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SPEAKING INTERNATIONAL: HPAIR 2015 AT MANILA



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The Harvard Project for Asian and International Relations (HPAIR) 2015 was held in Manila, Philippines, from August 20-24, 2015. There were 450 delegates from 50 countries around the world; Farah Tahsin Alam and I represented Bangladesh at the event.

The event was inaugurated by the keynote speaker, Philip Goldberg, US Ambassador to the Philippines. The main event commenced on August 21, with panel sessions and seminars on specific subjects. The first seminar was held on “Future of Commerce” by Vvivi Hu, Chief Strategy Officer, eBay Greater China and Senior Director, eBay. The second seminar was entitled “Brand Management” by Martin Roll, Senior Advisor, McKinsey & Company. There were 7 panel discussions on topics including Human Rights, Entrepreneurship, Corporate Leadership, Energy and Sustainability, Finance and World Economy, Health and Social Policy, and Security and Diplomacy.

I was assigned the Human Rights panel which was held in different sessions over three days. The topics covered were “Modern-Day Slavery: The Many Faces of Human Trafficking”, “Dangerous Speech”, and “Bending Tradition: BGLTQ Rights”. The speakers were, Natalie Jesionka, Program Chair, Human Rights at Rutgers, Founder of The PRIZM Project; Nieves Confesor, Chair, Panel Declaration Expert-Advisers to the International Labor Organization (ILO); Sam Inocencio, Field Officer Director, International Justice Mission, Philippines; T. Kumar, International Advocacy Director for AI, Asia; Ravi Agrawal, CNN India Bureau Chief; Sam Gregory, Director of WITNESS; Cristina Cristobal, Project Co-ordinator for Asia and the Pacific, International Gay and Human Rights Commission; Joanne Leung, Chairperson, Transperson Research Center Hong Kong; Jennifer HsinChieh Lu, Director of Tongzhi Rexian; and Popo Fan, Independent Filmmaker, Director of Beijing Queer Film Festival. Some topics emphasised on Bangladeshi incidents such as the recent murders of bloggers. The telecom partner of the event, Globe, hosted a dinner at their headquarters that evening.



On the second day, the delegates were taken on a tour to De La Salle University, which was the host university in Manila, besides Harvard University. Few seminars were held that day and I was assigned the seminar on “Brand Management by P&G,” the speaker of which was Nicole Villarojo, Brand Manager of P&G Philippines. A career fair was held, followed by an International Night where the delegates set up booths to promote their own cultures. After the panel sessions the following day, the floor was opened for delegates to share their personal and inspirational stories. A Filipino cultural programme was held afterwards.

On August 24, the last day of the conference, a business and academic plenary was held. The speakers were, Dr. Surin Pitsuwan, Former ASEAN Secretary-General; Simon Kahn, CMO, Google APAC; Martin Roll, Founder, Martin Roll Company; Jikyeong Kang, Dean, Asian Institute of Management; Rongrong Hu, Chief Strategy Officer of eBay Greater China, President of Harvard Business School Alumni Club; Gomer Butala Padong, Beyond 2015 Philippine National Coordinator/Secretariat and Global Executive Committee Member; and Claudio Schuftan, Freelance Consultant and Member of the Steering Committee of People's Health Movement.

The 5-day-long event ended with speeches from the executive directors of Harvard University and De La Salle University, followed by group activities and awarding of certificates.