

## ***Cultural Diplomacy as a Vocation: The University in the Public Service***

Keynote Address

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Distinguished Guests, welcome to the first session at NYU New York of the International Symposium on Cultural Diplomacy. My appreciation is expressed to Sarah C. Awad, Blair Simmons, and the staff of the LaGuardia Co-op for hosting these sessions. This location is a student-oriented, learning futures, and data analysis-driven facility aimed at promoting NYU as a Global Network University in its outreach to the world.

We come together as the 72<sup>nd</sup> Regular Session of the UNGA occurs. Sadly, violence against civilians is an omnipresent global reality. The imperative to strengthen cultural diplomacy, defined as the "exchange of ideas, information, art and other aspects of culture among nations and their peoples in order to foster mutual understanding" invites the university to enhance its role in the public service.

The essential question in learning, research, and service within the university setting asks: "If area experts and international researchers are only collecting data and no subsequent action is taken on the basis of the evidence discovered, is justice being served?"<sup>1</sup> This query resonates most strongly in our present time where the imperative is to grapple with the security-development-justice nexus to understand the plight of the most disenfranchised in our world.

The concerns of the university in the public service are on the vulnerabilities of increasing numbers of underserved peoples that define our human condition. The reality of complex interdependence deepens our mutual fragility. We bear witness through crowdsourced maps and visual data to the stories of women and girls who suffer from physical abuses in public spaces and to the plight of the marginalized who are targeted in ethno-national-religious-linguistic conflicts, which result in mass atrocities and genocidal violence.

The genuine harm that can be inflicted on already vulnerable populations as a result of technological interventions in remote and fragile locales requires us to bear in mind the golden rule, "do no harm". We strive, in the words of President Elisabeth Guigou, to move from "awareness to results" in our efforts to counter exclusion and to protect the most vulnerable. In cultural diplomacy as a vocation, we underline "freedom from exclusion" as a human right, as I wrote 15 years ago in a Keynote Essay for the *United Nations Chronicle*.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See Mazzucelli et. al., "Querying the Ethics of Data Collection as a Community of Research and Practice," <http://scholarcommons.usf.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1509&context=gsp>

<sup>2</sup> Colette Mazzucelli (2001), "Education and the 'Freedom from Exclusion'," *United Nations Chronicle*.

In this context, researchers and practitioners alike must always return to the impact of their engagement with technologies in the local area, which has a robust cultural specificity across countries – Democratic Republic of Congo, Guatemala, Bosnia, Libya, North Korea, Syria, and Nigeria, to cite a few examples. This emphasis is in line with the area studies literature that rejects “the disappearing local” in the twenty-first century globalization context.<sup>3</sup> Instead localization outreach is a theme that figures prominently in the university’s engagement, which speaks, in the language of cultural diplomacy, to the idea expressed by Eleanor Roosevelt:<sup>4</sup>

"Where, after all, do universal human rights begin? In small places, close to home - so close and so small that they cannot be seen on any maps of the world. Such are the places where every man, woman, and child seeks equal justice, equal opportunity, equal dignity without discrimination. Unless these rights have meaning there, they have little meaning anywhere. Without concerted citizen action to uphold them close to home, we shall look in vain for progress in the larger world."

Eleanor Roosevelt, speech to the United Nations Commission on Human Rights, United Nations, New York, March 27, 1958

Mrs. Roosevelt’s quest was to give voice to the powerless. This quest guides the university engagement in the public service (1) to revolutionize, (2) to professionalize, and (3) to disrupt the field of data collection. The careful delineation of the manner in which an emerging community of research and practice works to intervene or not to intervene with technologies at different stages of public abuses or mass atrocities is at the forefront of concerns in pedagogy as well as policy. Violence against civilians targets women and girls with a particular consistency around the world. For this reason, NYU New York is forging cooperation with #Safecity to support crowd mapping of reports by women in India and other countries of the abuses they suffer in public spaces.

The university engagement to empathize with the stories that are shared by women and girls underlines a well-known Irish quote mentioned by President Mary Robinson at a Security and Development meeting yesterday in which climate justice was underscored: “If you have the words, there's always a chance that you'll find the way.” - Seamus Heaney

The university’s vocation is to place education at the service of a society that gives the marginalized hope, a society in which servant leaders speak to its civil nature and who act to ensure that learning today inspires action to anticipate future human needs. These are the leaders, inspired by the commitment of HE President Joyce Banda, who urge world citizens to work together in the service of education. Cultural diplomacy must continue to play a vital role in these efforts to serve humanity. Thank you.

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<sup>3</sup> Ali Mirsepassi, Amrita Basu, and Frederick Weaver, eds. *Localizing Knowledge in a Globalizing World* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 2003).

<sup>4</sup> Faine Greenwood, Caitlin Howarth, Danielle Escudero Poole, Nathaniel Raymond, and Daniel Scarnecchia, *The Signal Code* (Cambridge: Harvard Humanitarian Initiative, 2017).