

# THE MOSAIC DISPATCH

HARNESSING CANADA'S DIVERSITY FOR  
PEACE AND DEVELOPMENT ABROAD

## Using Music to Celebrate the “Magic of the Middle East”

On December 3, 2011, the Mosaic Institute gathered together 200 friends, both new and old, to celebrate the ability of music to bridge divides and forge new understandings between people and communities. This important fundraising event, known as “Music of the Mosaic: Celebrating the Magic of the Middle East,” raised more than \$70,000 to support the work of the Mosaic Institute.



*Young alumni of the Mosaic Institute surround Minister of Citizenship and Immigration the Hon. Jason Kenney at Music of the Mosaic" event on December 3, 2011.*

The evening started out with an elegant cocktail reception in the Conservatory Theatre. After brief words of greeting from Mosaic Executive Director John Monahan and Event Committee Chair Susie Kololian, the two co-Presidents of the UofMosaic chapter at Toronto's York University, Maxa Sawyer and Sara Zeitoun, held everyone's attention with their personal stories of working to encourage inter-community dialogue and cooperation between Arab and Jewish students on campus. Soon thereafter, Canada's Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, the Hon. Jason Kenney, arrived at the reception and engaged with a number of Mosaic friends, volunteers and UofMosaic students.

Guests were then ushered into the majestic Koerner Hall, where they were treated to a two-part concert featuring Egyptian-Canadian singer-musician Maryem Tollar and Israeli singer-songwriter Chava Alberstein. Drawing on their respective Middle Eastern roots, the performers reminded everyone of the unique ability of music to heal hearts and reinforce our common humanity.

Following the concert, a dessert and champagne reception was held. After brief remarks by Mervon Mehta of the Royal Conservatory, and a touching toast and tribute by Mosaic Chairman Vahan Kololian, Mosaic Peace Patron Eve Lewis accepted a special award recognizing the contributions made to the Mosaic Institute by her late husband, Paul Oberman.

### 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.

## CONTENTS

Using Music to Celebrate the “Magic of the Middle East”	1
High Schoolers Demonstrate “Global Citizenship” in Action	2
Mosaic Institute Releases Landmark Report on the Role of Diaspora Communities in Canadian Foreign Policy	2
“BuildChange” Spring Gala	2
Co-Founder of Mosaic Institute's “Young Canadians' Peace Dialogue on Sri Lanka” wins Student Leadership Award	3
UofMosaic Students at UofT Build Bridges to Peace and Pluralism	3
UofMosaic at York Students Compare Perspectives on Identity	4
UofMosaic at Ryerson Students Grapple with Complex Questions, Move Dialogue Forward	4

## High Schoolers Demonstrate “Global Citizenship” in Action

On December 22, 2011, students from Toronto's Thistletown Collegiate Institute who had participated in the Mosaic Institute's "South Asian-Canadian Global Citizenship Project" held a rousing school assembly. With a simple "loonie and toonie" drive, they raised enough money to build a water-well for residents of the Vanni region of northeast Sri Lanka, who had been displaced in the final days of that country's three-decade civil war in 2009.

The students who organized the event had all been participants in the Mosaic Institute's "South Asian-Canadian Global Citizenship Project" throughout the fall of 2011. The success of their assembly – the entrance fee for which was a mere \$1.50 per student, collected in a “wishing well” – was proof positive that they had heard and responded to the program's call to engage in community service and practice “good global



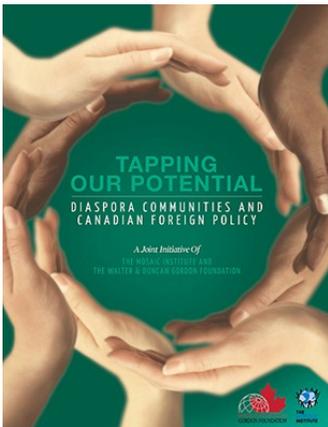
*Thistletown Students tossed their loonies and toonies into this 'wishing well'.*

citizenship”.

The students from Thistletown were among the approximately 350 students from eleven high schools and two school boards (Toronto and Peel) who participated in the “South Asian-Canadian Global Citizenship Project” during 2011. One of the many objectives of the initiative was to encourage young Canadians of South Asian heritage to become lifelong “global citizens” and ambassadors for Canada and its values.

These students have done more than merely prove that Mosaic's “South-Asian Canadian Global Citizenship Project” has been a meaningful and valuable learning opportunity for them. They have also set an example for other Canadians about how to respond quickly, efficiently and pragmatically to help meet the needs – and quench the thirst – of some of the world's most disadvantaged people.

## Mosaic Institute Releases Landmark Report on the Role of Diaspora Communities in Canadian Foreign Policy



In late December, the Mosaic Institute and the Walter and Duncan Gordon Foundation co-released a report entitled *Tapping Our Potential: Diaspora Communities and Canadian Foreign Policy*. This report looks at the extent to which Canada's foreign policy can be informed, shaped and strengthened by diaspora groups in Canada. At the same time, it takes into consideration the capacity of these communities to inform policy development on international issues and the existing structures and barriers to doing so. Case studies on five diaspora groups in Canada - those from Afghanistan, Eritrea, China, Sri Lanka and Sudan - highlight the capacities of select groups to provide meaningful input into the foreign policy process. We hope that this report will serve as a basis for further discussion and research on this important and misunderstood issue.

The report identifies specific existing and potential mechanisms through which multi-national Canadians might contribute constructively to Canada's global peace-making and development activities. To ground this review, this report also includes a number of case studies designed to highlight the capacities of a select group of Canadian diasporic communities to provide meaningful input into the foreign policy process.

The report provides additional knowledge and information on these important themes, drawing on existing literature and on the work supported and initiated by the Mosaic Institute and the Walter & Duncan Gordon Foundation. Our overall aim is to provoke discussion: we do not claim to have all the answers, and we have not even asked all of the questions. Our hope, however, is that this report will help stimulate healthy dialogue, essential to a healthy democracy, about how best to realize the possibilities that our increasingly diverse society holds for improving Canada's role in the world.

## SAVE THE DATE MAY 4, 2012: “BuildChange” Spring Gala

On the evening of Friday, May 4, the alumni of the Mosaic Institute's "Young Canadians' Peace Dialogue on Sri Lanka" will hold a gala dinner/dance called "Spring for Wells". The event is to raise funds for their "BuildChange" initiative that hopes to build residential water-wells for people left displaced and homeless in 2009 during the final months of Sri Lanka's thirty-year civil war. In partnership with the Canadian Rotarian Water Foundation and the Water and Sanitation Rotarian Action Group (WASRAG), these dynamic young people are hoping to raise the final \$10,000 needed towards their ultimate goal of \$25,000, which will provide clean, accessible water to 25 households.

All are welcome. Visit [WWW.BUILDCHANGE.CA](http://WWW.BUILDCHANGE.CA) for more details.

## Co-Founder of Mosaic Institute's "Young Canadians' Peace Dialogue on Sri Lanka" wins Student Leadership Award



Jothi Shanmugam (pictured left), one of the original co-founders of the Mosaic Institute's landmark "Young Canadians' Peace Dialogue on Sri Lanka", and a former Mosaic Institute intern, has received well-deserved

recognition for her commitment to global citizenship.

It has just been announced that Jothi is the 2012 recipient of the Student Leadership Award given by the Dean of the Faculty of Arts & Science at the University of Toronto.

Jothi Shanmugam has put her questions about identity and war to action by bringing communities together for change and creating new opportunities for students.

Shanmugam, a fourth-year student in criminology and peace and conflict studies, is being honoured for her leadership in projects such as the "Young Canadians Peace Dialogue on Sri Lanka", "Students for International Development", and the "First Generation Program."

The Trinity College student was born in Sri Lanka and came to Canada as a refugee when she was seven. She says she grew up with some identity issues about being an immigrant and starting her life all over again. Her curiosity about why her life had to be uprooted led her to choose peace and conflict studies at UofT.

"I wanted to learn why conflicts unfold in ways that leave behind animosity and rip communities apart. I had too many unanswered questions about conflict resolution because it is close to my heart, it's part of my identity, it's who I am."

Shanmugam is being honoured, in part, for her role with the "Young Canadians' Peace Dialogue" (YCPD), an initiative of the Mosaic Institute. The Institute has worked to bring Sinhalese, Tamil and Muslim Sri Lankans together to develop a plan to promote peace in Sri Lanka. At the encouragement of Shanmugam and another student, Natale Dankotuwage, the Institute launched the YCPD.

"Jothi undertakes these ambitious goals earnestly and with great success," says Ron Levi, director of the Trudeau Centre. "In my estimation Jothi is part of a new cohort of U of T students, and Canadians more generally, who are working to promote civil discourse and ethnocultural understanding."

## U OF MOSAIC

### UofMosaic Students at UofT Build Bridges to Peace and Pluralism

On Friday, January 13, the UofMosaic student chapter at the University of Toronto held its second event of the year as part of its ongoing "UofMosaic Middle East Dialogue Series." More than 30 students from a wide number of communities connected to the Middle East gathered at Trinity College for an event entitled, "The Path to Pluralism: Bridging Community Divides Through Dialogue". Special guest speakers were Susan Davis, former Executive Vice-President of the Canadian Council for Israel and Jewish Advocacy, and Raja Khouri, former President of the Canadian Arab Federation, both of whom discussed their long-term involvement in the Toronto-based Arab Jewish Leadership Dialogue. (Both are pictured, right, with Mosaic Executive Director John Monahan). Clifton van der Linden of UofT moderated the session.

The two guest speakers began by providing a brief overview of the general state of the relationship between the Jewish and Arab communities in Toronto. They proceeded to describe their current efforts with the Arab Jewish Dialogue Group, a Toronto-based initiative that has been meeting for the past three years in hopes of improving the relationship between these two communities.



The session became even more interesting when many students in attendance began sharing their own experiences navigating Arab-Jewish tensions as young people with strong connections to the Middle East. It was clear to all that the very session in which they were participating was itself an excellent example of the potential for inter-community dialogue, which most agreed was of fundamental importance to both strengthening pluralism in Canada and eventually promoting similar principles across the Middle East.

## UofMosaic at York Students Compare Perspectives on Identity



*York Students gathered for dialogue on January 16*

On Monday, January 16, more than 35 students with personal, family or community connections to the Middle East gathered at Toronto's York University to participate in another session of the year-long inter-community dialogue about the Middle East that was organized by UofMosaic@York.

The event, titled "Middle Eastern Identity in a Canadian Cultural Mosaic", was a dynamic group discussion about how young people with connections to the Middle East perceive their own identities as both Canadians and as people who belong to diasporic communities. The fascinating discussion was led by Omar Alghabra, former MP and one-time head of the Canadian Arab Federation, and Professor Nergis Canefe of York University. The event was co-moderated by student leaders Sara Zeitoun and Maxa Sawyer under the guidance of Noel Badiou, Director of the Centre for Human Rights at

York.

The participating students were from diverse ethnocultural and religious backgrounds.

As they shared a snack of hummus, pita and veggies, Professor Canefe provided a panoramic overview of both the Middle Eastern and Jewish diasporas in Canada, outlining their various cultural, religious, and ethnic dimensions. Mr. Alghabra took a more personal approach to the topic, and recounted his own story as a Syrian-born, Saudi-raised immigrant to Canada, his personal sense of identity as a Canadian of Middle Eastern background, and how that identity informed his decision to pursue a life of public service. After the panelists' presentations, the students launched into full dialogue mode, openly sharing their differing insights and points of view on what it means to be a "hyphenated" Canadian, the meaning and promise of multi-

culturalism in this country and the way in which differing notions of identity can be all-too-easily manipulated to divide Canadians through "identity politics."

The UofMosaic is an initiative of The Mosaic Institute to encourage Canadian university students to confront old conflicts, become purveyors of peace on campus, and help strengthen their fellow Canadians' commitment to fostering peace, pluralism and good government around the world – starting right here at home. The work of the UofMosaic is made possible by the generosity of private and corporate donors. Special recognition is due to the BMO Financial Group for its multi-year support of this ground breaking initiative.

## UofMosaic at Ryerson Students Grapple with Complex Questions, Move Dialogue Forward

On January 25, 2012, more than thirty students (and a few faculty members) gathered at the main campus of Ryerson University for another session in the peace dialogue on the Middle East organized by UofMosaic@Ryerson. The topic was a challenging one: "Palestinians Outside Palestine - Refugees, the 'Right of Return', and Prospects for Peace." Special speakers for the evening were Dr. Moshe Naor, a professor at Hebrew University in Jerusalem and a Visiting Scholar at York University's

Centre for Jewish Studies, and Dr. Faida Abu Ghazaleh, a Palestinian archaeologist currently working at the Royal Ontario Museum. Many divergent opinions were expressed, but the discussion was constructive and respectful. The event was expertly moderated by Ryerson Professor Arne Kislenco.

Both speakers engaged in a productive dialogue that examined the plight of Palestinian refugees across the Middle East, the Palestinian 'right of return', the Israeli Law of Return, and the options open to negotiators from both sides that might eventually lead to a workable solution on this issue.

"We were really happy that people came out to this event, and that they are engaging constructively on these issues; I think we are really beginning to have an impact on campus dynamics," said Nikita Patel, the co-President of the UofMosaic@RyersonUniversity chapter.

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