



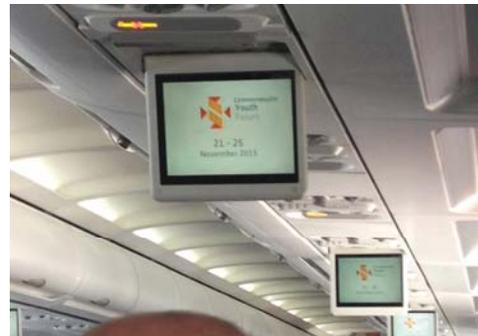
Arrival Day

Written by Aden Hamza

Our first day was all about meeting our colleagues from across the Commonwealth with whom we would become great friends with over the following four days.

Prior to leaving for Malta, I had the opportunity to meet via Skype with my partner, Joshua Mazur, as well as a Canadian Observer, Aaron Pinto. We discussed the four agendas that were the focus of the forum: Political, Environmental, Social and Economic. Each of these agendas had aspects relevant to Canadian youth, and we started to identify priorities we hoped to advocate at the Commonwealth Youth Forum (CYF). It was great to have the chance to collaborate with our fellow Canadians, and we all shared the same perspective that the CYF would be the experience of a lifetime and that we all felt privileged to be a part of it.

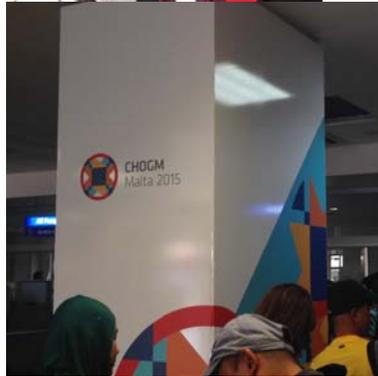
I travelled to Malta with Aaron, and we really didn't realize the scope of CHOGM and the CYF until we were on the Air Malta flight and saw the commercial for CYF on the airplane television. Upon landing, the signs, logos and directions for CHOGM were showcased everywhere and when we were escorted to a large white tent with the CHOGM logo written across, we finally understood that we were a part of a much greater movement for the Commonwealth.



On the flight, the commercial for CHOGM appeared and the Commonwealth Youth Forum was also featured!

I ran into a fellow Canadian Observer Aaron Pinto on the flight from Toronto – we were both excited to finally board the plane to Malta!





CHOGM taking over Malta!
(Bottom left) The reception tent for delegates outside the airport.
(Bottom right) Our shuttle bus to the hotel.

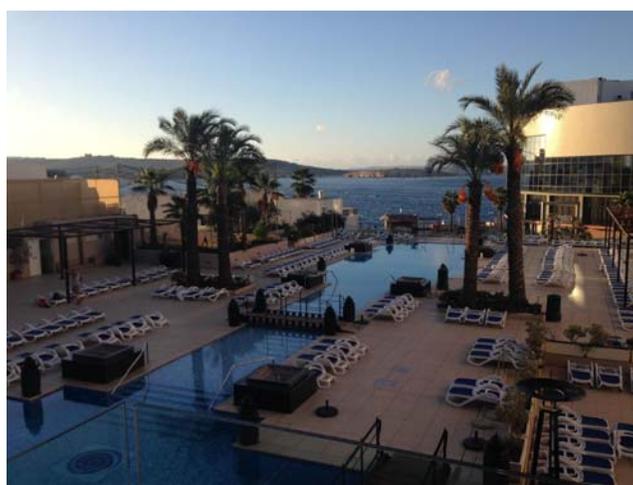


National Youth Delegates excited to start the journey to CYF!
Pictured: Aaron Pinto (Canadian Observer), Sam Ogwal (Ugandan National Youth Delegate) and Aden Hamza (Canadian National Youth Delegate)

Once inside the waiting area, we met with youth delegates from countries across the Commonwealth including the Seychelles, Nigeria and Kenya, each with a journey of many more hours and connections than ours. After loading onto our bus and arriving at our hotel, the rich mix of national identities became even more pronounced. I started to recognize the importance the Commonwealth holds for so many countries, as many delegates went to great lengths to attend the CYF, with some delegates not even arriving until the second to last day of the Forum. The enthusiasm that everyone had for what we could accomplish over the coming four days was contagious.

Among the delegates were candidates vying for positions on the Commonwealth Youth Council (CYC), which National Youth Delegates were going to vote on during the conference. The CYC is an autonomous body of the Commonwealth Secretariat which was enacted at the CHOGM in Sri Lanka 2013, where delegates voted in youth candidates for executive positions, that would advocate and push forward youth priorities across the Commonwealth. The election of the CYC this year would mark the first official transition from one democratically elected CYC to the next, marking a significant milestone for the organization. Speaking with just a few candidates that evening, it was clear the decision was not going to be easy, as many were leaders within their communities and had a great deal of experience with driving action-oriented change. We also had the opportunity to meet the rest of the Canadian Observers attending the CYF as non-voting members, some of whom had already been in Malta for the 33Sixty leadership conference put on by Common Purpose: Aniqah Zowmi (undergraduate student and social entrepreneur), Rasha Al-Katta (Global Affairs Canada employee), Brody McDonald (recent graduate and new hire for Global Affairs Canada) and Nick Schiavo (a recent graduate and Green Party staffer).

As part of promoting intercultural exchange, each youth delegate was paired with a roommate from another Commonwealth country. This added great value to the experience as I learned so much more about Maltese culture and was also able to share with her our Canadian culture/heritage as well. The diverse mix of backgrounds, expertise and experience that we encountered was just a small taste of what was to come for the rest of the conference, and it sparked renewed hope that we, the youth of the CYF, really could be the ones to lead the Commonwealth forward.



The hotel – a Maltese paradise

Official Day 1

Written by Aden Hamza

The opening day of the conference involved many firsts! It was our first official photo, our first working session on developing the agenda and our first General Assembly meeting. All this after being warmly welcomed by the Maltese, including a band, dancers and the Honourable Prime Minister Joseph Muscat.

The official opening ceremony took place on Saturday, November 21st, and was attended by dignitaries such as Prime Minister of Malta, Joseph Muscat, and Secretary General of the Commonwealth, Kamallesh Sharma. The Prime Minister provided an inspiring address relating to the recent challenges in the world, reminding us that the goal of terror is fear and humanity must overcome this with hope. He encouraged us to take advantage of the opportunity we have as youth to develop creative and provocative recommendations that could propel the Commonwealth forward. The Secretary-General reinforced these sentiments by emphasizing the need to create enabling conditions and supportive environments for youth to meaningfully participate meaningfully at the global stage. He identified projects that the Commonwealth Secretariat had initiated to meet this goal, including the Youth Development Index (a tool that is being used to measure development indicators specifically for youth in the Commonwealth – found here: www.youthdevelopmentindex.org), the Young Professionalism Program; as well as a focus on the professionalization of youth work.



“Youth are the DNA of the Commonwealth” –
Secretary General of the Commonwealth
Kamallesh Sharma

Following the Prime Minister and Secretary-General's speeches, we had the privilege of hearing from Commonwealth youth award winners Victor Ochen and Gulalai Ismail, who highlighted the idea that we, as youth, had a responsibility to participate meaningfully in society, and inspired us through their own stories which demonstrated how we can create real work and change in our communities. In addition, they called on government to focus on empowering youth as partners instead of beneficiaries and to address structural limitations youth face in society (i.e. oppression, injustices, discrimination). In the end, youth need investment, not just recognition.



Victor Ochen – “It is our work that will save the world.”



Gulalai Ismail – “Every young person missed is a missed opportunity for development”
“It is not because you **can** change the world, but because you **have to** change the world.”

These youth delegates sat on a panel with Prime Minister Muscat, Secretary-General Sharma and CYC Chairperson Ahmed Adamu, starting a trend for all the panels of the CYF. The CYF organized the panels so that we didn't just hear stories from experienced leaders, but also from youth leaders and delegates who were acting on these issues in their communities. Listening to the stories, challenges and successes of fellow colleagues on these topics reaffirmed the value and expertise that exists within the youth of the Commonwealth and also facilitated the creation of networks and collaboration. The panel addressed the conference theme Adding Global Value, and focused on questions about migration, youth entrepreneurship and combating youth extremism. In the ensuing discussion, the inter-relatedness of these issues was brought to light as poverty, lack of education and employment opportunities were identified as conditions that enabled radicalization, a topical issue at the forefront of the Political agenda. As Victor Ochen eloquently stated: “Before we call them extremists, to what extreme have we pushed them?”

Following the panel, we had a short break for an official photo and the opportunity to network with our fellow delegates.





Josh Mazur (Canadian Youth Delegate), Bing (New Zealand Observer) and Aden Hamza (Canadian Youth Delegate)



Aden Hamza (Canadian Youth Delegate), Krystle Reid (Sri Lanka Observer), Aaron Pinto (Canadian Observer).

The afternoon was divided into parallel work sessions for each agenda item (i.e. political, environmental, social and economic). The sessions started with a panel of speakers and activists discussing a topical issue within the agenda, and were followed by a work session for the delegates and observers. The work session provided delegates the opportunity to review the recommendations that the CYF Task Force had selected and to develop an action plan to be adopted by the General Assembly and then presented to world leaders at CHOGM. The recommendations represented a collation of ideas from international youth forums over the past two years, in this way the CYF was not re-inventing the wheel, but instead helping to push it forward by creating actionable items for governments to adopt. By working in small groups, we each created action plans that were then finalized by a drafting committee of youth delegates.



Participants developing an action plan in the Political Agenda working session

Participants reviewing the recommendations in the Social Agenda working sessions



After our work sessions we participated in the first General Assembly session of the conference, where we were introduced to the outgoing CYC Executive and were informed of the process for upcoming elections. In this session, the General Assembly was asked to approve the Arbitrators chosen by the CYC to oversee the election and approve the CYC report. As the official representatives for Canada, we felt an imperative to advocate for transparency and accountability in this process, and thus voiced our concerns regarding lack of information on the Arbitrators chosen and lack of timely access to the CYC report. We felt it necessary to ensure robust processes were in place so we could hold the CYC accountable as well as prevent any potential or perceived conflict of interest. Therefore we advocated, along with our fellow delegates from across the Commonwealth, for the timely provision of the CYC Executive report and more information about the Arbitrators for us to review in order to make informed decisions. The vote was suspended to the next meeting before which the profiles and reports would be provided to all delegates.



Canada's National Youth Delegates –
Aden Hamza and Joshua Mazur

At the end of the day, we had the opportunity to network with our fellow delegates over drinks, and I had the privilege of getting to know youth from as far as Tanzania, India and Australia. What struck me the most, especially as a Canadian who has travelled frequently, was the number of people who were interested in Canadian politics. Many delegates approached us to discuss topics including the new Prime Minister, Justin Trudeau, and his role as the Youth Minister, and also our gender-balanced Cabinet. I have never experienced such an overwhelming interest in Canadian politics, and it really highlighted the importance and potential of Canada as a leader in the Commonwealth.

Official Day 2

Written by Aden Hamza

On the second day of the conference we heard from youth activists and dignitaries on the Sustainable Development Goals and had our first exposure to the CYC election process. The day culminated with drafting and finalizing some of our much-anticipated action plans.

The second day started with the Bright Ideas campaign designed to promote the Commonwealth theme 'A Young Commonwealth', by recognizing youth who are bringing positive change to their communities (Find out more on how to be involved here: <http://www.yourcommonwealth.org/brightideas>). We heard from the runner-up of the competition, Angelique Pouponneau, a lawyer, climate change activist and delegate from the Seychelles, who gave an inspiring account of how she created a campaign *28 Young People Making a Difference in the Seychelles* to promote youth who were making positive contributions in her community and inspire others to do the same. (Find out more at the Facebook page: https://www.facebook.com/28YOUNGSEYCHELLOIS/?_rdr=p&fref=ts).



Angelique Pouponneau (Seychelles Delegate) speaking on her campaign to promote youth activism.

Throughout the conference we also had guest speakers discussing various timely issues that could be addressed by the Commonwealth. One of these speakers was Dr. Alex Sceberras Trigona, who brought to light a topic that I had never considered before, which is the classification of the internet as common heritage. At this point in time, the internet is still under governance of the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN), an organization of the United States of America which acts as the unilateral regulator. As the generation that lived through the transition from no internet to a now vibrant online world, it had never occurred to me to consider who or how the internet was regulated. Dr. Trigona advocated for the internet to be named a common heritage of mankind, thereby legally ensuring access to all countries. It was a very interesting presentation and discussion and for more information here is the link to the Internet Governance Forum at the last World Summit on Information and Society: <http://www.itu.int/net/wsis/implementation/igf/index.html>

The guest speaker was followed by a panel (on how youth can help achieve the Global Goals for Sustainable Development) consisting of Director of the Youth Division at the Commonwealth Secretariat, Katherine Ellis; Parliamentary Secretary for Research, Innovation, Youth and Sport, Honorable Chris Aguis and youth leaders from the Pacific Youth Council and CYC Executive. It was interesting to learn that although youth were mentioned throughout the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), of the 17 goals none is directed specifically towards youth (See complete list of SDGs here: <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org>).



Panel – Role of Young People in achieving the Global Goals of Sustainable Development.
Pictured: Mohammed Husni (CYC Co-Chair), Tehere Aaitui (Youth Representative – Pacific Youth Council), Katherine Ellis (Director Youth Division – Commonwealth Secretariat) and Hon. Chris Aguis (Parliamentary Secretary for Research, Innovation, Youth and Sport in Malta).

The remainder of our day was spent action planning in our respective sessions. Each day, the review of recommendations and creation of action plans became easier as we became more familiar with the process, and ended up with more comprehensive and effective action plans.

Panelists for the Social Agenda discussion on access to medical services.

Pictured: Dr. CHarmaine GAuci (Director of Health Promotion & Disease Prevention in Malta), Elis Eze (Youth Professional of the Commonwealth Secretariat), Dakshita Wickremarathne (Youth Advisor – Global Civil Society Advisory Group – UNWOMen) and Dr. Godfrey Xuereb (PAHO/WHO Representative)





Working group for the Social Agenda session on increasing access to medical services – Including delegates from Malta, Guyana, Sri Lanka, Canada and many more!

Working group in the Political Agenda on social cohesion with Rasha, Brody and Josh representing the Canadian delegation.



The second day was also the start of the CYC Executive Primaries – where delegates vying for a position had a chance to speak and answer questions from the audience. It was amazing to hear about all their experiences, as many of the candidates were already leading activities in their home countries whether as a founder of a non-governmental organisation (NGO) or youth worker. As the official delegation, we were listening intently to their speeches to ensure that Canadian values were well represented. During the Caribbean and Americas representatives debate, none of the candidates made any reference to Canada and so we questioned the panel to see how they hoped to represent and partner with Canada over the next two years. The candidates were quick to respond by identifying potential partnerships such as Canadian organization CUSO International as well as Canada's new Prime Minister and Youth Minister, Justin Trudeau.

After the primaries wrapped up, there was finally time for drafting committees to meet and finalize the Action Plans for each agenda. Aden was part of the committee with the Australian and Sri Lankan delegates that drafted the health-related action plans in the Social Agenda, while Rasha participated in the drafting committee for the Political Agenda. The better part of the evening and next morning was spent completing this task. Part of the challenge within these small groups is creating action plans that are realistic and measurable and to ensuring that governments and the CYC can be held accountable to implementing them. Upon completion, the Action Plans were sent to the CYF Task Force to be presented to the General Assembly for a vote.

Official Day 3

Written by Aden Hamza

Getting close to the end of the conference, Day 3 was jam-packed with panels on important issues such as climate change and gender equality, working hard to complete the last action plans before the deadline and sitting-in on the intense debate for candidates running for CYC Chair. The night ended with some much needed down-time by participating in a cultural show with our new friends.

Our third and last day of working sessions started and ended on high-notes. First, we had the privilege of listening to the winner of the Bright Ideas competition, Charles Batte of Uganda, discuss his work with Tree Adoption Uganda which promotes sustainable development through reforestation activities and programs (See more here: www.treedoptionuganda.com).

*“We are no longer the leaders of tomorrow, we are the leaders of today”
“I want my story to say that I lived in your time”*

This was followed by a panel discussion on Climate Change, where we learned of climate change’s devastating impact socially, economically and environmentally on the Pacific Islands and the importance of coordinated global action now. People are being forced to evacuate due to destruction of food and shelter; young people can play an integral role in advocating that Governments address these issues seriously. There was a chilling moment during the Q&A when Christina Giwe, the delegate from Papua New Guinea, took to the microphone and pleaded to everyone in the room to work to combat climate change. She cried as she explained how people were dying because of climate change and that everyone in the room needed to focus on taking action. The delegates from the Pacific Islands then stood up holding signs saying: “We want Climate Action No More Talks”. It was a powerful statement followed by a standing ovation in the audience and brought home the message loud and clear to all the delegates in the room – don’t just sit and listen, let’s get up and do something about it.

Panel – Climate Change: Impact on Sustainable Development.

Pictured: Jean Affana (Coordinator of Commonwealth Youth Climate Change network), Deodat Maharaj (Deputy Secretary General of the Commonwealth Secretariat), Simone Borg (Malta’s Ambassador on Climate Change), Kruna Rana (Youth Representative of the African Youth Initiative on Climate Change) and David Rupa (Papua New Guinea National Youth Delegate)



The final panel of the conference was focused on Gender Equality and was equally riveting. The panel was diverse and inclusive, with men and women representing youth and experienced leaders from both developed and developing nations, thus helping to shatter stereotypes about who can advocate for gender equality. From the youth standpoint, there needs to be more investment in youth-led initiatives as well as an increased focus not just on legal frameworks but on community education and opportunities for women, as stated by Aristarick Joseph who is fighting against early childhood marriage in Tanzania (See more here: www.youthforchange.org). In addition, the complexity of gender equality of boys and girls was particularly highlighted by Leon Ward, the delegate from the United Kingdom, who explained the cycles of mental health issues and poverty on boys and girls.

*“We are not going to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals if we do not make gender equality a reality”
- Vivian Onano*



Panel – Commonwealth Charter: Article 12 on Gender Equality... #WhatNext
Pictured: Sarah Soysa (Gender and Equality Network Coordinator – RCS), Leon Ward (Plan UK Board Member and UK National Youth Delegate), Hon. Helena Dalli (Minister for Social Dialogue, Consumer Affairs and Civil Liberties in Malta), Vivian Onano (Youth Advisor to the UN Women Global Civil Society Advisory Group) and Aristarick Joseph (Youth Activist – Youth for Change in Tanzania)

In this last session we had a surprise guest speaker, the Speaker of the House of Representatives in Malta, Angelo Farrugia, spoke to the audience about fighting for human rights and peace. He was adamant about youth speaking out and challenging our countries to promote human rights at home and abroad, reminding us that change rarely comes from above but instead forces its way up from below. Luckily, Hon. Speaker Farrugia stayed for the campaign primaries for candidates running for the Chair of CYC, and participated in the panel of dignitaries who questions the candidates about the role of Chairperson. We then divided into our final working sessions for the conference, and created the last action plans to be debated the following day.

“Silence never won rights” – Speaker of the House of Representatives in Malta, Angelo Farrugia

Pictured: Speaker Farrugia being thanked by CYC Chair Ahmad Adamu and Director Katherine Ellis





The panel posing great questions to the candidates for CYC Chairperson. Pictured: Director Katherine Ellis, CYC Chair Ahmad Adamu, Miriam Teuma (Chief Executive Office of Malta National Youth Agency), and Speaker Farrugia



The Q&A period of candidates running for the CYC Chairperson position.

It was on this final day of working sessions that Cultural Night was held – where delegates were asked to dress in their country’s national dress and create a performance with their region. As the Canadian delegation, we had many discussions of what to wear for the event – as Canada doesn’t really have a national dress (hockey jerseys aside), we are a country that prides itself on diversity. So, both Rasha and Aden decided to wear the cultural dress from Ethiopia and Yemen respectively, as this represented how Canada is strong because of its differences, not in spite of them. Talking and mixing with all of the delegates in their national dress really showed how diverse and rich this group of young leaders is, but also highlighted for me the whole purpose of the Commonwealth. That many different countries and cultures could come together and still stand for the same values and goals for youth moving forward was to me enough evidence that we really can change the world.



(Left) Opening the Cultural Night was the Pacific Region!

(Middle) Representing Canada with Canadian flags and maple candies – Aden and Rasha

(Right) African Region performance for Cultural Night!



Official Day 4

Written by Josh Mazur

When all is said and done, day 4 would include 14 hours of deliberations across 4 agenda topics resulting in 39 separate recommendations from the Commonwealth Youth Forum to be implemented by the Commonwealth Youth Council over the next two years.

While this was an exhausting day, as the Canadian National Delegation, Aden and I pushed for realistic policies for youth inclusion spanning political, social, environmental and economic agendas.

Off to an early morning on Day 4, as the Canadian delegation to the Commonwealth Youth Forum, Aden and I ate a quick breakfast all the while discussing our strategy for the day. When the General Assembly first sat down to discuss our unfinished business from Day 1, it would have been hard to imagine that in total the day would span 14 hours of deliberations, many technical difficulties and several demands for rewritten reports. The end result of our deliberations can be found online at <http://commonwealthyouthcouncil.com/index.php/news/37-2015-commonwealth-youth-declaration> .

As my colleague Aden mentioned on the first day, we, as the Canadian delegation, felt it was our responsibility to ensure transparency and accountability within the CYC and recognize areas where these could be strengthened. We, along with many of our colleagues, advocated for increased transparency by rejecting the first financial report that was tabled the morning of our General Assembly, due to lack of timely access and detail in the financial report. After this and a vigorous debate over a new selection process for Arbitrators, we broke for lunch, allowing the Chairperson and his council to reconvene and author a new financial report.

After lunch, delegates had to trudge through the proposals and amendments, beginning work on our task for the day by considering, in turn, each of the four context setting documents provided by the drafting committees for our approval. Aden took the lead on the economic agenda with the veracity young Canadians have come to expect when fighting for job growth on an international stage. Aiming pointed questions at the drafting committee we proposed several amendments that continued to strengthen the existing action-plan while also equalizing some provisions to make them applicable to all Commonwealth nations.

I took my seat at the table for the environmental agenda and we quickly passed all environmental recommendations with ease and few amendments, emphasizing the global youth sentiment toward actionable climate change initiatives and the political will to do something about them. Moving on to the social agenda, Aden once again took her spot at the table while simultaneously wearing another hat: that of drafting committee member for the social agenda. Aden advocated recommendations and action plans from the commitment of youth to address substance abuse problems, to the provision of proper sexual health education in all Commonwealth countries.

I finally retook my seat for the last time as the political agenda began, and was proud to pass recommendations aimed at purposefully involving youth in the planning, implementation and assessment phases of policy making. We also addressed the violent radicalization of youth within the Commonwealth and voted to work toward a

more youth-inclusive anti-radicalization network. Key among these recommendations was a proposal for the establishment of youth-led research into the causes of violent radicalism. As the Canadian delegation we were proud to support all these recommendations and more. As the voting record will show, we did not agree on all the recommendations and even proposed amendments aimed at the more realistic implementation of already existing initiatives, but not all were successful no matter their merit. This being said, we are proud to stand by the final document produced at the CYF by the CYC General Assembly and look forward to implementing it in the years to come.



Long and strenuous negotiations in the final session of the General Assembly.

Canadian Youth Delegates, Aden and Josh, at the end of a 14-hour day of proposals and amendments.



Official Day 5

Written by Josh Mazur

On day 5, joined by Canadian observers to the CYF, Aden and I had the opportunity to meet with senior officials from Global Affairs Canada, to discuss our impressions of the Forum and priorities of the various agenda items. Our group was extremely grateful of the reception we received from the officials and our comments were used to craft the Prime Minister's speech later that week. We left the meeting to attend the closing ceremonies of the CYF and wrapped up our time as a group with a tour of the beautiful town of Qrendi.

The final day got off to a later start, for which I believe I can speak for both Aden and myself when I say that we were thankful this after our 14 hour marathon the day before. To start off the day we had the pleasure of sitting down with Diane Jacovella, Assistant Deputy Minister, Global Issues and Development. We were joined by the other Canadian observers to the CYF, as well as the Canadian task force member, Fawzi Ghosn, in a robust discussion on our thoughts as our week in Malta was drawing to a close. We were not shy to provide Ms. Jacovella with extensive feedback on our experiences throughout the week and recommendations on how to meaningfully include youth in the policymaking process going forward. As youth, it is rare that we are shown the same courtesies others, often twice our age, come to expect. The Assistant Deputy Minister however, listened with the intensity and dedication she clearly shows in all aspects of her work, and for that she gained our clear respect and admiration.



Official photo of Canadian delegation to CYF with Assistant Deputy Minister for Global Issues and Development Diane Jacovella.

Pictured: Aaron Pinto, Aden Hamza, Joshua Mazur, Diane Jacovella, Rasha Al-Katta, Aniqah Zowmi, Brody McDonald, Nancy and Nick Schiavo

The meeting wrapped up with the announcement that the new CYC had been announced. We quickly learned who the newly minted young leaders were and set off to congratulate all parties on their campaigns, successful or otherwise. We then had the opportunity to participate in the regional meetings, where delegates within the same region come together with their newly elected representative to discuss how to push the CYC Action Plan forward. During this discussion we joined the Caribbean & Americas delegates to identify priorities for our region as well as potential collaborations and partnerships to achieve these goals. Everyone was engaged and focused on keeping the momentum for youth over the next two years.



Selfie of the delegates representing countries from the Caribbean and Americas Region!

Given our very limited time constraints throughout the week, the organizers left the afternoon of our last day to tour our beautiful host country, Malta. Aden, Rasha and myself opted to accompany a number of our colleagues on a day excursion to the small village of Qrendi, boasting a beautiful view of the sea and the amazing ancient ruins at Hagar Qim. Upon our arrival we were informed our tour guide had been waiting some time for us. It was only an hour later we would find out this tour guide was in fact Mayor David Schembri. This quelled much of the group's curiosity as to how our tour guide seemed to know everyone in town. The wisecracking Mayor led us first to a 5000 year old temple, describing how the ancient societies had worshipped the goddess of fertility, a plump woman with exchangeable heads to fit the occasion. After many more jokes, our tour continued down the hill to the beautiful Blue Grotto, also in the Mayors principality, to watch the sun set. The view was spectacular and the dark walk back was filled with even more local information, from the location of the catacombs last seen in the days of WWII, to innocuous details like why the locals leave full water bottles lying in every nook and cranny.

The night and forum wrapped up at a venue the purpose for which was somewhere between cocktail lounge and aquarium. For the last time, we mingled with many of the friends and colleagues we had met throughout the week and had the opportunity to speak more freely about loose collaborations and projects of interests in the near future. This final day had truly been one of the best. Not only had we had some much needed time to decompress after a week of firsts, but we were able to spend it with new friends that had already become as familiar as old ones, and enjoy it all the Maltese way, over drinks and light fluffy hors d'oeuvres.

YouthCAN Launch

Written by Joshua Mazur

Given our extended stay in Malta and enthusiastic presence at the General Assembly, Aden and I were asked to attend the launch of YouthCAN, a youth civil activism network.

At the launch we divided into small, intimate groups and discussed youth-led action against violent radicalization in different corners of the world. This networking opportunity allowed Aden and me to meet youth-led efforts across the globe to eradicate violent radicalization. Our night ended with an amazing dinner and show at Ta' Marija; a night I won't soon forget.

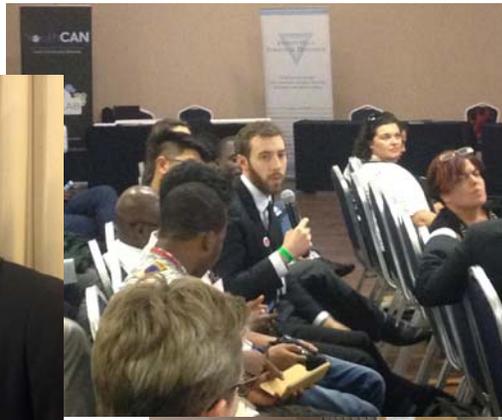
After the conclusion of two conferences, and two weeks in Malta I was very much looking forward to a day's rest before the Youth Dialogue Breakfast but alas, we were asked to attend another conference, and we were more than happy we did. The Youth Civil Activism Network (YouthCAN) conference served as the launch for an online collaborative platform to combat extremism. We kicked off the morning hearing from a panel on youth activism being used to solve challenges from across the Commonwealth. This included speakers Rafiullah Kakar and Achaleke Leke who were working to fight radicalization of youth in Pakistan and Cameroon respectively, focusing on creating a counter-narrative for youth and working at the grass-roots level to demonstrate real investment and trust with the communities. Additionally, the panel discussed the timely issue of migration and rights of refugees, with Dr. Pisani highlighting one of the issues as: "Illegalized body of non-citizens doesn't have the same claim to rights as other citizens". Finally, we heard from Asmaah Helal whose work uses sport to engage new immigrant and refugee youth in the promotion of inclusion and also addresses issues of identity and the understanding of systems.



Commonwealth Panel: Specific Region Issues, Challenges and Trends.

Pictured: Jessica, Assmaah Helal (Football United, Australia), Rafiullah Kakar (Commonwealth Youth Division Pakistan), Dr. Maria Pisani (Integra Foundation, Malta), Achaleke Leke (Commonwealth Youth Program, Cameroon) and Nikoli Edwards (CYC, Trinidad and Tobago).

The conference then quickly became more focused, narrowing in on how youth were already combating violent radicalization and what resources they need to do more. The panelists discussed how innovative solutions were being used online, through sports as well as arts and culture to empower youth to combat extremism. It was fascinating seeing how creative and effective these ideas were, and really made us feel privileged to be a part of this network. The day continued by alternating between group workshops and panel discussions. Although much had been touched on in the previous two conferences I had attended, the breadth of knowledge and opinions in the room made the discussions even more engaging. The focus on grassroots level campaigns and programs provided insight into potential challenges, opportunities and collaborations that could develop as we return home to advocate for our own CYF Action Plan.



Group workshop on Fostering Peacebuilding and Cohesion in Communities.

We wrapped up the day with a dinner, which provided us with the chance to get to better know some of the young professionals in the room on a more personal level. As we ate, drank and danced, all in the traditional Maltese style, for the first time, the week I had spent in Malta began to flash before my eyes. I couldn't think of a better way to end my time with my peers, over delicious Maltese food and wine, watching delegations from 53 member states make fools of themselves on the dance floor.



CHOGM Youth Dialogue Breakfast

Written by Aden Hamza

The highlight of the entire experience was our final day at the CHOGM Youth Dialogue Breakfast - where we had the opportunity to see our recommendations presented to Heads of Government and meet our Prime Minister Justin Trudeau!

During the CYF, we had the pleasure of being introduced to Katherine Ellis, the Director of the Youth Division at the Commonwealth Secretariat, who works closely with the CYC to ensure their progression and success. Director Ellis had organized the CHOGM Youth Dialogue Breakfast, which is the opportunity for the newly elected CYC to highlight some of the main outcomes and priorities of the Action Plan developed during the CYF. Given that this would be Prime Minister Trudeau's first appearance at CHOGM, Director Ellis invited us as the National Youth Delegates for Canada to attend the breakfast alongside the CYC and provided an opportunity to meet and discuss the youth priorities with our Prime Minister.

The breakfast was hosted by 18 Heads of Government, the outgoing and incoming CYC and the Secretaries General of both the Commonwealth and the United Nations. The main priorities highlighted by the CYC were climate change, youth entrepreneurship and addressing violent extremism. The Heads of Government and dignitaries then took the floor, many of whom spoke to the importance of youth engagement in development. Youth were identified as a resource not often capitalized on in the peace-building and peace-keeping process, and their work in grassroots initiatives to combat de-radicalization was highlighted as an important strategy moving forward. The conversation went on to focus on the importance of engaging youth and providing meaningful education to the bottom 50% of populations as well as the top. The urgency for climate change action was very much at the forefront of the conversations throughout the room with a focus on how this problem could address global unemployment as well as foster innovative solutions to future problems. A number of youth in the room brought the conversation to a close with points on the importance of youth-led and not simply youth-involved decision-making processes, and action-oriented solutions.

Prime Minister Trudeau also took to the podium and addressed his comments to the Heads of Government to strongly encourage a change in outlook toward youth as the leaders of today and not leaders of a distant future. The Prime Minister then went on to focus on promoting youth empowerment and meaningful engagement saying "youth are not simply a box to be ticked and move on". He went on to point out that Heads of Government in the room were in their positions of power as a result of the status quo and youth were very much looking to challenge and critique these systems and rightfully so.

Upon the Prime Minister's departure we had the opportunity to reinforce the need to build on the momentum for youth engagement in Canada, particularly the possibility of forming a National Youth Council. The Prime Minister spoke encouragingly of youth engagement and also mentioned that he hoped to create an Advisory Youth Panel, as was presented in his campaign. Josh and I both look forward to following up on this as well as pursuing the recommendations of CYF in our 2-year term as National Youth Delegates.

Just when we thought it was all over, as we waited in the lobby for our shuttle, we ran into Canada's Foreign Affairs Minister Stephane Dion. We had an engaging discussion about the main recommendations from the CYF Action Plan, including climate change and youth engagement in policy decision-making. When asked what the one thing we took away from the conference was - we both stated that the development of a National Youth Council was primary. In order to maintain consistent accountability and perspective on youth issues, a National Youth Council should to be created. Canada is one of the only countries in the Commonwealth that doesn't have one in place.

It was an honour to have the opportunity to meet and discuss youth priorities with both Prime Minister Trudeau and Minister Dion, and we look forward to following up with the government in pushing the CYF Action Plan forward.



CYC Canadian National Youth Delegates Joshua Mazur and Aden Hamza with the Rt. Hon. Prime Minister Justin Trudeau (left) and Hon. Foreign Minister Stephane Dion (right).