

## **Student diplomats bring their best to Georgetown's Model United Nations**

Over 350 high school students have taken over the world, and the Qatar National Convention Center! Young delegates from 50 local and international schools took on diplomatic roles in academic simulations of the real United Nations from February 18th through the 21st.

Dima Khatib, a journalist and Managing Director of AJ+, who heads Al Jazeera network's innovative digital-only news platform and was ranked as one of the top ten most influential Arabs on Twitter, delivered the keynote address in the opening ceremony launching the conference.

The GU-Q MUN is the longest running international model United Nations conference in Qatar, and provides hands-on experiential learning by encouraging students to confront contemporary global issues through the perspectives of their assigned country. Diplomatic role playing strengthens the skills of critical thinking, strategic negotiation, and debate, but also serves to introduce high school students to higher education, said Jacqui Snell, the Educational Enrichment Manager at GU-Q and one of the two staff members involved in organizing logistics for the MUN.

"By interacting with our university students, participants are getting a great introduction to Georgetown, and a closer look at what a liberal arts education is all about. The MUN empowers high school students to say yes, I can fit into a university setting."

The conference is only three days long, but preparation and training provided by Georgetown's staff and student mentors continues throughout the year. "Not many students would have access to the support we provide through the pre-conference workshops and tailored training we organize for all participating schools, no matter what level their ability," said Student Development Officer Mohamad Khalil Harb, who works with Jacqui in organizing conference logistics.

The content of the conference is completely organized by Georgetown University students, who choose the theme, topics, speakers, and prepare the background briefing. Qatari senior at GU-Q and MUN Secretary General, Hessa Al-Noaimi, welcomed the delegates and explained this year's theme, "Contested Boundaries: Redefining Authority".

"The MUN board tailored a pertinent theme that reflects the challenges to our contemporary understanding of cultural, economic and national borders. It is your duty as delegates and distinguished chairs to join us in contributing to this dialogue and finding plausible solutions to these present issues."

This year, around half of the high schools are from Qatar, with the remaining come from schools around the world, and hail from countries such as the United States, China, Saudi Arabia, Italy, Jordan, Greece, Ethiopia, India, and more. "The diversity of these young people really enhances

the authenticity of our MUN as representing the U.N., an international institution,” added Mohamad Khalil Harb.

New at this year’s GU-Q MUN is a Press Committee that has left the printing press behind, using a shared online portal instead to disseminate photos, videos, and daily updates. This year also marks the first time local students enrolled in GU-Q’s Planet Georgetown pre-college preparatory program are able to participate. This enables students whose schools don’t participate in the MUN, due to lack of support or resources, the opportunity to join the conference.

Some of the topics student committees are negotiating in the mock UN panels include the legality of torture, the nuclear threat to security, borders and refugees, the situation in Yemen, and the social-media inspired and hashtagged topic, #CombatingCyberWarfare.

The conference culminates in the Cultural Night, a fun celebration of each school’s national heritage featuring a showcase of cultural items, food, and artistic performances.