

Summary of the 2009 G8 University Student's Summit

The summit kicked off with two very impressive speakers, Jeremy Rifkin, President of the Foundation on Economic Trends and Piero Grasso, National Anti-Mafia Public Prosecutor. I found Mr. Rifkin's talk to be very inspirational. He spoke of a push for a "Third Industrial Revolution: Leading the way to a green era and a hydrogen economy". I believe that Mr. Rifkin's ideologies will lead to an ecological and economically sustainable future. The remainder focused on debates revolving around two subjects, that of the role of education in peace and lawfulness and the role of education in sustainable development.

Following the inspirational keynote speeches, we engaged in our first debate revolving around lawfulness and a legacy of peace. The general consensus is that we need to instill lawfulness into our youths at an early age, preferable before school and reinforced through the primary educational system. The way we do this is through media arts and by appropriately training our future primary school teachers. In terms of promoting peacefulness, we agreed that we should educate people in accepting different cultures and religions. In addition we should develop international and national policies to encourage the interaction between youths of different countries so that we can dismiss the stereotypes and ignorance of other people, ignorance and stereotypes being dangerous vehicles for war and prejudice.

On the next day we began our discussion on sustainable development. Some of the delegates were a bit misinformed about how sustainable certain "next generation" fuels are. We did not have a chance to debate about the specifics of sustainable development, but a few ideas were passed around such as the use of hydrogen and ethanol. Aside from the subtle details about becoming sustainable, the bigger issue lies in the fact that countries that are in conflict cannot even begin to think about becoming sustainable when safety is an issue. The delegate from China felt that sustainable development is a luxury that they cannot afford. He felt that the West was given a chance to develop but now that China is ready to develop, they are not allowed to due to environmental concerns. These issues raised by the delegates have made me realize my naïve thinking about our world being shielded within our beautiful country where we have the luxury of living safely and being able to act on building a more sustainable nation. Coming back to the debate about the role of education on sustainable development, we generally agreed upon the fact that the university needs to promote more interdisciplinary studies that brings together, economics, science, and politics in the studies. In addition to this, we felt that the university should be a community laboratory where we could test out real world solutions so that there would be less translation needed from the university to the outside community.

The summit was an amazing experience and has reaffirmed the fact that there is a lot of work to do in bringing to world towards peace and adopting world wide sustainable practices.