

Ms. Hawa Diallo: A Life Spent in the United Nations

Ms. Hawa Diallo, an official from the United Nations Department of Public Information (UN DPI) made a presentation before our class on comparative politics on April 3, 2018. She shared with us her incredible story of being affiliated with the UN. Her father was the Ambassador of Sierra Leone to the United States, as well as the Minister of Trade and Industry for Sierra Leone among other positions. Her family has always been involved in public service and because of this, she grew up with the public service mindset without even realizing it. Because she lived in countries in such contrast with each other such as the United States and Sierra Leone, she has always had a strong sense of globalization.

Her first job was right after college in 1986 as a tour guide at the U.N working in the Public Information and Advocacy Department. In order to fulfill this role, Ms. Diallo had to digest U.N information and then translate it to understandable information that was attainable to the public. Working at the U.N taught and required her to be open to everyone and everything; in essence, she grew up as a “global person.” When she was 25, she received the opportunity to go to U.N peacekeeping operations in Cambodia for a year: her job was all verbal communication. She explains this as a time of personal and professional growth. After Cambodia, she came back to New York, but was immediately sent to Somalia. She arrived in Somalia the day when what most of us know as “Black Hawk Down” happened-when American troops were sent to take down terrorists, but their helicopters were shot down. Despite all this, she was determined to do her job. She described how most days, even during the drive to their residence in Somalia, the public would throw things at Ms. Diallo and her colleagues from the UN experiences. She attributed this to the absence of understanding among local people in Somalia about their role and mission in the country.

After Somalia, Ms. Diallo worked as a secretary in the United Nations Secretary General's office at the general headquarters. She used this opportunity to take the required exam to be transferred from the general support office to a professional carrier in the U.N. Later, Ms. Diallo learned that she had the highest test score out of the thousands of applicants and chose to start her professional career at the U.N Habitat office in Kenya: she worked in Nairobi for 10 years. She had, under supervision, the largest youth empowerment program in Kenya. U.N Habitat provides opportunities for communities and youth who would otherwise not have access to them such as training in certain skills, being able to open a bank account, and to even receive a birth certificate. Ms. Diallo shared with us that she loved being involved in the community activities and working with the people directly, but if she could go back, she would strive to understand the U.N better and would like to apply what she has learned now to what she was doing in her early 20's. Her peacekeeping experience had a lasting mark on her life and career. She now works with external organizations within the U.N such as youth groups and organizing conferences to spread the United Nation's ideals.

Ms. Diallo advised us to be informed, proactive, and flexible if we are willing to work at the U.N. This was a very interesting and inspiring meeting with such a unique person as Ms. Hawa Diallo.

Karson Kester, Utah Valley University student