

Report of the 7th General Assembly of the Silk Road Universities Network (SUN)

Held (online) at National University of Mongolia, Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia.

On 29-30th September, 2021

Guiding Theme of the 7th General Assembly

“Next Steps of SUN as Combined Intellectual Forces toward Peaceful Co-existence and Economic Co-prosperity at the Second Phase of SUN”

Part 1: OPENING CEREMONY

1. Due to the ongoing COVID pandemic, the 7th General Assembly 2021 of Silk Road Universities Network (SUN), scheduled at the National University of Mongolia, Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia, took place virtually on 29-30th September 2021.
2. At the outset, the General Assembly observed a moment of silence to mourn those who lost their lives due to Covid-19 disease and for those who sacrificed their lives in conflicts in Afghanistan and other parts of the world.
3. Following the tradition and practice of the General Assembly of SUN to sing the host country's national anthem, the National Anthem of Mongolia was played in the 7th General Assembly, followed by a video cultural performance highlighting Mongolian culture and educational culture of the National University of Mongolia.
4. Galt NARGIL introduced the participants and the new member universities of SUN who have joined SUN in the year 2020-21.
5. The head of Chair University and the President HUFS Prof. Inchul Kim announced the proclamation of the 7th General Assembly of SUN 2021. In his opening remarks, the honourable President appreciated the efforts of SUN under the leadership of its Secretary-General Prof. Hwang and extended sincere thanks to the member universities of SUN for their continued support. He suggested remaining connected even virtually during this devastating pandemic to achieve sustainable, peaceful and harmonious developmental goals.
6. On behalf of the Rector of the National University of Mongolia, Prof. Ochirkhuyag Bayanjargal vice-rector Nyom-Osor BATKHUU welcomed delegated of the 7th General Assembly of SUN. He conveyed his sincere thanks to the Secretary-General of SUN, Prof. Hwang, for accepting their request to host the 7th General Assembly of SUN 2021. Highlighting the historical importance of the ancient Silk Road and locating Mongolia's presence, he reiterated the need for working together for a peaceful and tolerant global society. Cristina Pacurar, President of USSUN, also welcomed the delegates of the 7th General Assembly.
7. In his remarkable keynote address, Prof. Ronald Steiner of Chapman University, California, referred to the contributions of the ancient Silk Road and invoked the intellectuals and the academia to draw a modern path of peace and harmony. He opined that individual and collective conflicts and differences and disputes are not going to vanish; however, we can mitigate these challenges through mutual understanding in political, economic, and cultural interactions. Prof. Steiner lauded the efforts of SUN for bringing peace-loving global intellectual forces together and envisioned a meaningful change in the near future.
8. Prof. Irina A. Kraeva, Rector of Moscow State Linguistic University and a member of the Board of Directors of SUN, emphasize the need to unite intellectual forces and use

them for society's common good. In this regard, she introduced diverse academic and co-curricular activities of Moscow State Linguistic University.

9. Mr. Shi-yong Chon, the editor-in-Chief of Silkroadia, a cross-cultural, inter-campus webzine of SUN, interacted with the delegates showing various sections of the webzine and requested member universities to participate and support the above cause proactively.
10. Ms. Maryam Bolouri, Secretary-General of USSUN, shared details of diverse activities of USSUN held in 2020-21.
11. An award ceremony to felicitate the winners (list enclosed) of PHOCOS, WRICOS, and S-DECOS -2021 held wherein prizes and citations were conferred by honourable Chairman of GA and President of Hankuk University of Foreign Studies Prof. Inchul Kim and Secretary-General of SUN Prof. S. D. Hwang.
12. A group photo was formalized at the end of the opening session.

Part 2: Secretary General's speech and annual financial report & audit report

1. In the second part of the 7th General Assembly, the Secretary-General of SUN Prof. S D. Hwang presented a detailed academic and cultural activities report. Events concluded in the year 2020-21 with a sense of satisfaction for continuing key activities of SUN even during the testing time of the Covid-19 pandemic. Even Silk Road Expeditions were organized, although virtually. The Secretary-General listed activities and events planned for the year 2021-22. It gave an outline of a few special projects such as:
 - Special Events for Students of SUN to celebrate the 1600th anniversary of Venezia, Italy, jointly organized with Ca' Foscari University of Venice, wherein students can participate in various contests.
2. The Secretary-General informed the House that the following universities had joined SUN in the year 2021:
 - Chapman University, California, US
 - Derzhavin Tambov State University, Tambov, Russia
3. While reviewing SUN's journey, the Secretary-General said that the Silk Road Universities Network (SUN) began its journey with 32 member universities in 2015. Now it is working with 82 universities located in 63 cities of 28 countries to build a better future.
4. The Secretary-General informed the House that Prof. Karim Chelli, President of Canadian University of Dubai (CUD), UAE, has kindly consented to host the 8th General Assembly (offline/online) on February 20-24, 2022 with bearing the cost of food, accommodation, and airfare of the participants. The House extended a sense of gratitude to his generosity. It was also stated that the 7th annual conference of IASS will also be held simultaneously with the 8th General Assembly at the Canadian University of Dubai (CUD), UAE.
5. The House wholeheartedly supported and approved the reports and plans presented by the Secretary-General.
6. The annual financial report 2021 and the audit report 2021 of SUN have been tabled by the treasurer Prof. Jeong O Park (HUFS), and the auditor Prof. M. Burkitbayev (Al-Farabi Kazakh National University), respectively. The House unanimously approved and adopted the audited financial report.

Part III(A) – UPSUN Workshop

1. As per the practice in the General Assembly, the UPSUN workshop was held in the third session of the General Assembly, wherein useful proposals and valuable suggestions were discussed. Based on SUN Secretariat's proposal Prof. M. Ertan Gokman of Ankara University briefly introduced the idea of e-Silk Road University, touching on essential issues involved in it such as Students mobility, duration of the study, SUN-credit transfer system, conditions, and financial support, etcetera.
2. Mr. Cheon Dong Hyeon of C&E Company presented an overview of the operational part of the e-Silk Road Universities followed by an interaction session on the topic.
3. Prof. Roberto Tottoli, Univ. of Naples, shared information about his universities, including the academic activities.
4. The Vice-Rector of Derzhavin Tambov State University (DTSU), Tambov, Russia, Prof. Irina Naletova, shared her ideas about possibilities of cooperation and collaboration with SUN member universities in the field of science and innovation and organized a video tour of DTSU followed by a short video of activities.
5. Prof. Ronald Steiner of Chapman University, California, US, introduced Chapman University and its academic activities. He underlined the mission of Chapman University to provide personalized education of distinctions that leads to inquiring ethical and productive lives as global citizens.
6. Prof. Stella Kostopoulou of the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki shared the aims and objectives of the Western Silk Road Tourism Development Initiative and the diverse roles of the Aristotle University played in the above initiative.
7. Prof. Siti Nursheena Mohd of the University of Malaysia talked about the Covid-19 situation and countermeasures strategies and revised and modified learning and training programs adopted by the University of Malaysia and its contribution towards social responsibilities of the Malaysian society.
8. Prof. Corina Silvia elaborated comprehensive academic programs and international partnerships of the Transilvania University of Brasov, one of the leading universities of Romania.
9. Prof. Tiziana Lippiello of the Ca' Foscari University of Venice shared the information of celebrating the 1600th anniversary of Venezia and invited academia and students of SUN to participate in the same.

Part III (B) – USSUN Workshop

Introduction

1. The 7th SUN General Assembly for 2021 by virtual conference was co-hosted by the National University of Mongolia and Hankuk University of Foreign Studies from 29-30 September 2021.
2. As it is the tradition of SUN, while Presidents and Rectors from Universities along the Silk Road gather for workshops and meetings, student representatives from participating universities will gather for their own activities. Unfortunately, due to the pandemic, for the second time in row, the meetings, workshops and activities had to be conducted virtually. This year for USSUN, we had 25 participants registered to participate in the workshops and to elect the new President for 2022.
3. This report will present the following:
 - USSUN workshop – participants
 - USSUN 2021 activities – Day 2

- Suggestions for improvement

USSUN Workshop Participants

4. The USSUN workshop only began on Day 2 unlike in previous years where the activities would be conducted over a period of two days.
5. Officially 26 students were registered for USSUN activities this year and they were from the following universities:
 - a. Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, Greece(2)
 - b. Ca' Foscari University, Venice (2)
 - c. Canadian University, Dubai (2)
 - d. Imam Khomeini International University, Iran (2)
 - e. Moscow state Linguistic University, Moscow (1)
 - f. National University of Mongolia (1)
 - g. Transilvania University of Brasov, Romania (3)
 - h. University of Malaya, Malaysia (2)
 - i. University of Coimbra, Portugal (1)
 - j. Ankara University, Turkey (2)

The remaining participants were the committee members and members from the HUFs secretariat.

USSUN 2021 Participation - Day 1

6. As no activities were scheduled for USSUN on Day 1 this year, students were able to watch the opening ceremony of the 7th Assembly of SUN and listen to the opening address by Prof. Inchul Kim, Chairman of the General Assembly and the President of Hankuk University of Foreign Studies. After the opening address, the students also had the opportunity to listen to the opening address by the President of the National University of Mongolia and the Secretary General of SUN. Following this they also had the opportunity to listen to an uplifting and inspiring keynote delivered by Professor Ron Steiner from Chapman University.
7. After the delivery of the keynote address the report of activities of SUN was delivered followed by the audit report and the financial report. It is suggested that for future assembly, perhaps this time slot could be given to the students to interact and get to know one another as otherwise there is insufficient time for the students to interact on Day 2. Interaction time especially on Day 1 is necessary as the students are required to vote for the new President the next day. Thus, unless time is given for the students to get to know one another first, it would be rather awkward to ask them to cast their votes when they had not had the time to get to know one another.

USSUN 2021 Activities - Day 2

8. On Day 2, the focus was on the election of the new USSUN President and Vice President. The time allocated for the students to meet, interact and then vote for the President and Vice President was 70 minutes which is hardly sufficient for the participants to get to know one another. Thus, as mentioned previously, regardless of whether the next USSUN will be online or face to face, time should be allocated for introductory sessions on Day 1 so that the students will be able to vote wisely for the new President and the Vice President.
9. In my welcoming speech to the students, we took a moment to remember our friends from Kabul University – especially Omid who was the Vice president for Asia, as

well as other students from Afghanistan who were with us in previous assemblies. Faisal Gulzad an Afghan student studying in Khazakstan was given a few minutes to share the situation in Afghanistan and he asked us to continue to keep our Afghan friends in our thoughts and prayers.

10. Cristina Pacurar, the President for 2020 delivered a heart-warming speech to welcome the students and to guide them in the election for the new President for 2021. This was followed by the delivery from Maryam Bolouri, the Secretary General of USSUN who briefed the participants on the role of USSUN and the activities which are mainly WRICOS, PHOCOS and S-DECOS.
11. Following this was a sharing from the USSUN team on the opportunities to participate in USSUN activities and the reports of USSUN activities gave the participants a better idea of the type of activities they could participate in.
12. As a warm up for the participants, Cristina did a Silk Road Quiz which both served to break the ice as well as introduce students to SUN and USSUN. It was indeed a creative way of introducing new students to SUN and USSUN.
13. Following this, students were also informed about the opportunities to participate in the competitions in conjunction with the 600th year celebration of the founding of Venice and also the opportunity to participate in the 8th Assembly at Dubai in 2022.

Suggestions for Future Action

14. Currently, since the inception of USSUN in 2015, apart from the annual USSUN workshop, USSUN has the following activities:
 - PHOCOS
 - WRICOS
 - SILKROADIA
 - S-DECOS (launched in 2019)
 - SRVF (Silk Road Video festival – launched in 2020)
15. Taking into consideration of the fact that we see new faces every year, there is a need to help the participants familiarize themselves with the main activities of USSUN so that they can share this information with their member universities and in turn encourage greater participation.
16. It is unfortunate that for two consecutive years, USSUN activities have been conducted virtually and this has really been a loss for the participants as virtual interactions can never replace the experience of a face-to-face interaction. As it is uncertain whether we will be able to gather in Dubai next year, I would like to suggest the following activities – both to maximize the experience of a virtual gathering and also to help the participants have a better idea of what we do in USSUN.

Day 1

17. All participants should attend the assembly as this is where they will see all the Presidents from the participating universities and listen to the opening address
18. Day 1 should begin with get-to-know you session so that getting participants to interact with one another would be easier after that. This can be achieved through ice breakers, games etc
19. At the same time, we also want to introduce students to USSUN or what we do in USSUN and here I would like to suggest that after a brief summary by the Secretary General of USSUN, an effective presentation would be to show clips from PHOCOS,

WRICOS and S-DECOS. Here if we could get the winners of each competition to say a few words and showcase their works, this would be excellent. The sharing by the winners could be a pre-recorded video to save time or if the winners are at the USSUN workshop then they could also present live.

20. As there are already a number of Silk Road Videos available, Day 1 could also be an opportunity to view some of these videos and virtual tours so that participants get a glimpse of countries along the Silk Road.

Day 2

21. The main focus on Day 2 is the election of the President and Vice President. Here the potential office holders should be given the opportunity to introduce themselves and to say why they would like to hold the post of President. In addition, previous office holders could also share how they have contributed to USSUN and this can be a live presentation or pre-recorded video.
22. As there is usually a farewell dinner on Day 2, it would be good for students to do a presentation. This was done two years ago in Kazakhstan and everyone had a great time. It also gave students and Presidents time to interact with one another.
23. In the situation where we are not able to gather in Dubai next year, activities that are designed for Day 2 have to be conducted in a very different manner from face-to-face gathering and also the nature of the activity has to be something which can be done effectively virtually. In this case, participants may be asked to present something about their country - e.g. a short video of a festival, a particular food, their university etc which can then be shared during the virtual meet. In other words, more thoughts and preparations need to be given into the type of activities that could be done virtually which would be interesting for all the participants. Thus, forward planning is absolutely necessary.

Conclusion

24. It is unfortunate that the 2021 USSUN workshop was limited to 70 minutes which was not sufficient for the activities that the Secretariat had planned. For 2022, regardless of whether we will or will not meet in Dubai physically, it is important for USSUN to meet on Day 1 and Day 2. Hopefully the Secretariat and the office bearers will be able to have more time to plan the activities for the next assembly so that participants will benefit from the sessions- virtually or otherwise, and be able to contribute actively and members of USSUN.

Part IV – Closing Ceremony

1. As a host of SUN's 8th general assembly (2021), Prof. Karim Chelli, Canadian University of Dubai (CUD), UAE, addressed the general assembly and requested guests to grace the next year's General Assembly of SUN at the Canadian University of Dubai.
2. The Rector/Vice-Rector of the National University of Mongolia delivered a farewell address. He thanked all participants for attending the virtual general assembly and conveyed his sincere gratitude to the Secretary-General of SUN for choosing the National University of Mongolia for hosting the 7th general assembly.
After the closing declaration by the head of the Chair University of SUN, the general Assembly ended with thanks to the Chair.

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