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# Kluwer Mediation Blog

## Peacemakers' – An Update

Joel Lee (National University of Singapore, Faculty of Law) · Sunday, July 14th, 2013

Last year, I wrote about the [Peacemakers'](#) Initiative and talked a little about its intent, objectives and effect. This year, I want to provide readers, by way of update, a development that is both touching and an indication that things are on the right track.

To set the context, the Peacemakers' Conference is an initiative seeking to teach young people the skills of mediation in the hope of planting the seeds of amicable dispute resolution. Like last year, this year's Peacemakers' Conference was a 3 day event comprising of a training component of one and a half days and a competition component. Participants were secondary school level students aged between 13 to 16 years old.

There were however a couple of differences that are important to mention. First, in the past, the conference participants were only students from Singapore schools. This year, we saw a delegation of 24 students from Indonesia who flew in to Singapore to attend the Peacemakers' training and participate in the competition. They were accompanied by their teachers. This was a happy difference as it was part of Peacemakers' longer term goal of involving countries from around the region.

The second difference was less of a happy one. During the days of the Peacemakers' Conference, Singapore was experiencing what is referred to colloquially as the haze. This is generally an annual phenomena caused by the burning of forests in parts of Indonesia as part of a bid to clear land for agriculture. When done by small farm owners, this usually does not present a problem. However, when done on a large scale by commercial operators, the amount of smoke and pollutants released into the environment can cause a big problem. This year, the haze conditions in Singapore were particularly bad due to prevailing wind conditions. In fact, the Pollutant Standard Index (PSI) hit an all time high and record levels were broken 2 days in a row. There were sufficient concerns about health conditions that masks (that filtered out pollutants) were distributed and used and many events were cancelled.

The Peacemakers' Conference soldiered on for a day and a half. At the end of the training component and in light of the extremely bad haze conditions, we made the call to cancel the competition component of the conference. Although there was palpable disappointment among the participants and the organizers, it was the right decision.

As part of the initial programme, a visit to the Supreme Court of Singapore and the Singapore Mediation Centre had been planned. Since this was a largely indoor event, this went on as planned. At the end of the tour, there was an informal closing ceremony.

It was at this ceremony that a special moment occurred which is the point of this update. I cannot express it any better than in the words of Aloysius Goh, the chair of the conference. I reproduce it here for you.

“At the ceremony, the teacher-guardian for the Indonesian students asked to speak. She surprised everyone when she cried and said she was sorry that the fires in her country had caused so much inconvenience to Singapore.

When she ended, a 15 year old Singaporean student also asked to speak. What she said moved me and gave me another big reason why the Peacemakers Conference should continue. She told the Indonesian teacher:

‘Please do not apologise. We understand that this is not an Indonesian problem alone and neither is it just a Singaporean one. Some of your countrymen needed to burn the forests because this was their best way of making a living. We live in the same earth and this is OUR problem. We are one family.’

I wish everyone was there to witness that moment. This is Peacemaking.”

From out of the mouths of babes. Peacemaking indeed. As mediators, I hope we can take both hope and inspiration from this moment. I am honored to have been a part of this. Thank you for reading.

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