



## **UN Youth Representatives Speak for the Voiceless on the Global Stage** **By Timmy Dillard, LU/UN Communications intern**

Two Lehigh undergraduate students recently spoke at high-level events held at the United Nations Headquarters in New York City. As Youth Representatives, they represent two UN-accredited Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) - located in Nigeria and Armenia - serving as the only voice these organizations have at the UN. [Rolake Tomoye](#) and [\\*\\*Julianna Caskie](#) were able to have this opportunity because of their involvement in the Lehigh University / United Nations Partnership, which gives students the rare chance to serve in this accredited capacity at the UN.

Tomoye, who represents the Centre for Women's Studies and Intervention (CWSI), took part in a UN panel event titled "Higher Education and Multilateralism: Academia Responding to Global Challenges." The discussion was meant to answer questions such as: How to strengthen the relationship between academia and the UN?; and what role is there for faculty and students? Tomoye reminded the leaders of academia and the UN that their role is one of service to the global community and advocated that youth have a seat at the table.

"Youth should not feel scared or hesitant to use their voices to speak up for what they believe in - to use their experiences to change perspectives". Tomoye's comments were carried live across the world via UN Web TV.

At a large consultative event convening NGOs and UN officials from all over the world, Caskie, who represents Nor Luyce, advocated for improved accessibility at the UN for NGOs. By recommending a number of potential ways to strengthen the presence of NGOs in the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), she helped amplify the voices of those in developing countries at the global stage.

"There's an inherent benefit to physically being at the UN", Caskie said. It is at events such as this that NGOs can speak to actively-listening UN officials and make their voices heard.

Tomoye, a fourth year IDEAS major studying Computer Science Engineering, Economics, and Global Studies, represents the Centre for Women Studies and Intervention (CWSI) based in Abuja, Nigeria. Rolake herself is originally from Nigeria - she has done a lot of volunteer work there before - and is passionate about sub-Saharan African development. By representing CWSI at the UN, Tomoye works to strengthen their mission of upholding the dignity of

marginalized and oppressed women and girls. Like other NGOs, CWSI is made up of concerned citizens outside of government. They coach women to become more politically aware, socially responsible, and economically independent; “Any way to increase the standard of living for women in Nigeria”, said Tomoye.

Caskie, another fourth year who majors in Political Science, represents the Armenian-based NGO Nor Luyce. With a minor in Women, Gender, and Sexuality Studies, her academic passions align with the mission of Nor Luyce, which focuses on providing Armenian girls with the means to become self-sufficient. At the UN, she advocates for the empowerment of teenage girls from orphanages and low-income families through education. Caskie found herself in the UN Youth Representative program after a trip to the headquarters with her International Relations class. Recalling how she did not yet have the proper business attire, she said “I do remember over that winter break thinking, ‘I really want to keep on doing these things’, and so I went and got a blazer.”

To prepare to represent their NGOs at these events, Tomoye and Caskie both had the help of staff making up the Lehigh UN Partnership team. Tomoye said, “You have to say your message in the most respectful, diplomatic way: The Partnership helped in that way.” The time that participants have to speak in these events is limited. She continued, “[The Partnership team] was helpful to make my words more precise and impactful, because you only have five minutes to get that across. It was great to have that help to refine my message and feel great about it.” Caskie also had to prepare for that setting: “I spoke it aloud to other people a lot, because you had to get it down to the time format.” Both Youth Representatives were satisfied with being able to speak on behalf of the NGO that aligns with their passions at pivotal UN events.

Through the Youth Representative Program, these students become more familiar with advocacy work and prepare for their future careers with the skills they acquire. About her future plans, Caskie said, “I’m especially hoping to do research-based policy or advocacy work.” She continued that her practice with drafting statements and delivering speeches gave her “good exposure to what a career in this line of work could look like.”

Clipped footage of Rolake’s remarks: (video by Jordon Pykon)

\*\* Julianna’s comments are located between 1:31:30 to 1:34:00 in the video.