

Spring/Summer 2013

# MOSAIC DISPATCH

Harnessing Canada's Diversity for Peace at Home & Abroad



THE  
MOSAIC  
INSTITUTE



Disasporas@Toronto  
Conference  
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## The Conversation Starts Here: China & Tibet

In April 2013, the first large-group sessions of the New Beginnings: Young Canadians' Peace Dialogue on China & Tibet took place in Toronto and Calgary. As the project's name suggests, many in both communities hope that it will mark a "new beginning" in the relationship between Canadians of Chinese and Tibetan descent, and a re-imagining of Canada's complex relationship with this pivotal part of Asia.

The first large-group session was entitled "Where Are We Now?: Finding Common Understanding on China and Tibet". All told, most 150 people gathered to hear some of Canada's foremost scholars on China and Tibet speak in the two cities. They included Tsering Shakya, Zhiming Chen, Timothy Cheek and David Ownby.

Susan Henders, former Director of the York Centre for Asian Research in Toronto, one of our presenting partners, spoke at both sessions.

The second sessions in Toronto and Calgary were held in mid-May and early June, respectively. Both were entitled "Towards Sustainable Development on the Tibetan Plateau: Challenges & Opportunities for China and Canada". Speakers included Robert Hanlon, Tashi Tsering, Jennifer Hsu, and Jack Hayes.

The next sessions will take place in September 2013. Meanwhile, over the summer, participants have begun working on a volunteer project to provide educational opportunities for children in China's Tibetan plateau through Machik Canada.



Pictured above, l to r: Special guest speakers Tsering Shakya, Susan Hender and Zhiming Chen at the first session of "New Beginnings" in Toronto, April 4, 2013.

Watch videos of our guest speakers or learn more about the New Beginnings initiative online at [mosaicinstitute.ca](http://mosaicinstitute.ca)



# DIASPORAS@ TORONTO

*Living in a country that can lay claim to one of the most diverse populations in the world, Canadians of all backgrounds have the unique opportunity to tap into dynamic diaspora networks that can help Canada identify and achieve its most important international objectives.*



On Tues, May 14, 2013 the Mosaic Institute hosted the first-ever Diasporas@Toronto conference, which brought together representatives from government, academia, business, community organizations and the not-for-profit sector to discuss the engagement of diaspora communities in Canada's global affairs. Diasporas@Toronto represents the springboard for this kind of cross-sector connection, capacity building and understanding.

The one-day conference was timed to coincide with the Global Diaspora Forum (GDF) in Washington, D.C., which is an annual conference organized by the United States State Department's International Diaspora Engagement Alliance (IdEA). IdEA is dedicated to engaging globally-minded diaspora communities in the United States in areas of entrepreneurship, volunteerism, philanthropy, diplomacy, and social innovation. The Mosaic Institute – which engages diasporic communities in peacebuilding and international development efforts – was invited by IdEA to expand its model outside of the United States, and to bring a uniquely Canadian perspective to promoting the engagement of diasporic communities in global affairs.

After introductory remarks from Mosaic's Executive Director John Monahan, the event opened with a live video link-up to the GDF conference in Washington. In his opening speech, Thomas Debass, Acting Special Representative of the Secretary of State's Office of Global Partnerships, publicly saluted the Mosaic Institute and those other organizations and individuals gathered for Diasporas@Toronto. Mr. Debass then introduced the day's opening keynote speaker, U.S. Undersecretary of State for Economic Growth, Energy and the Environment, Robert Hormats. Mr. Hormats, in turn, was followed with a live address in Toronto by Mosaic's co-Founder and Chairman, Vahan Kololian, who shared the story of his own personal involvement, as a

member of Canada's Armenian diaspora.

For many, the highlight of the day was a series of "best practice" presentations of "made-in-Canada" strategies for enhancing diaspora engagement in global affairs. Speakers included representatives from The Mowat Centre for Policy Innovation, One Child, Public Safety Canada and TiE Toronto among others.

Alumni of the Mosaic Institute's Young Canadians' Peace Dialogue on Sri Lanka, now calling themselves BuildChange, spoke about their peacebuilding work – a combination of dialogues and community service projects – with Sinhalese, Tamil and Muslim Sri Lankan communities in Canada and Sri Lanka.

Each of the presentations illuminated the vast potential benefits for Canada of expanded engagement by diaspora communities in Canadian global affairs. Participants left the session eager to forge new relationships and innovate within and across various sectors of specialization.

After a working lunch, a strategic brainstorming session in the afternoon served to focus everyone's thoughts on how to enhance the engagement of diaspora communities going forward. A short report summarizing key recommendations will be issued this summer, to be shared widely with both government and Canadian civil society. Overall, the event was well-received, receiving an average approval rating of 87.5% from those program participants who were surveyed.

We hope that Diasporas@Toronto will be just the starting point of an exciting journey ahead. We at the Mosaic Institute hope to build on the ideas and suggestions that emerged from the conference and work with other organizations to harness Canada's diversity in an efficient, inclusive and strategic manner across all areas of global affairs.



## RefugeAid Surpasses 10K Target for Syrian Refugees

By: Samir Mourani, UofMosaic Summer Intern

RefugeAid is a student-led project that grew out of the UofMosaic's 2012 Citizen Summit: Day of Dialogue for Peace in the Middle East. The aim of the project was to respond constructively to the physical and emotional needs of refugees fleeing into northern Lebanon from the civil war in Syria. Our goal was to raise \$10,000 for the "Emergency Fund" of Médecins Sans Frontières and its pivotal work with refugees in northern Lebanon. To date we have been able to raise over \$11,000.

RefugeAid empowered young people who before had been at a loss for how to get involved to make a difference. I hope the success of this project will inspire more young people to make a difference.

RefugeAid united students from different backgrounds, mostly students with connections to the Middle East, under a common goal. That is the Mosaic model

of peace-building in action: bringing communities who historically are in conflict to work collaboratively on a project that manifests the values of Canadian "global citizenship". It was inspiring to see so many people take up this project as their own and truly make it a student movement.

Students organized fundraisers, bake sales and other events to reach their financial target.

### Next Steps for RefugeAid:

Due to the incredible level of support and enthusiasm from our fellow students and communities, we have decided to continue the RefugeAid project during the 2013/2014 school year. We will continue to raise money for Syrian refugees with the hope of eventually expanding our reach to help refugees in other countries in the region. Visit [www.refugeaid.com](http://www.refugeaid.com) to follow the group's activities.



## Mosaic's European Tour

The world really does need more Canada – and more of the "Mosaic Model" of engaging diaspora communities in the promotion of peace.

That was one of the unavoidable conclusions derived from the speaking tour that took John Monahan, the Executive Director of the Mosaic Institute, to Berlin, London and Oslo in early June 2013 to present the work of The Mosaic Institute at the invitation of Canada's Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade & Development.

Read the three part series on the Mosaic blog:  
[mosaicinstitute.wordpress.com](http://mosaicinstitute.wordpress.com)



## OUR VIEW IS NOT PERMANENT: RETHINKING LAND & PEOPLE

*Stephen Tang is a participant in the Mosaic Institute's New: Beginnings Young Canadians' Peace Dialogue on China & Tibet initiative.*

In 2008, like other Chinese around the world, I was happy that China was hosting the Olympics. That very same year I unexpectedly learnt about a familiar but also very unfamiliar place: Tibet. I knew about the regime, its cultural affinity to Buddhism, and its current situation with the Peoples' Republic of China, but that was it. I had no special feeling about the country and its people.

But that year my view on the Tibetan people became very negative, mainly because of the news I heard about the riots in Lhasa. In my own little head I imagined the Tibetan people as a terrorist group.

Is it true? No! But that is what I thought for a couple years, that is, until 2010. That year my grandfather passed away and, to my surprise, I learned that one of my father's business partners is a devoted practitioner of the Nyingma strand of Tibetan Buddhism. After hearing about my family's loss, his lama – Tibetan spiritual leader – said a prayer for my grandfather. That fed my own curiosity about Tibetan Buddhism. A couple of weeks later, I went to the book store and found a book by H.H. the Dalai Lama titled *How to Practice the Way to a Meaningful Life*. For the first time, I began to appreciate Tibetan literature. Since then, I have read more classical texts of the Gelugpa school of Tibetan Buddhism, and my interest in and respect for Tibetan culture and way of life have only grown.

This post is not about religion, but it shows that by learning we can change our views. When we are ignorant about an object, we can only imagine its qualities. Last year, I went to Kumbum Monastery in the Tsongkha region of Xining city in Qinghai province, or Amdo as it is known in Tibetan. The town was peaceful with multiple ethnicities, including Han Chinese, Hui (Islamic Chinese), Tujia, Mongolian, and Tibetan. I also went to Qinghai Lake (or Kokonur in Mongolian). Several encounters made me reflect on why the Tibetan people were not happy in 2008.

From what I saw as a tourist, some Tibetans feel alienated. There appears to be a lot of distrust between Tibetan and Chinese people. On a macro-scale, as interactions increase between local Tibetan nomads and wealthy tourists, a sense of economic inequality could develop.

On a micro-scale of human interaction, I witnessed a Tibetan nomad trying to get breakfast in the small town of Hui (a village populated by Chinese Muslims), but he was ignored and not served tea. My Hui tour guide warned me to not speak with the Tibetans and told me many negative things about Tibetan people and their food. Yet I developed a fondness for butter tea, tsamba, and a Kumbum Monastery variation of the momo (Tibetan dumpling).

I don't know how the "macro" Tibet question can be resolved, but I know we can eliminate hostility toward others on a micro-scale. We can learn and try things out with an open mind and learn to understand that no one is inherently or permanently bad. It is only in our imagination that our "enemies" exist as such.

Did you know that a large Tibetan monastery, called Yonghe Gong in Chinese, was left untouched during the Cultural Revolution due to a personal order by a communist Chinese leader at the time? I was there in 2011 and received some blessed rice from the monks.

The first step towards improving relations between Chinese and Tibetan communities, including here in Canada, is to get to know one another on a human level. As a Chinese Buddhist proverb says, "Like a person drinking water, only he himself knows it is hot or cold."



by Stephen Tang

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