

Before I start, I'd like to ask everyone to turn on your camera and unmute yourself. I'd love to talk to you and hear your answers.

Now raise your hand, if you have ever lived abroad or traveled abroad, and answered the questions: where are you from?

And what's your answer to that?

(I know we have over 10 countries on more than 3 continents represented today across multiple time zones, so good morning early risers and good evening late nighters.)

Now how many of you have ever found this question of *where are you from* not straightforward to answer, maybe you live in a foreign country, maybe you moved around? Show me your hands.

Just like many of you here, I found *where are you from* a tricky question. I call home 6 countries on 4 continents, and I have 4 home LC, in the US, UK, China, Japan, with a traineeship in India. I speak English with an accent that people have described as American, British and somewhat Asian, whatever that means. To make it more complicated, I married an AIESECer born and raised in Macedonia, Predrag, who's a board member of AIESEC Life and also here today. He did his AIESEC traineeship in Poland, and lived in 7 countries including Italy - I know some of you here are from there today. As you can imagine, in my home, deciding which country to cheer for during the Olympic games or FIFA World Cup is what I call a marriage crisis.

So when people ask me, where are you from? I just started to ramble. Then people look at me with sympathy - you know, this girl is not very smart, she can't answer a very simple question. But not in AIESEC. In AIESEC, you welcome my ridiculous answer; In AIESEC, you told me the answer to that question is the longer the better; and in AIESEC, I know you all have an incredible story of your own that humbles me every single time. So I know right here right now, I do have a simple answer to that question of *where are you from*, and that simple answer is: I am from AIESEC! And you are from AIESEC. We are all from AIESEC. So I want you to unmute, just shout it out with me, I am from AIESEC!

We are all proud of our common identity as AIESECers, yet the world today challenges us AIESECers in many ways. Travels banned, borders closed, entries rejected, and AIESEC exchanges halted. But it's not only that. Our common value, our value of international friendship, our value of cultural understanding, our value of fulfilment of potential of all humankind, is also in many ways under attack.

Today we live in a world where people avoid or resent those from a different race or country as if they were virus, sometimes literally; we live in a world where foreign visitors or settlers might as well be considered as alien attacks; we live in a world where sometimes nationalism is mistaken

as patriotism; we live in a world where our AIESEC values were stirred and then shaken. The state of the world is dire.

But not so quick to despair. The state of the world today traced me back to AIESEC's roots. As we all know, AIESEC was born in the 1940s, shortly after one of the darkest eras of mankind, so we could be the bridge to connect the world. So let us remind ourselves, AIESEC was not born on a bright sunny day, AIESEC was born after a storm as we are in today! AIESEC was not born DESPITE the dire state of the world, it was born BECAUSE of the dire state of the world!

And that's why we are all here today at this event of Global Alumni Connect. Because the time is now, that we not hit the brakes but accelerate our international connections! The time is now, that we steer the ship of our common values out of the harbor and into that open international water! And the time is now, that we turn an unprecedented challenge into an unprecedented opportunity!

As we launch our Global Alumni Connect here, we envision a platform where all alums in all AIESEC member countries can connect with each other on an individual level, at your own will, in your own time, on your own topic, with your own chosen country partners. While we are still panning out the exact shapes and forms of this program in the future, we ask you to join us, connect with us, brainstorm with us, and meanwhile initiate your own international events to connect with the rest of the world, which I know many countries here are already doing and Bravos to you. We 3 hosts here know our power is limited, bounded, timed; but with all of you together, your power is limitless, boundless, and timeless.

My fellow AIESECers, in a disrupted world today, let's carry on this torch across the borders, a torch lighted from a flame that was seeded over 70 years ago on AIESEC's day of birth, a day that the world saw light in the darkness. I know that if we AIESECers cannot rebuild the international connections in the world, then I'm afraid no one can! If the world is connected with more people like you, then the world will be a better place.

Thank you for being here at our first event, and you are already showing us your power and reminding all of us: we are all from the very same place. We are all from AIESEC. We built the stage Global Alumni Connect today, and now this stage is all yours.