January 18, 2018

Dear Colleagues and Friends of AC$^4$,

I am excited to welcome the Columbia community to a new and ambitious year in 2018. This begins AC$^4$’s 9th year at the university, and we are proud to be part of a vibrant and innovative community devoted to building a peaceful, collaborative, and socially just world. As we look ahead to the new year, I’d like to share some of the successes of 2017 that prepare us for an exciting 2018.

AC$^4$ was born out of the idea that creating sustainable peace and fostering constructive conflict resolution require the expertise of many disciplines and areas of practice, along with the merging of top-down policy approaches with the bottom-up knowledge generated through the lived experience of communities and practitioners. The Earth Institute (EI) brings this same ethic to Sustainable Development, making it the perfect home for the consortium. Within EI, we have the focus of supporting the peace and conflict community at Columbia and of leading interdisciplinary research on peace, conflict, and sustainable development.

In order to support the Columbia community, we sponsor events and host a series of public educational offerings titled Perspectives on Peace, in partnership with student organizations, other research centers, and faculty. Each year we also host an annual Sustaining Peace Forum, which in 2017 brought together 389 attendees with 14 speakers and a Research Gallery featuring the 12 AC$^4$ Peace Fellows. In 2017, we convened 7 events, including the original photography exhibit Speaking to Peace: Portraits from Maputo and New York on display at Columbia’s Low Library through March 2018. We share our work beyond campus by fostering an online community that engaged 60,000 users on multiple channels, including website, social media and public radio show. Additionally, we provide fellowships for innovative graduate research. This year we hosted our 8th cohort of AC$^4$ Peace Fellows, and altogether funded 22 individuals to conduct research or practice-oriented projects around the world or to attend academic and practitioner conferences in Berlin and London.

For our work leading interdisciplinary research and practice, we have tested several models over the years aimed at building bridges across disciplines, schools, and departments. Over time, we’ve learned what works well, and in 2017 we formalized four signature initiatives that enable more effective collaborations. Collectively, the Sustainable Peace (SP), Environment, Peace and Sustainability (EPS), Youth, Peace and Security (YPS), and Women, Peace and Security (WPS) initiatives create focal areas for research and practice-oriented collaborations across EI, Columbia, and with many academic, governmental, and civil society organizations around the world. Our team at AC$^4$ shares some successes from these initiatives below as well as some previews of the year ahead and hopes you’ll join us in a collaborative 2018.

As we embark on this new year, AC$^4$ will continue to support the CU community through fellowships and sponsorship, online media, and by convening the community in our Perspectives on Peace series and at the 2018 Sustaining Peace Forum on March 29th. We will also continue to foster the research and practice of our signature initiatives with the goal of building a peaceful, collaborative, and socially just world. I’m excited to continue together toward that ambitious goal, and look forward to collaborating with many of you in 2018.

Sincerely,

Joshua Fisher, Ph.D.
Director, AC$^4$
2017 Looking Back

Sustainable Peace Project

The SP initiative, now in its 3rd year, engaged expert academics and practitioners who are drawing on the project’s current key findings to inform their understanding of sustainable peace. The team presented preliminary insights from empirical research on sustaining peace at the International Peace Institute to representatives from Permanent Missions to the United Nations and civil society organizations. The team also presented at the International Association for Conflict Management in Berlin and at the Peace and Justice Association Conference in Birmingham, Alabama.

Environment, Peace and Sustainability

The EPS team had a productive year of collaboration with CU faculty and international partners. They conducted a social impact assessment of mine closure at the Tulawaka Gold Mine, funded by UNESCO and AC4. Additionally, EPS produced a final evaluation of a three-year study on conflict prevention and protected area management in the Peruvian Amazon, as the culmination of a collaboration with The Amazon Conservation Association (ACA) and CARE Peru. EPS team assisted ACA on a management plan for the buffer zone of the Tambopata National Reserve, co-creating a land use planning methodology that is now being tested in the Peruvian Amazon.

Youth, Peace and Security

The YPS team designed a YPS Leadership Certificate, which aims to build capacity and support networks of young leaders, practitioners and policy-makers around the world. The team published two academic articles and introduced a case study on Medellin mandated by the U.N Security Council Resolution 2250. Additionally, the team launched a partnership with WOVEN in high schools in NY to conduct evaluation of ‘NICE’ programs, which provide training on conflict resolution, bias awareness, communication, and bullying prevention to students and teachers.

Women, Peace and Security

The WPS Program publicly launched in 2017 at Low Library for 300 guests featuring speakers from around the globe, including Chirlane McCray, First Lady of New York City, Gloria Steinem, and Graça Samo, International Coordinator of the World March of Women. As AC4’s newest initiative, the team traveled to Mozambique for participatory workshops with grassroots activists and peacebuilders. Exec. Director Leymah Gbowee and Assoc. Director Mikaela Luttrell-Rowland led a participatory workshop in NYC with key female WPS leaders, and spoke throughout NYC on the need to invest in women’s movements globally.
2018 Looking Forward

Sustainable Peace Project
In 2018, SP will continue building a model for sustainable peace, now using natural language processing and machine learning to read data on peace systems and sustainably peaceful societies, highlighting potential gaps in our understanding of these societies. Additionally, the team will develop a user-friendly interface of the model of sustainable peace, allowing practitioners and policymakers to interact with the model, test the impact of certain variables and interventions, and understand how variables in a system interact in moving towards a more or less peaceful state.

Environment, Peace and Sustainability
EPS will continue to collaborate with the Amazon Conservation Association to design socially and environmentally beneficial land use models. Publication is also on the horizon; three reports on extractive industry impact assessment from case studies in Papua New Guinea, Tanzania, and Peru. At the same time, AC4 aims to expand collaborations with prominent institutions including the American Museum of Natural History, Manhattan College, University of Massachusetts, and The University of the Basque Country.

Youth, Peace and Security
YPS will take next steps on various initiatives in NYC and in Medellin, and work to refine evaluation protocol and contribute to the youth-facing ‘NICE’ programs. The team will implement next phase of applied research program in Medellin and also continue the collaboration and connection with UN agencies. Additionally, the team plans to launch the YPS Certificate Program and continue research on the social history of youth leadership and their responses to violence.

Women, Peace and Security
WPS will continue contributing to a greater understanding of the diverse roles women play in successfully influencing sustainable peace and human security through everyday activism. Through education, public service, outreach and research, in 2018, the WPS Program plans to convene women activists in order to co-create and disseminate lessons learned from their experiences and knowledge. AC4 aims to advance visibility and enhance capacity of women peacekeepers and practitioners both domestically and internationally.

Speaking to Peace
Portraits from Maputo and New York

http://ac4.ei.columbia.edu
“Attending the International Association of Conflict Management (IACM) conference as an AC⁴ fellow was a powerful experience. It was deeply motivating to be surrounded by scholars, professionals, faculty and so many inspiring people in the field of conflict management from institutions around the world. ... I left the conference encouraged and inspired to continue my work in the academic field and to become part of the IACM academic family.”

- Graduate of the Masters in Negotiation and Conflict Resolution, Columbia University, 2017 AC⁴-IACM Fellow

“It is rare to find a group of practitioners and researchers who are united by a common vision, both professionally and deeply personally. The sincerity, inclusivity, and enthusiasm at the Cordinated Management of Meaning (CMM) Learning Exchange was striking, and the venue was intimate. ... The experience has newly inspired me to continue in my work as a researcher and practitioner.”

- Ph.D. Student, Oregon State University, 2017 AC⁴-CMM Fellow

With special thanks to