Arab Spring Panel on UN Day

On December 18th, 2010 a movement began that will forever change the Arab world -- a series of protests that has since become known as the “Arab Spring”. The movement is one of the people, people who are discontented with their governments. With a motto of “Ash-shab yurid isqat an-nizam” or “the people want to bring down the regime”, it is easy to see where this discontent lies. To date, the uprisings, whether they be riots, protests, revolutions, or otherwise, have occurred in 18 or more different regions of the Arab world; they show no signs of slowing down. On Monday, October 24, the UNA-GP co-hosted a panel of speakers and a performance at the University of Pennsylvania’s Hall of Flags that analyzed this movement at its core. The panel consisted of two speakers (Omar Agusi and Dr. Hallak) and one performer (Omar Offendum) who discussed many of the different factors that contributed to the Arab spring movement.

The first to speak was Omar Agusi, a doctoral student from the University of Pennsylvania, who has been watching and contributing to the events in the Arab World since the very beginning. He has analyzed dozens of articles from around the world in an attempt to explain how so many people from such different countries could be grouped together in a movement such as this, which many have deemed “historic”. His analysis of these articles has brought him to the conclusion that despite their differences in culture and location, the people of each country have similar goals. Agusi uses examples from a pre-colonial Arab world to draw connections between the revolutions and their common goals. These common goals all come down to change -- change, which they did not have after the eradication of western colonialism. He also explains the role of social media, and the media in general, in these revolutions. As many of us know, the events that unfolded in the Arab world these past months have often been referred to as the “Facebook revolution”.

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This is because revolutionaries used social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter in order to spread the word about what was going on in their respective areas, thus helping to ignite movements in others. Not only did social media platforms help to spread revolution, but so did Internet media coverage in general. With the increased access to Internet around the world, news and narratives about the revolutions could be shared in no time at all. Agusi also found that gender played a large role in the revolutions. In almost every uprising there are reports of a large presence of females, and often these women are questioning traditional feminine roles in politics, religion, and everyday life. They are asking for dignity, liberty, democracy, justice, self-determination, and gender equality-themes illustrated through many contemporary artists’ rap lyrics. During many protests the “rules” of the streets were suspended; men and women alike had a chance to go out and mingle with no fear of being ostracized for not acting in certain traditional fashions. However, with laws in place to counteract this practice, some women found themselves in trouble.

During the Arab Spring the true nature of the regimes was revealed. Someone directly involved with this was Dr. Hallak, of Syria. Dr. Hallak is a Syrian national with direct ties to the movement in Syria and who experienced firsthand the cruelty of the regime. During the turmoil in Syria the government began to persecute those who they thought were likely to oppose them, helping the movement. One of these people was Dr. Hallak’s brother, a physician whose life was lost during the Arab Spring. Dr. Hallak’s panel outlined, in more depth, specific reasons why people were discontented with their government. Through his experience he found that the people’s reason for discontent with the regime was manifested through the actions of the government in the times of turmoil. The government attempted to hide the oppression of its people by eliminating its “enemies”; however, in doing this actually it actually enraged them into demonstrating even more. Through torture, detainment, and murder the government attempted to silence the revolution. In many cases those who oppose the government and disappear are deemed victims of “kidnapping”, but are actually detained by the government.

A short Q&A section and a performance by Omar Offendum, a Syrian-American rap artist, followed the speaking panel. His music is a combination of traditional Syrian music and language with contemporary hip-
hop style. Using these techniques and his lyrical prowess Offendum hopes his music can bridge the cultural gaps between the Arab World and America. His music attempts to solve issues of dignity and nepotism as well as support those fighting for their freedom in the Arab world.

A thank you to all of the speakers, performers, and everyone involved in making this event happen goes out from the UNA-GP.

Patrick J. Medeo

Global Focal Point

This month was a busy one for our Global Focal Point leaders Edith Mia Davies and Kelly Franquemont as they worked with students from University City High School and Andrew Jackson Elementary to raise multicultural awareness.

Youth Building Roots

One of the major goals of the United Nations Association of Greater Philadelphia is advocacy for the work of the United Nations. “Youth Building Roots” is a project that the UNA-GP, in cooperation with Novi NGO, has designed in an effort to address worldwide issues of hunger with the youth of Philadelphia. This year will be the second year of what is planned to become an annual, two-part program that will culminate in the 2012 Youth Service Day.

The first part of the project will include UNA-GP volunteers visiting Philadelphia classrooms where they will lead discussions in which the participating students will be challenged to think critically about where their food comes from. The students will then each plant a seed, which they will take care of in their

Right: As part of a culture presentation at University City High School, students had a chance to try on traditional Japanese dress. Top left: Kelsey Heath giving a presentation to the students on UN millennium development goals. Bottom left: Students debate whether the US should have an official language or not.
The 5th graders of Andrew Jackson followed up UNA-GP members’ presentation on the UN with a presentation of their own. The children worked all month long to put together a presentation on a country of their choice, after which the project was presented in front of the class, then put on display next to the flag of the respective country on the first floor of the school. The Principal of Andrew Jackson, Lisa Kaplan, says, “I really think they learned something” and hopes to continue the project with another grade. Meanwhile at University City High School the UNA-GP members reached out to the international club to give a short presentation about the UN. The club listened as Kelsey Heath and Edith Mia gave presentations, which focused on the basics of the UN Millennium Development Goals, then discussed education in their native countries. The presentation ended with a debate-style discussion on the official language of the United States and how far businesses should go to accommodate non-English speakers in the U.S. With many of the students in the international club being ESL students, the debate was well versed and came to an inconclusive end.

Patrick J. Medeo

UNA-USA Honors Human Rights Activist Dr. Jahangir

Dr. Asma Jahangir was awarded the 2011 Leo Nevas Human Rights Award by the United Nations Association of the USA. Jahangir is a prominent human rights lawyer, who worked as an international monitor on human rights. She has served the UN as special rapporteur on many cases such as arbitrary execution and freedom of religion.

Her work in Pakistan has led her to such prestigious positions as Chairperson of the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan and more recently, President of the Supreme Court Bar Association of Pakistan.

The Leo Nevas Human Rights Award has been presented annually since classroom. The second part of the project consists of the students gathering in a central location in Philadelphia where they will have a teleconference with students in Benin to discuss what they have learned.

For the Youth Building Roots Project, we have held one fundraiser at Landmark Americana in Philadelphia and will soon be holding another. The money generated for these fundraisers will provide supplies for the students and transportation to the central location for Youth Service Day.

Kelsey Heath

Dr. Asma Jahangir (Photo by The Express Tribune News)
Human Trafficking

On October 26th, about 50 law students and members of the public attended an illuminating film showing on the tragedy of worldwide human trafficking. The United Nations Association of Greater Philadelphia, spearheaded by undergraduate interns Jessica George, Kelsey Heath, and Erica Butler, hosted the film showing in collaboration with the Temple’s International Law Society and Temple’s Law office of Graduate and International Programs. It was part of the advocacy portion of the Law Society’s Human Trafficking Project, which is researching human trafficking in the United States and in particular, Philadelphia.

The movie shown was “Not My Life,” narrated by Glenn Close, which educated attendees on both the magnitude, frequency, and terrible effects of child trafficking and sexual trafficking in various areas of the world, including India, Ghana, Nepal, Sudan and the United States. In addition to showing the film, the law society also passed around a petition addressed to Senator Pileggi and Senator Corman that asked them to pass the “Posting the National Human Trafficking Hotline Act” (SB 338 and HB 238). For more information about this act, visit www.polarisproject.org.

The UNA-GP is working diligently to bring awareness of human trafficking to the Philadelphia community in an effort to end the neglect of these issues.

International News

Recent sources say that though they do not possess nuclear weapons Iran has begun practices that suggest an attempt to attain them. These attempts are in direct disregard of the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty. To read more visit http://nyti.ms/v88Rgq
If you are interested in human trafficking, the UNA-GP will be hosting additional film showings at colleges in the Philadelphia area. Contact Elizabeth Turchi at eturchi@temple.edu for more details.

IAEA Report Reveals More Than Just Nuclear Development

When the UN’s nuclear watchdog, the International Atomic Energy Agency, released its latest report on Iran’s nuclear program and asserted that Iran is on a path to develop nuclear weapons, (western) nations were not surprised. The report essentially embellished previous IAEA reports on Iran’s nuclear enrichment program, and was simply more detailed in this latest release. The IAEA, as well as 10 member state intelligence agencies, attempted to issue a warning on Iran’s nuclear weapon development, including the creation of warheads with long-range ballistic capabilities. The report did not comment on any major forms of nuclear advancement within Iran, yet the response from countries such as Russia was also not surprised, and concluded that the report showed ‘nothing new’. Hence Russia is opposed to any new sanctions against Iran. Russia’s stance is an example of the overall tone of shifting politics regarding the Middle East and Asia. Russia and Iran are both interested in limiting the United States’ role in Central Asia. For example, just recently Iran was admitted into the Shanghai Cooperation Organization. Furthermore, Russia and Iran are
two of the founders of the Gas Exporting Countries Forum, which has legitimized a shared common economic interest between the two nations. These shared interests have led to increased trade and that has benefited larger Russian oil companies such as Gazprom and Lukoil. These economic alliances have resulted in Iran being now a candidate member for the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), which is a regional Central Asian organization including China and Russia.

So what does this mean? Will Russia’s overwhelming political influence in Central Asia protect Iran’s nuclear development program as long as Russia continues getting oil? Will more nuclear weapons be created by a “rogue” nation? Will another Cold War break out? Not necessarily for any of these. Russia’s decision to protect Iran as of now is more of a strategic decision, intended to promote regional stability with China. China, India and Russia are the major players of the “Asian Game” presently, and Russia’s decision must be seen as a regional oversight mechanism due to China’s rapid development and growth. Russia’s decision is also in part due to being an attempt to create a diplomatic counterweight to the United States. As the United States attempts to use Indian imports as a counterweight to Chinese economic expansion, Russia’s political strategy uses programs such as Iran’s nuclear development methods as protection of private investments while in partnership with Chinese trading companies. The ‘globalization’ shift is more or less an economic shift to protect partnership investments on behalf of Russia and China. It seems that both Russia and China can live with Iran having nuclear weapons, something a diplomat stationed at the UN considers the new reality anyway (the genie is out of bottle, he said). In such a global power game, the question that remains is the United States’ scale of options (if and) when Iran develops full capability of long-range ballistic missiles with nuclear loads.

*Talha Malik*

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**Russia’s decision to protect Iran is more of a strategic decision, intended to promote regional stability with China.**

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**Upcoming Event: Celebration of Universal Declaration of Human Rights**

On Saturday, December 10th, the UNA-GP, in coordination with the Ethical Humanist Society of Philadelphia, will be hosting a celebration for the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. This year’s theme is ‘Are there Disposable People? The case of Trafficking’, and will be addressed in a documentary and presentation by Hugh Organ. Following this will be a discussion and reception as well as a special toast to Mrs. Eleanor Roosevelt. The event will be held at the Ethical Humanist Society of Philadelphia, 1906 S. Rittenhouse Square, starting at 5 pm and continuing on until 7 pm. We hope to see you there!

**Key Event Information**

- Saturday, Dec. 10, 2011
- 5pm - 7pm
- Ethical Humanist Society of Philadelphia
- 1906 S. Rittenhouse Square