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UN chief gathers with fellow alumni of Red Cross study trip for 50-year reunion



Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon welcomes attendees to the Operation VISTA programme 50-year reunion. UN Photo/American Red Cross/Niki Clark

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[Secretary-General](#) Ban Ki-moon on Sunday gathered in Washington, D. C. with friends he made half a century ago during their visit to the United States, which was organized by the American Red Cross and which inspired him to pursue a life of public service.

“I have given many speeches in my life, but I have never felt the emotions I am experiencing today,” Mr. Ban [said](#) as he welcomed attendees to the 50-year reunion of Operation VISTA (Visit of International Students to America).

As a teenager, Mr. Ban scored top points on a nation-wide English-writing exam as part of a competitive process to win a coveted chance to go to the US as part of the VISTA programme.

The young student travelled from his rural hometown of Eumseong in the North Chungcheong Province of the Republic of Korea, taking an unpaved road to the capital, Seoul, where he was chosen to take part in the programme, which took 41 students from 25 countries to different cities throughout the US.

“Seeing all of you, I am transported back 50 years to when we were all just teenagers,” he added, recalling fond memories of the Red Cross study trip, especially the “amazing” meeting the group had with President John F. Kennedy.

“He pointed out that we came from countries where the governments did not get along but the people did. He said that is 'a very good reminder to all of us what hopes we can have for the future',” Mr. Ban stated.

“Our reunion is a clear proof that friendships cross national boundaries. It shows the timeless truth of President Kennedy's words,” he added.

The Secretary-General said that global events these last few years have shown that young people are speaking up and speaking out and making a “profound” difference around the world. “They are not only shaping their own destiny – they are changing the world.

“That is why I often say that young people are not only leaders of tomorrow, you are also leaders for today.”

He also pointed out that the United Nations is an institution that can only succeed thanks to the actions of the Red Cross, Red Crescent and many other civil society leaders.

“Not just the fellow VISTA alumni, but the young people who join us. The world is in your hands. Be a global citizen. Look beyond the borders of your own country. Join together to create a better future for everyone.”

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