

Media Release

Melbourne Host Directorate

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Future leaders meet in Melbourne to change the world

In Melbourne this month, 2000 young change-makers from 80 countries will meet for the world's largest international student-led youth conference, the Harvard World Model United Nations (WorldMUN), from 18-22 March.

Now in its 22nd year, with past meetings in Brussels, Geneva, London and Beijing, the world's future leaders will be hosted here by students from Monash University and RMIT University at the Melbourne Convention and Exhibition Centre.

The conference is supported by all levels of government in Australia, and this year, for the first time, they've got the backing of the UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), our regional arm of the United Nations Secretariat.

Dr Noeleen Heyzer, Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations and Executive Secretary of ESCAP, said young voices are vital, and young people need to be recognised not just as future leaders, but also as today's partners.

"It is clear that the next big challenge for the United Nations and the peoples of the world – especially our young people – is to ensure a future which is both inclusive and sustainable. Getting it right in Asia-Pacific means getting it right for two-thirds of humanity. I am therefore greatly pleased ESCAP is part of this key event, bringing together such a diverse and dynamic group of young leaders."

"We're thrilled that the UN has officially recognised the impact that my generation can have," said 21 year-old conference President Siamak Loni. "We are the next generation of leaders, and many of us are already making an impact in our local communities."

This year's conference asks what will come after the UN's Millennium Development Goals – eight targets in health, education, finance and human rights. As the 2015 deadline looms, the young delegates will plan towards the next set of goals in development, watched over by UN officials and mentors from the Red Cross, World Vision, Unicef, and AusAID, the Australian government's overseas aid agency.

But of course, many of these young people working toward these goals already, and can share personal stories of the impact of the MDGs in their communities and of the work they're doing now to create change.

- Indonesian Kyana Dipananda has established Buku Berjalan – The Walking Book – to share books with children in her community.
- Costa Rican communication student Natalia Salas is determined to keep children in school by bringing the One Laptop One Child project to her home country by 2014.
- Lena Diekhans, from Germany, is funding women's groups in Togo to work together to grow beans and rice, using \$15,000 she's raised through parties and events back home. She's also encouraged 50 fellow business students to take on their own development projects.
- Entrepreneur Bonnie Chiu is building a social enterprise to tackle poverty by photographing and sharing the stories of the poorest women in her home town Hong Kong, with plans to expand to Indonesia.
- Australian-Papua New Guinean Ayesha Lutschini is working on a project to address violence against women in PNG, as well as campaigning to increase the amount Australia spends on foreign aid.
- And, in this election year, environment student Leon Gonzalez from Sydney is trying to help other young people realise that you don't have to climb Everest to change the world.

WorldMUN 2013 is supported by: UN ESCAP, the City of Melbourne, the Victorian State Government, Study Melbourne, Monash University, RMIT University, the Harvard World Model United Nations, UNICEF, AusAID and working in collaboration with One Just World.

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www.melbourne2013.org.au