

Model WTO 2008: St.Gallen & Geneva, Switzerland

**Md Rizwan Shamim
and Iftekhar ul Karim**

AS the name suggests Model WTO is a simulation of the Ministerial Meet of the World Trade Organization. It's a regular event of 'Oikos', the international platform for students in the field of sustainable economics and management, and takes place in St Gallen, Switzerland. This year the model took place from the 4th to the 9th of May in St Gallen, Altstätten and Geneva and forty-three participants from around the world took part in the event.



If there's only one country to visit in Europe, it has to be Switzerland, due to its icy glaciers and the snow capped peaks that offer the best vista. The catchphrase came true when we first landed on the levels of Zurich, almost 15-20 Km above the ground of Zurich. All this had happened due to the tremendous fact that we got selected from BRAC University to take part in Model WTO 2008 (Trade & Sustainability) from May 4 to 9 in St. Gallen, Altstätten and Geneva, Switzerland. Yet, both of us kept having the feeling that whatever was happening wasn't happening for real!

But again we realized that we got selected from among a highly competitive pool of applicants from around the world and were selected after the evaluation of our essays. They were on "Intellectual Property (IP) Rights Enforcement Regulations for Poor Countries" (by Rizwan) and "Special & Differential Treatment (SDT) for Sustainable Development" (by Iftekhar).

We relaxed for a couple of hours in Zurich Airport. Our destination was St. Gallen, closely tied to the national Swiss Federal Railways network and has intercity connections to Zurich and the Zurich International Airport every half an hour. We set out for St. Gallen on a train that offered a splendid panorama along the way on two sides. At the station Guillaume and Julia (from Oikos St Gallen) along with Felix and Camran (who had later hosted us for the first two days were there to receive us.

St. Gallen is situated in the north-eastern part of Switzerland in a valley between Lake Constance and the mountains of the Appenzell Alps. We were to stay at the place of Felix and Camran, both Masters students at University of St.Gallen and they were also participating in Model WTO as the Committee Chairs.

We passed two days in the culturally rich city of St. Gallen and roamed around the city on bicycles (which we hired with just a security deposit from the train station!). St. Gallen is known for the University of St. Gallen. It is the number one school for business and management in German-speaking Europe. Since we arrived at St Gallen a day and a half prior to the event, we had the chance to do some sight seeing.

Another big surprise was Tashaffi bhैया! We got a call from him all of a sudden and were pretty amazed to hear from someone from Bangladesh whom we knew! 'Tash' as we call him is the Marketing Director of oikos-international. We had the chance to hang out around the city with Tash and he gave us a treat at McDonalds on our last day at St Gallen. Downtown St Gallen left a mark of treasure onto our hearts the moment we left for Altstatten, another small town of Switzerland.



The Model started in the University of St Gallen with a welcoming address from Dr. Heinz Hauser and from the president of Oikos International, Katharina Beck.



Among us, Rizwan had been the Head Delegate for USA and the two of us along with Collins from University of British Columbia and David from Harvard University (both of them graduate students) represented USA.

Most of Model WTO took place in Altstätten. Altstätten is a town in the district Rhine Valley, in the canton of St. Gall in Switzerland. We resided in Hotel Untetor there, that was built in the 15th century but astonishingly renovated to provide us with all the modern facilities. There, we took part in the negotiations on the most pressing issues of world trade and our Committee negotiations and Country meetings took place there.

We also got the opportunity to attend keynote sessions from top researchers, and experts in the field. We had people like the Editor in chief of Intellectual Property Watch, William New; Dr Carsten Fink, senior Economist, World Bank; Prof Jean Lehmann, the founding Director of Evian Group and Garnt Louw from Royal Dutch Shell.

The negotiation process in the TRIPS committee (Rizwan) was mainly on the amendment of article 29 regarding the patent relating to biological materials and traditional knowledge, and article 23 i.e. an extension of higher level of protection to all products as permitted to wines and spirits. All committees were given the necessary materials on the web prior to the start of the model and we all were well prepared. Our negotiations took place in harmony compared to the disputes we heard about in the other committees!

The final declaration took place in Geneva (which was a five hour journey from Altstätten on a chartered double decker bus) and there we stayed at the Geneva Youth Hostel. We were in Geneva to wrap up the Model at the WTO headquarters. There, we got to meet and learn from the WTO experts about how the Model and the real negotiations exist and finally reach our declaration.

The event ended after the best negotiating country award was given to Brazil and we all received certificates. This whole experience was something for which we will always be grateful to Allah. We thank BRAC University for the financial support as well as Oikos St Gallen for financial support, which made this trip possible. We also thank our dear friends Felix, Camran, Guillaume and Julia in St Gallen for all the support.

So, hopefully next year, when Model WTO takes place again, we will see more students from BRAC University applying and taking part in it. Besides, Oikos gives lots of opportunities to develop leadership skills and contributes in the field of sustainable economics and management.

For more information you could visit the website: oikos-international.org

Our email addresses:

contactriz1@hotmail.com (Rizwan)

iftekharulkarim@gmail.com (iftekhar)