

Inspiring presentation of Ms. Hawa Diallo



Ms. Hawa Diallo during presentation at UVU

On April 3, 2018, I had the great pleasure to participate in a seminar by Ms. Hawa Diallo, Public Information Officer, and Youth Engagement Focal Point for the United Nations as well as NGO Relations & Advocacy Section Department.

Ms. Diallo described her childhood in New York City and her knowledge of the UN through her father who was a founding member of the political party that brought democracy to Sierra Leone. He was an ambassador and high commissioner to Canada and Sierra Leone. Without realizing it this influence the trajectory of her entire life. She described how this shaped her as a child and through defending kids from bullies on the playground she was beginning her path in the fight for human rights; enforcing her sense of globalism and multiculturalism. After graduating high school, she got her first job at the UN in 1985 as a tour guide. The Department of Public information employed hundreds of or “public information assistants,” who were on the ground level and thus absorbed an extraordinary amount of information about the UN and its practices. After a few years working at a tour guide, she was offered a position to travel and assist in peacekeeping operations in Cambodia. Immediately after returning, she was then offered a position to help participate in the 1995 peacekeeping operations in Somalia.

When Ms. Diallo came back, she then took a position of the secretary in the Secretary General’s office, and this gave her the knowledge and experience for her decision to later take the

Professional Service Test. Ms. Diallo describes the varying positions and the difference between United Nations Professional Service (PS) staff, General Service Staff, and Support Service Staff. PS staff are leaders within the hierarchy of the UN structure. This gave Ms. Diallo the opportunity to take a position in Nairobi, Kenya. She spent ten years managing UN-Habitat in the city of Nairobi and came away learning some very important lessons: that people around the world are the same, the only difference arises because groups and individuals lack the resources or an enabling environment, either economic or social, for opportunities. That the main goal of the UN is assisting and enabling a population to organize and obtain resources to better their own community. The most important task is to help build the infrastructure to eventually be self-sustaining and self-perpetuating. This often includes certification and training programs that are backed by the UN, giving these certifications more credibility and validity on not only the local level but the world stage as well.

The most valuable thing I gleaned from this seminar is that the UN, although it sounds like a monolith organization, is relatable and actively interested in youth participation. There is often a misnomer that the most beneficial educational training is that of a political science or law degree, but Ms. Diallo pressed the value of social sciences. The United Nations is communications focused, and values highly the social sciences and communications training. Not only interpersonal communication but the literal collection of Languages and translation abilities. The UN needs its members to be open, to be flexible, and to be compassionate.

I myself am very near graduation and so grateful for the opportunity to be exposed to such inspiring individuals who give me hope for my personal aspirations. I sometimes feel intimidated as most of my current peers are law or political science focused, but I have chosen to study Social Science and Anthropology. Communication, relation, and culture are so valuable and they shape us on not only an individual level but a community level. I firmly believe that cultural miscommunications and a misunderstanding of value structures are the source of most global strife, both historically and in modern times. With compassion and empathy, individuals and communities have the ability to enrich the lives of their own citizens as well as the lives of people vastly different than us. I feel very privileged to receive opportunities like this and look forward to participating in more UN involved activities, internships, and potentially career.

Caitlin Tomly, Utah Valley University student