



DGACM participates in UN4U outreach programme

By *Laila Shamji*, Communications Officer, DGACM, New York

Launched in 2008, with the strong support of Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, the UN4U initiative was conceived as a way to reach out to New York City public high school students and introduce them to the United Nations. Since the programme's inception, 15,000 students have learned about the issues that are a priority for the United Nations.

To spread the word about the many ways in which the United Nations makes a difference and touches lives, on Tuesday, 18 October 2011, Assistant Secretary-General Franz Baumann addressed tenth-grade students at Columbia Secondary School for Math, Science and Engineering located in Harlem, New York. Mr. Baumann was greeted by the school's principal, Miriam Nightengale, Global History teacher Professor Lynn Tiede and approximately 100 students who had gathered in the school auditorium.

"Early next week, the United Nations will be celebrating its sixty-sixth birthday", Mr. Baumann said after having been introduced by Ms. Nightengale. He gave students information about the history of the Organization, its Charter and the growth of its membership over the years. He also spoke about the functions of the General Assembly, the Security Council, the Human Rights Council and the specialized agencies, funds and programmes, telling students that "the United Nations is a forum for discussion and debate. Its purpose and challenge is to restore balance in our world. Member States have to work together to manage and prevent conflict". The students learned about the Organization's core principles of universality and sovereign equality.

The students were asked to imagine what the world would be like without amenities



Mr. Baumann addresses 10th Grade students in the auditorium at Columbia Secondary School.

such as access to quality education and clean drinking water, vaccines and medication, basic human rights, postage stamps, regulated air traffic systems, or reliable information and communication technologies. A short video highlighting the work of the United Nations was shown. The students were captivated by the powerful images of civil strife and destruction, disease and poverty, but more so by the help, comfort and rapid response provided by the United Nations to affected communities around the world.

Student Kiambra Griffin noted that "the most important part that I believe Mr. Baumann talked about was how the United Nations touches someone's life in various ways. When you think about this deeply and even the video we watched, you think about people from all walks of life coming together and creating a sense of hope for those who seem to have lost it". A classmate, Btedy Burgos, who was equally touched by Mr. Baumann's speech and the video, said that "it made me realize how easy I have it compared to others. It inspired me to want to give back instead of take, take, take. When he played the video at first I teared up and it was really a wake-up call to me. I realized that I want to help and make a difference!"

The students were attentive throughout the one-hour session and were quick to take notes. They were curious about the Organization and its activities and thus participated in a lively question-and-answer session. They asked: What is the most profound aspect of the United Nations? What is the United Nations doing about child trafficking? How does the Organization address power struggles and diplomacy? What does the United Nations think about Occupy Wall Street? How does the United Nations deal with human rights violations? Are voluntary positions available at the United Nations?

Impressed by the depth of all the questions posed and humbled by the students' interest in his involvement with the United Nations, Mr. Baumann narrated his own experience of when he was in the tenth grade and how he knew at that moment in time that he wanted to work with an international organization. He told students that although the United Nations does not offer voluntary positions for high school students, it does offer an internship programme for college students.

Mr. Baumann also said that diplomacy is an interesting concept and that the power of knowledge is incredible. He noted how

the United Nations is the organization with the highest hopes for civilization in the world – how it is impartial and stands for peace, social rights, the environment and other matters that make life worth living. He assured the students that issues concerning human rights violations, human trafficking and child soldiers are on the world's agenda and that these are just some of the issues that the United Nations considers to be a priority.

At the end of his visit, Mr. Baumann said, "This is the first time that I have participated in the UN4U programme and I must say that it has been a very enriching and pleasant experience. I was very impressed with the calibre of the students and I look forward to welcoming them on a tour of the Department, possibly early in 2012".

Following Mr. Baumann's visit, the students were given an assignment and were asked to respond to the following question: How is the work of the United Nations connected to the goals of our Global History course and to your goals as

a Columbia student? In grading students' responses Professor Tiede noted, "Applying knowledge to solve and help to alleviate some of the world's greatest social, political and environmental issues is a huge goal we set for our students".

Several students shared their thoughts:

"The work of the United Nations and our goals connect because we too are very diverse and we too want to protect humanity. We talk about what is happening around us and how we can maybe help prevent some things by doing something. Some time in the future, we can use this knowledge we gain to stop these major issues. Who knows?" – *Jorge Chávez*

"We try to understand how the world and all its realities came to exist and in order to achieve that goal we must understand how problems were resolved to create something better". – *Evaluna Acosta*

"We started off the course talking about the idea of world peace and living a life without terrorism and such, and that is basically the

same principle the United Nations has. We can apply this by being examples of people that want to do good for the world and ending all the tension we have between one another and perhaps joining the United Nations as we grow up to help them accomplish this as well". – *Umme Hassan*

"We are trying to be the very best we can be to help not only ourselves but other people; to get into high positions and positions of power so that we may be able to bring about a good change in the world". – *Jona Beliu*

"I feel that our goals connect to that of United Nations goals because if we want to make a difference it is by the means that the United Nations is using that we will be able to. It is our future that is in our hands and we have lots to learn from the United Nations and their organizations". – *Rosalía Polanco*

"The United Nations' goal is to advocate peace and prevent wars. Our goal is to use our knowledge to provide solutions to world issues". – *Sally Luu*

"The work of the United Nations is connected to our goals because our job is to eventually use our knowledge to make improvements in the world, which is essentially what the United Nations is trying to achieve". – *Alejandra Marcelino* ❖



Columbia Secondary School 10th Grade students gathered in the school auditorium.