

CALLING FOR EQUAL RIGHTS: ECOLINT'S FIRST GENDER EQUALITY CONFERENCE

In April 2019, the Campus des Nations held its first Gender Equality Conference, organised and led by students. **Tania Gentet Ganose** reports.

A pair of jeans and green t-shirt seemingly float in mid-air alongside a voluminous fluffy pink skirt to the sound of lullabies sung in 15 different languages. Among these garments and a number of other items on display as part of the exhibition "She's Gone", students, teachers, parents and visitors drift along silently and reverently. For these clothes belonged to over 125 women and young girls who were murdered in Israel alone, by jealous husbands, boyfriends, male relatives and total strangers. Some of these crimes were never solved, and many went unpunished.

In 1968, when Ecolint's charter was penned by the founders of the school, a sense that humanity could and had to do better permeated the world. With the first World War recently over, economic strife afflicting millions and countless lives lost, the world stood on the brink of collapse. In 2019, the sense that humanity can do a lot better has come again – this time, with regards to gender equality.

"Often, you have to be the one that steps up and takes the first step in order to effect change," said Director General David Hawley at the start of the first-ever gender conference. And that's exactly what Ecolint students decided to do with the Gender Equality Conference held at Campus des Nations in April. Organised and led by students, under the impulse of Spanish teacher and CAS Coordinator Lola Robledo, this one-day conference saw Secondary students of all ages and from each of the Ecolint campuses, pause and reflect on the terrible inequalities that women face across the world.

Eight women speakers, each active in a particular domain, acted as experts in student-led workshops that explored the theme of how to bring about greater gender equality. These included Somali psychotherapist and anti-FGM activist Leyla Hussein, explorer and adventurer



Pip Stewart, award-winning nature photographer Aletheia Casey, Ethiopian human rights lawyer Yetnebersh Nigussie, Manchester-based social activist Ruth Ibegbuna, Spanish behavioural economist Nagore Iriberrri, Swiss screenwriter and film director Petra Volpe, and Israeli human rights activist, artist and curator Keren Yehezkeili Goldstein.

During the workshops, students voiced their concerns about the gender equality issues they face or are witness to, and together with the experts brainstormed on how each individual can make a difference within their families, communities, cities, nations and on a global scale. All came together at the end for a round-table discussion to share their conclusions, agreeing that when it comes to gender equality, men must be part of the conversation, and that the single, most important and greatest hope for change is the students themselves!

As expert Petra Volpe concluded: "Ecolint dissolves the borders of nationalism and has shown that doing things differently works." With male and female students

concluding the conference with a call for equal rights for all, the eight speakers left the conference with a sense of hope that the students of Ecolint will continue to inform themselves, engage and raise their voices to break the barriers that prevent gender equality and end the violence against women and girls.

