

## Youth Excel Global Launch Event Speakers Bios



**Silvyia Kananu (she, her)**  
**Youth Excel Project Lead, IREX**  
**Host of the Launch Event**

Silvyia is the Project Lead for USAID’s Youth Excel program. In this role, Silvyia serves as part of the core leadership team, provides strategic and technical leadership, and further serves as a liaison with USAID, IREX’s consortium, and key Youth Excel stakeholders that include youth-led and youth-serving organizations and local public- and private-sector officials.

Prior to joining IREX, Silvyia worked as a director of East Africa Programs at Sinapis, where she oversaw programs focused on entrepreneurship training and job creation for youth, women, and adults in Kenya, Uganda, and Rwanda. In her tenure, over 30,000 people were positively impacted from jobs created by the program beneficiaries. Through her partnership development efforts, she was instrumental in bringing on board new cross-sectoral partners and expanding Sinapis’s regional reach and impact.

Silvyia has experience with starting new enterprises and programs supported by foundations and bilateral donors. In her earlier working years, Silvyia specialized in marketing and communications where she worked in brand management at Unilever and in media strategy at WPP-Scangroup. Silvyia holds an MSc in innovation management and entrepreneurship (distinction) from the University of Manchester and a Bachelor of Commerce (first class honors) from the University of Strathmore.



**Kristin M. Lord (she, her)**  
**President and CEO, IREX**

Prior to joining IREX in 2014, Dr. Lord served as Acting President and Executive Vice President of the United States Institute of Peace, a Congressionally created organization that prevents, mitigates, and resolves violent conflict worldwide. While at USIP, Lord oversaw the launch of an online education initiative, the creation of the PeaceTech Lab, the expansion of programs on Africa and South/Central Asia, and the development of a five-year strategic plan.

From 2009 to 2013, Lord was Executive Vice President and Director of Studies at the Center for a New American Security, where she oversaw the Center's research and served as one of three members of the Center's leadership team. She served as editor-in-chief of 110 CNAS publications during that period and authored significant studies on diplomacy and development, cyber security, U.S. global engagement, and violent extremism. Prior to joining CNAS, Lord was a fellow at the Brookings Institution, where she directed the science and technology initiative of the Project on U.S. Relations with the Islamic World and authored studies on human development in the Arab world and U.S. public diplomacy.

From 1995 to 2008, Lord held leadership roles at the George Washington University's Elliott School of International Affairs, including Associate Dean for Strategy, Research, and External Relations and Associate Dean for Management and Planning. During her tenure, she launched three master's programs, ten certificate programs, a global network of university partnerships, the school's skills curriculum, and numerous educational programs for students, diplomats, and midcareer professionals from the public, private, and non-profit sectors. A member of the faculty, she taught courses on US public diplomacy, U.S. foreign policy, and the causes of war. Dr. Lord received an International Affairs Fellowship from the Council on Foreign Relations, enabling her to serve as special advisor to the Under Secretary of State for Democracy and Global Affairs from 2005 to 2006.

Dr. Lord is the author of *Perils and Promise of Global Transparency: Why the Information Revolution May Not Lead to Security Democracy or Peace* (SUNY Press, 2006), *Power and Conflict in an Age of Transparency*, edited with Bernard I. Finel (Palgrave Macmillan, 2000), and numerous book chapters, policy papers, and articles. In 2019, she co-authored (with George Ingram) a widely read Brookings Institution study on the changing global development landscape: "[Global Development Disrupted: Findings from a Survey of 93 Leaders.](#)" Her articles have appeared in *Foreign Policy*, *The National Interest*, *International Studies Quarterly*,

*Washington Quarterly, World Politics Review, CNN.com, Columbia Journal of International Affairs, USA Today, Defense News, Joint Force Quarterly, Roll Call, The Hill, Science, Foreign Service Journal, Christian Science Monitor, Politico, Reuters.com, and Huffington Post.* She has appeared on NPR, BBC Radio, VOA, PBS, and MSNBC and provided expert commentary to the Washington Post, Wall Street Journal and other news outlets.

Dr. Lord is a member of the Board of Directors for the U.S. Global Leadership Coalition and the American University in Cairo, and a lifetime member of the Council on Foreign Relations. She served as co-chair of the Alliance for International Youth Development from 2015 to 2017. Dr. Lord received her MA and PhD in government from Georgetown University and her BA in international studies from American University.



**Leanna Marr (She, Her)**  
**Acting Deputy Assistant Administrator, USAID**

Acting Deputy Assistant Administrator LeAnna Marr oversees DDI's Center for Education. Previously, Ms. Marr served as the Director of the Center for Education in the Bureau for Development, Democracy and Innovation at USAID. As a USAID Foreign Service Officer since 2004, she has served as Education Office Director and Program Officer in Guinea, South Sudan, Sudan (Khartoum) and Macedonia, and was the Program Officer and Acting Mission Director of USAID/Morocco. From 2007 to 2010, LeAnna served as USAID's Senior Education Advisor in the Office of Afghanistan and Pakistan Affairs. Prior to joining USAID, she worked as Associate Peace Corps Director in Guinea and as executive director of a non-profit alternative education program in Washington, DC. She has a Master's in International Education Policy from the Harvard Graduate School of Education and a Bachelor's in French from Kalamazoo College.

## Youth Panel Bios:



**Mena Ayazi (she, her)**  
**Program Officer-Children and Youth Division, Search for Common Ground**

Mena Ayazi is a young peacebuilder with experience in organizing diaspora and youth advocates for peace and justice. She is currently a Program Officer for the Children and Youth division at Search for Common Ground (SFCG) where she supports Search's global and U.S. based Youth, Peace and Security (YPS) advocacy, youth programming, youth protection, and serves as a Co-Chair of the U.S. YPS Coalition.

Prior to joining SFCG, Mena was the Manager for Policy and Communications at the Alliance for Peacebuilding (AfP) where she focused on global fragility, network building, and shaping peacebuilding narratives. Mena also spent a few years at the United States Institute of Peace (USIP) as a Research Assistant where she researched gender dynamics in conflict, coordinated the U.S. Civil Society Working Group on Women, Peace and Security, and researched American youth and educator engagement in global peacebuilding.

She also has experience cultivating youth leaders from around the world with Seeds of Peace International and the Conflict Resolution Youth Summit. Mena actively works with the Afghan-American community to engage the Afghan diaspora in transnational peacebuilding and American politics. She received both her BA and MS in Conflict Analysis and Resolution from George Mason University.



**Karen Carvajalino (she, her)**  
**Co-founder and COO, The Biz Nation**

Karen Carvajalino is a passionate dreamer, enthusiastic entrepreneur, author and social leader. She is a young Colombian who started doing business along with her sisters with \$15 when she was 7 years old and founded Chococar, a chocolate company. One year later, she gave her first lecture and started her career as a motivational speaker. Karen is the co-founder of The Biz Nation, an online education platform that teaches marketable skills as well as business education. Her company was highlighted by President Obama at the Global Entrepreneurship Summit for its innovation and social purpose.

Besides running 4 successful companies, Karen is dedicated to developing the entrepreneurial spirit in Latin America and inspiring thousands of people around the globe. Karen is a firm believer of education and is passionate about providing children with financial education at a young age. This idea led to her book *Parents and Coaches: Unleash Your Children's Inner Entrepreneur*. Karen has been nominated to different international awards and was also declared Historical and Cultural Heritage of Colombia. The Biz Nation was awarded in 2019 as the best social enterprise by 14 peace laureates in their annual convention in Merida, Mexico.



**Willice Onyango (he, him)**  
**Executive Director, The Youth Café**

Willice Onyango serves as the Executive Director of The Youth Café, a Pan-African youth organization based in Kenya. He previously served as a global youth representative to

the UN High Level Panel of Eminent Persons on Post 2015 that was co-chaired by the British Prime Minister, and the Liberian and Indonesian Presidents. He also served in the African Union Working Group on Food Security and Demographic Dividend and as the chairperson for the International Youth Council, Kenya. He has been a speaker at numerous international forums spanning 28 countries including the 68th UN General Assembly, World Bank Youth Forum, AU Heads of State Summit, European Investment Bank's Africa Day, among other conferences on youth, development and democracy. He is also an alumnus of the One Young World, International Young Leaders Assembly, and completed Civic Leadership at the Staley School of Leadership, Kansas State University in the United States as a Mandela Washington Fellow.

Willice is the author of The Kenya Youth Manifesto that unified the aspirations of the ordinary Kenyan youth into a common philosophy, leading to the publication and launch of the first ever non-partisan blueprint for Kenyan youth. He is a columnist for the Star Newspaper, The Standard Newspaper, Huffington Post, Open Democracy, and World Economic Forum among other publications.



**Nadia Terpilowska (she, her)**  
**Capacity Coordinator, United Network of Young Peacebuilders (UNOY)**

Nadia Terpilowska is a young peacebuilder passionate about building sustainable spaces for young people to shape decisions that affect them. Her mission is to create a world where youth participation is real and meaningful. She runs training programs for young peacebuilders and coordinates UNOY's Youth, Peace and Security network.

Nadia has previously worked in The Hague Peace Project and on social inclusion projects at the Municipality of The Hague. Nadia is a graduate of the University of Amsterdam with an MSc in Political Science-Public Policy and Governance.



**Joyce Mendez (she, her)**  
**Social Entrepreneur, GYAC member (Moderator)**

Joyce Mendez from Brazil is a STEM advocate and social entrepreneur working on transboundary cooperation in the water-energy-food nexus. Joyce advocates for the areas of Sustainability and Adaptation-Mitigation of Climate Change through education, empowerment and research. She is also a young climate ambassador and board member of the think-tank Center for United Nations Constitutional Research (CUNCR). She is also the co-founder of several grassroots movements in Latin America such as the Latin American Observatory of Geopolitics of Energy and the Binational Youth Collective of the Parana Basin 3. Joyce is a graduate student in Sustainability and Adaptation Planning - Centre of Alternative Technologies UK.



**GYAC Member bios (For Q&A section)**  
**Amina Soulimani (she, her)**  
**Ph.D. researcher, University of Cape Town**

Amina Soulimani is a writer and an Anthropology Ph.D. researcher at HUMA-Institute for Humanities in Africa, at the University of Cape Town in South Africa. She investigates the

intersection of AI, healthcare, and cancer research. As a qualitative researcher, she is interested in the ethics of care and the political economy of health.

Beyond Academia, Amina works in digital communications for the Nala Feminist Collective, a group that advocates for the implementation of the African Young women Beijing+25 Manifesto. She is an inclusivity advocate and has been involved in various youth capacity building programmes on the African continent and in Europe, which led her to develop an array of skills as a leadership mentor and communicator. Her areas of work focus primarily on community-based participatory approaches, qualitative research, and ethnography. Amina is also the editor of the Metric, an online publication that supports the dissemination of marginalized and silenced narratives.



**Dumiso Gatsha (they, them, their)**  
**Founder, Success Capital Organization**

Dumi is proudly Pan African and unequivocally non-binary queer feminist working on eliminating the barriers between grassroots experiences and global policy making. Dumi is the Founder of Success Capital Organisation; a youth, feminist led, managed and serving organisation working on strengthening and safeguarding youth agency and autonomy in human rights and sustainable development whilst challenging power, privilege and patriarchy through intersectionality underpinning participatory research, peer-to-peer knowledge sharing and advocacy. Notably reaching Beijing+25, ICPD+25, CEDAW, ACHPR, APRM and SADC Gender Protocol among other mechanisms.

A two-time masters graduate in Strategic Management and Human Rights & Democratization in Africa, Chartered Global Management Accountant and PRINCE2 Practitioner with previous work in PwC, GIZ and Zurich Insurance and consulting for CIVICUS World Alliance, UNDP, Global Philanthropy Project, Pan African ILGA World and Botswana Council of NGOs. In addition to the GYAC, Dumi also serves on the on the Gender Dynamix and World Youth Forum for Democracy Boards, WINGS Global Philanthropy Forum Planning Committee, advisory group of the civil society mechanism on UHC2030 & was recently appointed as an African Youth Charter Hustler by the AU Youth Envoy.