the discussion by giving a message of hope. He urged the international community to realize that “we are part of the world, but the world is also inside our nations” the key to solving challenges to our national interests lies in increased international cooperation.

In short: 70 years after the UN was founded, much remains to be done. Yet Deputy Secretary-General Jan Eliasson’s strong conviction in the power of international organizations remains unshaken.
UNS Director Elisabeth Lindenmayer, has began a new series bringing to the students a first-hand account of the realities on the ground from Secretary-General Special Envoys, Special Representatives and Coordinators.

“VOICES FROM THE FIELD”

PARFAIT ONANGA-ANYANGA, SPECIAL ENVOY OF SECRETARY-GENERAL, DISCUSSES BURUNDI

By Odharnait Ansbro

On Monday, April 6th, Parfait Onanga-Anyanga, former UN Special Representative of the Secretary General for Burundi, joined students at the School of International and Public Affairs, Columbia University, for a candid discussion on the political situation in Burundi and the upcoming elections, which will take place in June, this year. The date marked exactly twenty-one years since the beginning of the Rwandan genocide, whose trigger was a plane crash in which the President of Burundi was killed. Burundi’s recent history has been marked by legacy of the genocide, which sparked renewed ethnic violence between Hutu and Tutsi groups, following decades of inter-ethnic tension. It is estimated that 350,000 people have been killed in successive conflicts since the 1990’s, which finally came to an end with the signing of the Arusha Agreement in 2000 and the adoption of a new democratic constitution in 2005.

Mr. Onanga-Anyanga, who served for two and half years at the United Nations Mission to Burundi, recognized that the country has made significant progress in a number of important areas, most notably, security sector reform. Once a Tutsi-dominated institution, the army has come to represent and be accepted by the majority of people in Burundi and has played a key role in the stabilization of the country. “The country is almost there,” he said, “It’s ready to be a true, successful peacebuilding story and will require, what I call visionary leadership.”

He described the upcoming elections as “an amazing opportunity” for the current President, Pierre Nkurunziza, “to consolidate democratic values in Burundi”. However, he remains concerned that they could be a catalyst for further violence, if they are not conducted in a free and fair manner. The President has hinted that he may seek a third term, despite provisions in the constitution that prohibit this. Civil society groups, the Burundian Catholic Church and members of the opposition have actively contested this.

Peace in Burundi remains fragile and there are a number of outstanding issues that remain to be addressed, in particular, that of land ownership, which continues to be a source of tension between different ethnic groups. Troubling questions have also arisen, in recent years, about freedom of expression and the independence of the Burundian judiciary, in light of the increase in irregular detentions of media workers and members of opposition political parties, and alleged extra-judicial killings by the Burundian army. In addition, ongoing regional conflict poses a threat to the internal political stability of Burundi.

Mr. Onanga-Anyanga highlighted the important role of the international community in supporting Burundi in its journey towards sustainable peace and democracy. He acknowledged that “at the end of the day, it is the nation themselves that hold their future in their hands”. However, he stated that the international community should invest sufficient resources now to monitor the political situation closely, present a strong, unified message to the Burundian government stressing the need for free and fair elections and empower those within Burundi who are determined to ensure the peaceful, democratic development of the state.
UNS COMMEMORATES 10 YEARS OF THE PEACEBUILDING COMMISSION

By Alyssa Lee Gutnik & Ebe Ouattara

On Monday, February 23, The United Nations Studies (UNS) Specialization at SIPA marked a decade of the UN Peacebuilding Commission (PBC) with a distinguished panel of peacebuilding experts. Organized and moderated by UNS Director, Professor Elisabeth Lindenmayer, a packed room at Columbia University’s International Affairs Building witnessed a powerhouse panel on the future of UN peacebuilding.

The PBC’s tasks include, according to its website: (1) Bringing together all of the relevant actors, including international donors, the international financial institutions, national governments, troop contributing countries; (2) marshaling resources and (3) advising on and proposing integrated strategies for post-conflict peacebuilding and recovery and where appropriate, highlighting any gaps that threaten to undermine peace.

“The PBC is a body that has high value, whose potential hasn’t been fully tapped,” said Parfait Onanga-Anyanga, Former UN Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the Office for Burundi, succinctly described the topic of the panel discussion.

Accompanying Onanga-Anyanga were: UN Assistant Secretary-General for Peacebuilding Support Oscar Fernandez-Taranco; Permanent Representative of Brazil to the UN and PBC Chairperson Antonio Patriota; and Permanent Representative of Sierra Leone to the UN Vandi Chidi Minah. Burundi and Sierra Leone are two of the six countries currently on the PBC’s agenda.

In addition to taking time to reflect on the work of the PBC to this point, the panel also discussed the official review of the PBC that is to be conducted this spring. This holds particular weight within the UN community because it is the premier review of the PBC in its first decade of operation. Patriota noted that the PBC is a “lesser-known mechanism that exists in the United Nations” and that this review brings an opportunity to address the question that has become more evident as the review process draws near: did the Peacebuilding Commission deliver on its promises?

These four distinguished guests brought unique, inspiring and controversial perspectives. Professor Lindenmayer, as moderator, also added much-appreciated insight, as she was part of the Secretary-General’s team when the PBC was established. The openness of the discussion throughout the evening made it clear that regardless of their various ties to the PBC, each panelist seemed to hold a hesitant optimism that the review will lead to recommendations that empower the PBC to fulfill the potential its founders initially intended.

Ambassador Minah reminded the audience that it is crucial that the review recommendations enable the PBC to take long-term perspectives and actions stating, “Solving the causes of conflict requires a long-term view.” The need for long-term approaches to peacebuilding is currently more evident in Ebola-affected Sierra Leone than anywhere else. According to Ambassador Minah, even though Sierra Leone has been considered a “success” of the PBC, the work is not done. He stated, “Sierra Leone is a democratic work in progress.” The PBC had a positive impact on how Sierra Leone has handled the Ebola crisis but, despite the apparent success of the PBC in this case, the future agenda of PBC will ultimately be determined by the results of the upcoming review.

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By Lydia Tomkiw & Arsla Jawaid

With global crises from Ukraine to Syria, the rise of more transnational actors like the Islamic State, and widespread health epidemics like Ebola, the United Nations currently faces a plethora of problems that were unimaginable in 1945.

On February 23, students from the United Nations Studies (UNS) Specialization and Professor Elisabeth Lindenmayer’s course, “International Enforcement and the UN Security Council,” attended the UN Security Council debate chaired by the presidency of China which focused on the purposes and principles of the Charter of the UN 70 years after it was formed.

Recognizing that new and emerging threats to world peace require the utilization of more creative and complicated tools, member-states overwhelmingly agreed that the Charter remained relevant in 2015 but needed to gain robustness in order to continue to be effective in the face of these rapidly-escalating threats.

UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon’s opening remarks set the stage by stating, “The United Nations was founded to prevent another world war, and it has succeeded in that. Despite the recurrence of genocide and repeated outbreaks of armed conflict, the past seven decades would surely have been even bloodier without the United Nations.”

At the 70-year mark, however, it is important for the UN as an organization to take stock and reflect on its commitment to the Charter, especially since membership has quadrupled since its founding. The Secretary-General argued that the Charter must been seen as a living document that represents the important phrase — “we the peoples” — and at its heart calls for human rights and collective security.

However, there is no longer a full agreement among members about what collective security means. He questioned whether or not the UN could have kept the situation in Syria from escalating and emphasized the role and commitment member-states have in working towards collective security.

As member-states began speaking, the lines of current conflicts were readily apparent. Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov immediately critiqued the United States’ role in the Middle East and called the revolution in Ukraine an “unconstitutional state coup.”

U.S. Permanent Representative to the UN Samantha Power shot back at Russia saying, “Russia today is training, arming, supporting and fighting alongside separatists who have brutally seized Ukrainian territory — a blatant violation of the Charter of the United Nations and an assault on its neighbor’s sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity.”

Making a case for protecting civilians in dire consequences, Ambassador Power reiterated the United States’ commitment to the Charter’s “purposes and principles — to recommit ourselves to the people, individuals in every one of our States, whose basic dignity the Charter is meant to defend and uphold.”

Issues of sovereignty and intervention remain relevant to member-states even beyond the P5 — and their comments are a clear reflection of realities, priorities and the contribution of each state to the Council. According to Ambassador Dina Kawar, the Permanent Representative of Jordan to the UN, the “sovereignty, independence, territorial integrity and non-interference should always be respected, and the United Nations and its Members and organs should work to maintain their integrity.” However, Ambassador Kawar added that grave violations of human rights and humanitarian law remain critical to the Council and its commitment to international peace and security.

The lines of disagreement are firm and as different States weigh into the debate, it is clear that the issue of intervention is sensitive and poses to be a problematic grey area in the realm of peace and security. With references to past failures, such as Rwanda and Srebrenica, as well as current political and humanitarian crises in Ukraine, Syria and Palestine, amongst others, the issues are increasingly complex and the UN Security Council remains concerned but deeply divided.
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Fernandez-Taranco expressed hope that “this review will deliver bold and creative recommendations.” In a time when conflicts are taking center stage in the international theatre, bold and creative recommendations would serve all of us well. “Bold” and “creative” does not only come in the form of official recommendations, but also comes through questions and ideas of future leaders: SIPA students. As young people who are actively pursuing perspectives and experiences that will teach them how to bring their skills and compassion to the international peacebuilding table, SIPA students genuinely appreciated the insight of the distinguished panelists—and perhaps emerged with ideas of their own for bold and creative change to the UN peacebuilding agenda.
NEW INITIATIVE OF UN STUDIES

JUNIOR FELLOWSHIP POSITIONS

The UN Studies Specialization is launching a series of partnerships which will provide students opportunities for paid fellowships with various UN entities. The purpose of this new initiative is to further develop the synergy between the United Nations and SIPA, promote research, and give students access to the UN.

The first fellowship with the United Nations University (UNU) is already in place (see article below), and similar partnerships with UNICEF and UNDP will be announced shortly.

UN STUDIES CONGRATULATES FIRST UNU FELLOWS

The United Nations Studies Specialization at SIPA and the United Nations University (UNU), a network of academic institutes and programs that acts as the think-tank of the UN system, have partnered to create a Junior Research Fellowship for SIPA students and recent graduates. This paid fellowship will be offered twice a year for 4-6 months, based at UNU’s New York office and come with a stipend of up to $6,000 from UNU.

We are excited to announce and congratulate the first two fellow: Juliette Faure (MIA 2015) and Franziska Seethaler (MIA 2015), 28 students applied and two were selected. These successful candidates will gain valuable exposure to policy discussions at the UN and contribute to the UNU’s mission through research, drafting and editorial assistance.

Congratulations and please know that UN Studies will be sending out notifications for the next round of fellowship opportunities soon!

UPCOMING FALL UN STUDIES EVENTS

“SAVE THE DATE”

November 3  Kofi Annan, Former Secretary-General

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September 19 - 20  UN Studies Specialization Retreat