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**Clinton Global Initiative University 2008 Meeting
Building Peace on Campus and Beyond
Clinton Global Initiative University
March 15, 2008**

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MICKEY BERGMAN: Hi everyone and welcome to our working session. My name is Mickey Bergman. I'm the program manager for the Peace and Human Rights and I'm very, very excited that you're all here. I hope you enjoyed the opening plenary. I want to say a few words about this session and how it's going to work and then invite our panelists.

As you know, students and campus communities have been a leading voice and a leading role in everything that has to do with human rights, addressing conflicts around the world and social justice. This is a top priority for students as well as the role and resources that you are holding in your campuses and outside of your campuses to make a change.

This is where it happens. We're hoping to have you actually brainstorm with each other, get to know each other through these panels, hear from our panelists some ideas and get things out of here that might be concrete ideas of how we actually resolve, or challenge, or tackle the challenges the world is currently facing.

The way this session is going to work, we're going to start with a moderated discussion that will last about 25 to 30 minutes. During that session, you will have in each of your tables, notes. If you have a question to the panelists, please, write it down and pass it to the table facilitator, that is sitting, that's the person that is sitting if each

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table the table facilitator will just raise his or her hand, you see them around there, the ones with the laptop.

They will be able to feed those questions in real time to us, so those questions can be addressed by the panelists a little bit later. The second segment of the session is actually going to be about you.

We are going to ask for you to discuss a specific question in the tables, and you have a facilitator that will actually help you through this, and record the ideas and the things that are generated in the tables, so we actually get that.

In the back of the room we have a think tank that will seize that in lifetime and actually summarizes and realizes what's actually happening in the discussion, so in the third part of this session we're actually going to show to the panel and to you what was discussed on the floor, and ideas that you served and the panel will be--will have a chance to react to that and talk about some ideas that we have.

And this is a very exciting and interactive. I hope you're going to enjoy it and we have a very exciting and great panel here, and so please welcome our panelists, Courtney Spence, Eboo Patel, Stephanie Nyombayire, and our moderator, Gideon Yago. [Applause]

GIDEON YAGO: Good morning, everybody. How ya'll doing? I just wanted to make sure you guys were still awake

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after the plenary session. I want to thank you guys all for coming down and participating in this session in particular, which I personally think is actually the most difficult of the topics that are all being discussed here by you and your fellow colleagues at CGIU.

And that's not to disparage any of the hard work that's going on in the poverty or environmentalism conferences that are happening right now, it's just peace and human rights is a particularly difficult issue. I think if you watch a lot of the news, or you cover the news often you get the sense, as I did, that war and violence may in fact be the natural pose for humanity and it gets discouraging.

And then you stop, and you realize, you know what? Humanity actually gets defined not by the natural world. It's by the things that we construct. It's by the things that we can create, and the people talking behind the stage as well.

We take guttural sounds, we form words. We write poetry. We take houses, we build temples and churches and universities, and we further advance the study of mankind. And we look at the wars around us, we look at the conflicts around us, and we construct peace.

And of all the works that humanity is capable of, I think it is the most difficult but also the most rewarding, so I'm absolutely gratified and honored to be in this room with you guys here today. I'm intrigued to see what you guys can

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work and come up with and construct, and hopefully we here on the panel will be able to further your cause, so in a couple years when it's you up here telling about your experiences and what you got started in this room, it'll help another generation down the line.

I'm joined up here, I just wanted to give you guys a little bit of an introduction to my fellows on the panel. Sitting to my left immediately, is Stephanie Nyombayire, she works for the Genocide Intervention Network, which--and she's still a college student, like many of you. She goes to Swarthmore for, as she informed me, only a hundred more days.

She's a native of Rwanda, and unfortunately lost a large portion of her family during the genocide there in 1994. She took that experience though and applied it towards the genocide of our time, the current conflict in the Sudan, which has been the focus of her efforts since.

Sitting next to Stephanie is Eboo Patel. He works for the Interfaith Youth Core out of Chicago. He holds a doctorate in Sociology from a little university in England called Oxford, I guess, got some scholarship on the road or something like that. He is the author of Acts of Faith, and he has been working at peace and reconciliation through the faith communities.

And to his left is Courtney Spence, who is the founder of--who also founded Students of the World while she was

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college student, that's the organization that she's not only the president but also the founder of, which now operates in over 60 countries, trying to address human rights, social justice, and peace initiatives around the world.

They've done it. I'm hoping for the next 20 minutes or so we'll be able to talk a little bit about how they got started, the trials that they faced, and, ultimately, where their organizations are now and hopefully you guys can apply that in some practical utilitarian way towards your own efforts.

So, guys, I just--I guess the first question I had for you is, what made you start an organization like the ones that you guys have all started, and more importantly, getting it started off the ground, what were the first big hurdles that you had to face before launching your organization? I guess Stephanie, if you guys just want to go down the line that might be the best way to do it.

STEPHANIE NYOMBAYIRE: Well, hello everyone, and thank you for being here on a Saturday morning. The reason why we started the organization, the reason why I personally got involved in starting the organization was partly because of my personal background, and the fact that, when Rwanda happened, even though I was eight years old, I knew that the reason it happened, and the reason so many people lost their lives was because the world decided to watch and do nothing.

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It's because the world decided that those lives weren't worth being saved, so they turned their backs, pulled out the peace keepers and watched on TV as millions, as a million lives were being lost, as hundreds of my family members were being killed. So when I found out about what was going on in Darfur, I knew that part of the reason why genocide was allowed to happen was because people chose silence, and I didn't want to be a part of people who choose silence in the face of genocide, or choose silence in the face human rights abuse.

So we decided, as students at Swarthmore, that we were going to break the silence that surrounds genocide, break the impunity that surrounds genocide, and we were going to do it as students. We started off saying we were going to provide what wasn't provided for the Rwandan victims, which was security.

We were going to help the peace keepers who were on the ground in Darfur to provide a security which was a number one priority for the people who were being killed in Darfur, so that was the reason we got involved. And, of course, the biggest hurdle that I think all of us have encountered was, you guys are crazy. You're students.

You're idealistic. You don't know what the world out there holds. You don't know that what you envisioning can't actually happen. And that's pretty much how--what people told us to begin with, and that was the hardest thing to get over because once you--when you start an organization, you would get

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at least 10 no's for the one yes that you'll get. Everybody will tell you no.

But the one thing you have to remember is if you believe in it, if you can get others to believe in it, then it will happen. We were saying you know what? You don't know why we're doing what we're doing, but why aren't you doing anything? Instead of doing nothing, I'm doing something. So the question shouldn't be why are you doing something?

Is why is no one else doing what we're doing? So that's how we got over it and we got over it by persistence by sending hundreds and hundreds of emails to people, to professors, to random people who we thought might be interested, until we came across Center for American Progress and a woman named Gayle Smith who believed in us and believed that we could do it.

And from then on it picked up and students started joining and Stand was also founded, which is a student organization, and it picked up that way because people saw that we weren't joking. People saw that instead of sitting back and saying, those kids are just going to fall on their face, and realize they are idealistic.

People decided to actually believe and join. So, if you have an idea you believe in it, you can get others to follow then. You can make it happen, especially if it's

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something this big, and it's something that you know is wrong, it should not be allowed to happen, so.

GIDEON YAGO: Eboo, I was hoping that maybe you could explain a little bit about what the Interfaith Youth Core does, and some of the dialogues that you guys have provoked, and also what you guys are doing now as an organization, and how you got started as well.

EBOO PATEL, PH.D.: Sure. Well let me just directly address the first question, and I think that, Stephanie, your answer was excellent on this. And the question is why do people start things? And I think that the answer to that is because at some point you wake up and you decide you are unwilling to forfeit a particular terrain of the world to the bad people.

You're unwilling to forfeit the environment to the polluters. You are unwilling to forfeit human rights to the dictators. And in our case, we were unwilling to forfeit religion to the extremists or to the bigots and for me this kind of started in college.

I went to college in the early mid-1990s and I was very involved in multi-cultural work, work around race, work around ethnicity. Students, my colleagues and I, would talk all the time about the color line, which is the great phrase by W.E.B. DuBois a hundred years ago, that the problem of the 20th century would be the problem of the color line.

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And I would go home and I would tell my dad that we really need to be building a multi-cultural country. We need to be building racial pluralism, and it was hugely front and center in my mind and it still is. But my dad pointed out something that stays with me to this day, and this was kind of '93, '94 and my dad said, Eboo, whenever you talk about diversity, you talk about race and ethnicity and gender and those things are very important, but you never talk about religion.

And if you turn on the evening news or read the newspaper, the blood that's being spilled today is largely being done to the soundtrack of prayer and it was true. In the Balkans, in Northern Ireland, in the Middle East, in South Asia and increasing parts of the world, there were huge religious conflicts raging.

And when I thought about my time at the University of Illinois, the issue of religion probably came up five times in the diversity discussion. And when I looked at the kind of resources on our campus, and I thought about the number of people who were professional staff on other multi-cultural issues, it was huge.

And the number of people who were addressing the issue of religious identity, or what we at the Interfaith Youth Core call the faith line, were literally zero. Then I kind of started paying attention a little bit more to the story in the

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world, I thought to myself, you know, why is it that every time I see a heinous murder in the world, it's committed by somebody of faith, and that person is young. It was a 26 year old who killed Israeli Prime Minister Isaac Rabin. It was a bunch of twenty somethings who stepped on the planes on September 11th.

It was a 22 year old who rampaged through the Midwest in the name of the World Church of the Creator, murdering African Americans, Asians, and Jews.

And then another kind of storyline comes to mind as you kind of think of the 20th century, that whether or not you're a person of faith yourself, I imagine you admire people like Mahatma Gandhi, and Martin Luther King Jr., and Jane Adams, and Dorothy Day, and these are all the heroes of our century, and they were all people of faith.

And what they did was build interfaith movements, I mean you have this dramatic image of the Reverend Martin Luther King Jr. marching with the Rabbi Dr. Abraham Joshua Heschel in Selma, Alabama, not that far from here, right. And you have the image of Gandhi and Bacha Khan a Hindu and Muslim working together in villages in India, and all of these people, when they started were unbelievably young.

King was 26 years old in Montgomery; Gandhi was 24 in South Africa when he started his movement. And so I basically looked around and thought to myself, why is it that religious extremists are getting to young people before what we at the

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Interfaith Youth Core call religious pluralists. In the vast majority of the world believes in building societies where people from different backgrounds live together in equal dignity and mutual loyalty.

Why are we forfeiting the unbelievably powerful identity that is religion to the bigots and to the extremists? And so what the Interfaith Youth Core really is is it's a movement based on young people like Adina Teibloom, raise your hand, Frankie Fredericks raise your hand.

Who else in here, Amy, is Amy in here who's part of the Interfaith Youth Core network? Hafsa raise your hand. Is Hafsa in here okay? The big idea is to find students like Adina, like Frankie, like you in this room who say, you know what? I believe in interfaith cooperation. I believe in societies where people from different faith backgrounds come together to build understanding and to serve others and I'm going to start interfaith projects on my campus.

I'm going to run a day of interfaith youth service. I'm going to start an interfaith council. I'm going to talk to my administration about saying why can't we talk religious pluralism as seriously on this campus as we take other forms of multi-culturalism, and it's because of people like Adina and Hafsa and Frankie that this is becoming a global movement.

So what we do at the Interfaith Youth Core is we basically tell a story in the world. The story of Gandhi and

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King, the story of Heschel, the story of Mandela, and we say, is this generation up to that challenge? And here are a set of concrete projects, a day of interfaith youth service, an interfaith training, starting an interfaith student council, we can train you to do those, and then we'll network you around the world in doing that.

And that's how the days of Interfaith Youth Service was in nearly a dozen countries, that's how we've trained over 10,000 students to do this kind of stuff. And I just want to say one thing, one more thing which is, there's a great line by the political philosopher Michael Sandel which is, fundamentalists rush in where liberals fear to tread.

If you're not talking about religion, somebody else is, and the message they're bringing is probably a message of bigotry and extremism. Last year there was something called Islamo-Fascism Awareness Week, did it happen at any of your campuses, is anybody aware of it?

Okay, well guess what, if you're not engaging religious diversity in your campus, David Horowitz will come and engage it for you. And what he'll say is, your Muslim friends, they're all about violence. And he'll send Daniel Pipes to your campus and say, your Muslim dorm mate, he might suffer from sudden Jihad syndrome, where on his way to breakfast one morning instead of thinking about his English class, he's thinking about doing some whacked out thing right?

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But the reason those people can say that crazy stuff is because those of us who care about cooperation and understanding in other realms of our lives like in race, like in gender, like in sexuality, we've abandoned the religious terrain to them, and we at the Interfaith Youth Core don't want to do that and we're excited to work with you to make sure that the David Horowitz's don't win this that we do. [Applause]

GIDEON YAGO: Now, Courtney, in addition, I think, to talking to everybody about here a little bit about what hurdles you faced when you were starting Students of the World, maybe you could also talk a little bit about starting it on campus. Because you did it your sophomore year, you started it your sophomore year, and now it's what, four years later, five years later?

COURTNEY SPENCE: Eight years later.

GIDEON YAGO: Eight years later.

COURTNEY SPENCE: Yes.

GIDEON YAGO: Shh, don't tell anybody. I didn't mean to blow up your spot like that. Eight years later it's now in 60 countries so can you track a little bit from the beginning how it got started?

COURTNEY SPENCE: Yes, absolutely. Well, we're not in 60 countries quite yet, but we're on six university campuses here. Students of the World, just to tell you guys a little bit about that, is an organization I did start my sophomore

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year, and the basic premise of the organization is we send teams of college students to other countries to work specifically with non-profits on the ground to help them tell their stories of solutions of obstacles of success, of hope, of emotion, of lives that they change everyday on the front lines through documentary media.

So it's through films, through photography, through writing, through audio documentaries, the students come back and we help these organizations, large and small, tell their stories through media and raise awareness, raise funding, and send volunteers to go back to work with these organizations.

But the idea was, right now we do live in a world, as you were speaking about earlier, that is, I mean we are paralyzed by problems. I mean you can't turn on the TV without hearing about war, poverty, crime, everything and while we need to recognize that that's going in the world, we need to really celebrate those who are providing solutions on the ground and look at those problems through the lens of, you know what, we can overcome this.

We can do this. People are doing this every day. They're taking in orphans into their home when they have nothing. They are fighting against genocide in Sudan, there's wonderful things going on around the world, and I think the more that we can focus on that, to tell those stories is, well

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not only benefits you as an individual, but it'll benefit us as a country and as a world.

And we just really believe in the power of storytelling, whether you're running for office, or you're making a movie, or you're trying to tell the stories as you were just talking about. We all are storytellers and if we can just figure out how we want to tell that story, whether it's through a film, whether it's through a song, whatever that is. It not only helps you as an individual but, again, the community.

So starting Students of the World, it was a sort of a snowball idea. It didn't--it wasn't like I had one really personal experience. What I did know is that I felt as a student I was capable to engage in the world and the global stage now. I didn't have to wait until I was 35.

I was kind of tired of taking all these courses about leadership, and when you are a leader, and when you're this, and when you're that. I felt that, God I've got energy. I've got time. I'm being stimulated by all these different people and courses and things that I'm seeing in my life and I know that there are great things going on the world.

I would talk to my friends who had volunteered in an orphanage in Haiti or wherever it was, and I was like, why aren't we hearing more about these stories, about these people that are doing these great things? There's a great center for

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documentary studies at Duke, and so I just started talking to people, and I think that if you have a passion about, even just a broad topic, whatever it is, and you want to do something about it.

Just go and start talking to people, go read, go seek out information, go to--I mean I went and spoke to every professor that would listen to me. I went to every student leader that would listen to me and I said, you know, here's kind of this idea that I've got. What do you think? How could you help? Do you want to help maybe by getting us some money so we can try and get this thing going off the ground?

And as Stephanie said you're going to get a lot of no's but then you're going to get a yes. And what's really fun is like a year or two years later, you get to go back to the no's and say, hey, you know what? You said this wasn't going to work, it did, and we're here to tell you about it.

So I think starting organizations and movements on campuses is such a great incubator and it's such a great time in your life to do that, and take advantage of everyone that you meet, your friends, your professors, people that you don't know, and just run with it.

GIDEON YAGO: Just because we don't have a lot of time before everyone breaks off and you guys start going into working groups. I guess the last question that I wanted to throw to you guys probably is percolating in a lot of your

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minds right now, is how? If someone here has an idea and says, oh, I want to do something for refugees, or I want to do something along the interfaith lines, how? What are the first steps to take? What is a typical day like for you guys, in terms of running the initiatives that you guys run, guys and gals, sorry to make a broad sweeping generalization.

How do you get it off the ground in the first place? And maybe just with the last little bit of time we have, you guys can talk a little bit about the "how" of you guys getting started.

STEPHANIE NYOMBAYIRE: The "how" is really very different for different organizations, but the "how" of basics is, like she said, talking to people. And as great as our ideas are in general, a lot of people have thought about these things.

So going out to people who have thought about these things, going out to people who are experts in the field, or people who you know can teach you something, because we are students and we are still in the learning process to some extent, so going out to your professors, going out to people that you have heard about, even in what we did. We read a book by Samantha Power, A Problem from Hell, and we drove eight hours to go see her and talk to her about our idea.

And just things like that that may seem crazy but seeking out that information is so important, so that you begin

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at a place where you do know what's going on, but you also begin at a place where you can steer the shape of your organization. So seeking out information is number one, and getting support from your fellow students, and--because a lot of students out there want to do something, but they don't know what to do.

So if you already have the idea, you can go out and say, this is what I think. I think you should join me, share your ideas with me and add to those. Another "how" to do is set yourself up for the long run, just come into this with knowing that it's going to take a lot of persistence.

It's going to take a lot of willpower and it's going to take a lot of patience to get this started. We read a lot about movements, like the civil rights movement, Martin Luther King's role and we think, maybe it happened like that. Martin Luther King made his speech and the civil rights movement happened, but it really takes a lot of work and a lot time.

And past generations have seen this, and we need to understand that change is going to happen, but it's going to happen with time, not immediately, so know that when you go into it. We were talking about earlier the Darfur movement had been going on for two years and when we went into this we would have hoped that a year from it we wouldn't be hearing about Darfur genocide, but we still are.

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So go into this armed with patience and armed with persistence and armed with the fact that you cannot give up on this movement if you really, really believe in what you are doing. So the "how" is that is that my daily basis is I go to class but I also travel, and for people who run the organization is that, is to constantly come up with new ways to engage more people, and to drive your ideas as far as you can, and to make people continue to believe in what you're doing despite the time that it has taken for change to happen, so that's the piece that I can give.

EBOO PATEL, PH.D.: I'll just say a quick word on this, and say I think the "how" question is really answered by the movement of social entrepreneurship and the idea of social entrepreneurship. Who's heard that term before? Okay, great.

I have a really simple definition for a social entrepreneur; it's somebody who makes an idea reality. It's that simple, right. So here's my bet, every single person in this room is a social entrepreneur, that you have had an idea about how to change a club on your campus, or how to start a group, or how to start a new project, and you've made that idea happen, whether it's leading an alternative spring break trip, starting an Interfaith council, creating a chapter of the Genocide Intervention Network, something along those lines.

The question is how do you do that on kind of a larger and larger scale? And I have a couple of just ways of thinking

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about this. One is there is an increasing literature in social entrepreneurship and it's actually an unbelievably inspiring literature. I mean, my life changed. I'm like this immigrant, this son of like Indian immigrants, and my mom's like, Accountant, Engineer, Doctor, choose. [Laughter].

Actually when I finished my Doctorate and I told my dad I was starting the Interfaith Youth Core and not going on the tenure track at some university, he's like, we move to America for this? [Laughter]

When I was like a freshman or a sophomore in college I read an article about Mohammed Yunis, who, of course, everybody knows now because he won the Nobel Peace Prize for the Grameen Bank, but back in '94, '95 he was just starting to spread micro-finance out of Bangladesh.

And I noticed that what Mohammed Yunis did, was he noticed a problem, which is basically people dying in Bangladesh because they couldn't get small loans. He solved the problem, he gave people small loans, and then he did something much bigger, he said, how do you create a pattern change in this society, so that all around the world the people who need small loans can get them?

That's the trick. How do you create that pattern change, right? That's what distinguishes an entrepreneur is somebody who can make an idea reality, create the pattern change. I just want to end with one thing which is, we have a

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strong social entrepreneurship focus at the Interfaith Youth Core. We put our money where our mouth is. We have a fellowship for college students who want to run interfaith programs in their campuses.

We'll give you several thousand dollars a year. We'll give you additional training. We'll give you, we'll build a network of these, what we call Interfaith Youth Core Fellows, and we'd love for you to apply. If anybody's interested in that, you can come see Jenan, just raise your hand, or Cassie, or Frankie, or Adina who are both involved in the Fellowship, or, of course, me.

But it's basically saying here's several thousand dollars to finance your entrepreneurship in the world of interfaith relations.

GIDEON YAGO: And Courtney, I'll give you the last--we can run a little bit long, but why don't you?

COURTNEY SPENCE: Yes, I'll be brief. I think there are two things I'd like to say, one is in the vain of talking to people, don't be afraid to talk to anyone, and when I say talk to, it's more of--maybe I should say talk with.

I scheduled meetings with every single person I could think of. I would sit down I'd say, here's my idea, and then, what do you think? And then I would let them talk about their experiences or what--and I didn't always necessarily have a

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specific ask. It wasn't, I'm going to get money, or I'm going to get your support, or I want you to be our sponsor.

It was just more of a, I just want to talk to you and have a conversation with you. And then to the second thing I would say is, while you do have to be in it for the haul, and you do have to realize, I mean, I thought--I mean he we are, here I am eight years later still doing this and we're trying to get it bigger, but it's taken a bit longer to build than I thought it would.

It's about the journey, and it's about the process of growing, I mean you will grow so much when you put yourself out there in whatever capacity that is, and so while you need to be focused on the end result, you also just don't lose sight of the day to day of it all, so.

GIDEON YAGO: Sage advice. Well now we will stop talking at you and let you guys talk amongst yourselves. We will be back here in about 20 minutes to take your questions that come out of your discussions, so have at, and kick ass and we'll see you guys in a little bit.

MICKEY BERGMAN: And thank you for the panel, but you are not off the hook yet, because we're coming back to you as Gideon just explained. And we heard a little bit about the "how" to do and what's exciting now is that we want to talk about the "what".

¹ kaisernetwork.org makes every effort to ensure the accuracy of written transcripts, but due to the nature of transcribing recorded material and the deadlines involved, they may contain errors or incomplete content. We apologize for any inaccuracies.

And a lot of you already have ideas and proposals for commitments and we want you to be able to share them. So I want you to answer the following question on your table discussions.

What actions can campus communities, students, faculty, administration take in order to build peace and promote human rights on campus, locally, nationally, and internationally? And we will gather again when the time is up, thank you very much.

[END RECORDING]