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Bridging Generations for Peace, a Passage for the Future of Diplomacy

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Every year citizen diplomats, business influencers, municipal leaders and other luminaries from around the world converge at Sister Cities International's annual conference. Building on President Eisenhower's original vision, Sister Cities International is an organization dedicated to fostering world peace by building global relationships one city at a time. As technology and innovation are changing the landscape of how cross-cultural connections are made, there has never been a more important time to empower the next generation of leaders. This vision to the future includes understanding how new technology is disrupting and transforming the way these relationships are founded, built, and sustained. Governments, federal and local, are no longer the sole-proprietor of international relations but each individual is empowered to be a global citizen ambassador. In this modern era of diplomacy, we are witnessing what was once a top-down trickle of information closely curated by a few, to what has evolved into a two-way conversation that is had by many.

As a National Executive Committee Board Member and Chair of the Young Professional Taskforce, this year's 59th iteration being held in [Minneapolis, Minnesota July 16-18](#) under the theme of "Bridging Generations for Peace" could not be timelier or more personally engaging, especially during these final days of Ramadan, a holy month of contemplation and peace for Muslims around the world. As evidenced by

Minneapolis' most recent sister city Bosaso, Somalia these interfaith and intergenerational bridges of peace begin with each of us. While this pairing might seem random at first, Minnesota is actually home to the largest Somali population outside of Somalia. Famed for its Midwestern hospitality and easygoing nature, the Twin City will be hosting one of the most diverse and global gatherings of citizen diplomats at a critical juncture in world affairs. The hard work of building cultural and global bridges has never been more necessary in a world in which refugees from Somalia and now Syria continue to seek a better life outside of their homes.

Building on the success of last year's conference in San Jose, the heart of Silicon Valley, the role of technology in bridging generations and geography from new immigrants or foreign exchange students to their homes oceans away is undeniable. In addition, focusing on the next generation and instilling them with the pluralistic values of bridge-building between ethnic, faith, or national communities is ultimately the best investment for peace. Personally hearing the stories of what local Sister Cities communities are doing from elementary pen-pals that have never met but share a special bond to high-school homestay exchange always renews my faith in the power of citizen diplomats in an age of deeper international uncertainty. While questions about America's leadership role in providing international order continue to be main areas for presidential debate, American business, civil society, and educational leaders continue to embrace and lead us towards a more interconnected 21st century.

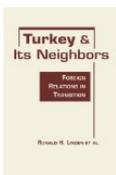
As evidenced by the tremendous growth of the parallel [Youth Leadership Summit](#) convened for high school students around the theme of "Peace through International Service," there is no shortage of interest from the next generation. The Summit is designed to engage the next generation of leaders and expose them to important global challenges that they will be facing. Often the highlight for many international dignitaries and leaders is meeting with these change makers of the future. Therefore as the world comes to Minneapolis, I hope all citizen diplomats that come through Sister Cities International can leave infused with the Midwestern hospitality and diversity of our Minnesotan hosts.

Joshua W. Walker, PhD is a proud Board Member of Sister Cities International, former Senior Advisor at the US Department of State, and current global citizen diplomat.

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