


March 19: Panel Discussion on Serving, Advocating for Refugees

Event is in Taylor Center, Room 080.


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Serving and Advocating for Refugees in MN

When: Tuesday, March 19 @ 5:30-7:00 p.m.
Where: Taylor Center 080


Summary: This event will host a panel of speakers with experience serving and/or advocating for refugees (such as Somali, Hmong and Iranian) through grassroots activism, the arts, education and work with the United Nations. Each panelist aims to discuss the challenges facing local refugee populations and to dispel myths/common misconceptions about these groups. **Food will be served for this event.**



Mehr "Jay" Shahidi is a business owner living in Saint Louis Park, MN and is the current president of the United Nations Association, Harold E. Stassen Division in Minnesota. Born in Iran, he came to the US for higher education and later became a citizen. He studied economics and political science at Minnesota State University, Mankato where he became the student body president and later received the university's Distinguished Alumni Humanitarian Award for his work on public education, refugee rights, land mines removal, population stabilization, environmental protection, economic development, nuclear disarmament and peace building. He has been an active member of Amnesty International and done citizen lobbying at all levels of government for over 40 years. Jay has served as a board member of the American Refugee Committee for 11 years, given over 800 public speeches and been a Great Decisions Lecturer for Foreign Policy Association and Global Minnesota for over 15 years.



Tou SaiKo Lee is a spoken word poet, storyteller, hip hop recording artist and community organizer from St. Paul, Minnesota. He has over a decade of experience collaborating and co-founding projects with the Hmong community, including "Fresh Traditions," "The H Project" (which was an Arts for Social Change effort resulting in a national music compilation CD to raise awareness about the Human Rights Violations of Hmong people in the jungles of Laos), the "Blackbird Elements," "Voice your Mind" Open Mics and an annual hip hop event called Boom Bap Village. He is now organizing a project called Street Stops and Mountain Tops which connects teaching artists from the U.S. to Hmong children in Southeast Asia. Lee has received numerous awards and grants from organizations, including the Jerome Foundation, Bush Fellow, Intermedia Arts VERVE Spoken Word grant. Lee is writing a memoir about his collaboration with his grandmother to honor her passing titled, "My Grandma Can Freestyle." He is releasing his first Hmong language Hip Hop album titled "Ntiq Tab Koom Tes," which translates to "Unified Worldwide" in 2019.



Nimo H. Farah is an artist and activist that uses language to express things she finds too confusing. Her current undertaking is to develop her skills as an orator while blending Somali and English. She thinks of herself charming and hilarious in the Somali language, but rarely does that humor translate into English. Her poetry and short stories have been published in Water-Stone Review, the Saint Paul Almanac, and the Loft. Inroads chapter book. As a storyteller she has shared her words at the Black Dog Café, the Loft, and Pillsbury House. She co-founded SALLI (Somali Arts Language & Leadership Institute), a nonprofit organization promoting art and literature the Somali community. She is a 2014 Loft Spoken Word Immersion Fellow, a 2014 Bush Fellow, a recipient of 2015 Intermedia Arts VERVE grant, and a 2016 National Arts Strategies Fellow.



Individuals with a disability who need a reasonable accommodation to participate in these events, please contact the Asian American Affairs office at 507-389-2799 (V), 800-627-3529 or 711 (MRSTTY) at least 5 days prior to an event. This document is available in alternative format to individuals with disabilities by calling the above numbers.

Mankato, Minn. – Minnesota State University, Mankato's Kessel Peace Institute and the University's Center for Asian American Affairs are hosting a panel discussion on "Serving and Advocating for Refugees in Minnesota" Tuesday, March 19 from 5:30-7 p.m. in the University's Taylor Center, Room 080 (located on [building's lower level](#)).

The event, free and open to the public, will host a panel of three speakers with experience serving and/or advocating for refugees through grassroots activism, the arts, education and work with the United Nations. Each panelist will aim to discuss the challenges facing local refugee populations and to dispel myths and common misconceptions about these groups.

For more information, contact Carol Glasser, assistant director of sociology and director of the Kessel Peace Institute, by phone at 507-389-1345 or by email at peace@mnsu.edu.

The event organizers provided the following information about the panelists:

- Mehr "Jay" Shahidi is a business owner living in St. Louis Park, Minn., and is the current president of the United Nations Association, Harold E. Stassen Division in Minnesota. Born in Iran, he came to the U.S. for higher education and later became a citizen. He studied economics and political science at Minnesota State Mankato, where he became the student body president and later received the university's Distinguished Alumni Humanitarian Award.
- Tou SaiKo Lee is a spoken word poet, storyteller, hip hop recording artist and community organizer from St. Paul, Minn. He has over a decade of experience collaborating and co-founding projects with the Hmong community. Among those projects was "The H Project," which was an Arts for Social Change effort resulting in a national music compilation CD to raise awareness about the Human Rights Violations of Hmong people in the jungles of Laos.
- Nimo H. Farah is an artist and activist that uses language to express things she finds too confusing. Her current undertaking is to develop her skills as an orator while blending Somali and English. She co-founded SALLI (Somali Arts Language & Leadership Institute), a nonprofit organization promoting art and literature the Somali community.

The event is presented by the Kessel Peace Institute and Minnesota State Mankato's Center for Asian American Affairs. The event co-sponsors are two registered student organizations – the Hmong Student Association and Hmong Opportunities Made Equal.

The [Kessel Institute for the Study of Peace and Change](#) is dedicated to advancing the understanding and the existence of peace at all levels, from the individual to the global community. It is named after the late Abbas Kessel, a lifelong peace activist who received a doctorate from the University of Chicago in 1956 and was a Minnesota State Mankato political science professor for 19 years. Kessel

died in 1987 of leukemia.

Kessel Institute for the Study of Peace and Change activities are coordinated by an advisory council that works through the dean of the [College of Social and Behavioral Sciences](#) at Minnesota State Mankato.

Minnesota State Mankato, a comprehensive university with 14,227 students, is part of the Minnesota State system, which includes 30 colleges and seven universities.