

Previous Atlas Week Themes and Keynote Speakers 2009-2023

2023 Atlas Week

Theme: Chasing the Echoes of Freedom in the 21st Century

Keynote: Roya Hakakian

Roya Hakakian is an Iranian American writer, journalist, and public speaker. Her opinion columns, essays and book reviews appear in leading English language publications including the New York Times, New York Review of Books and The Atlantic. A founding member of the Iran Human Rights Documentation Center, she has spoken on a variety of news outlets, from CNN's Fareed Zakaria GPS to MSNBC, as well as in Washington D.C. for the Senate Foreign Affairs Committee and the State Department with US Secretary Antony Blinken.

Hakakian is the author of two collections of poetry in Persian, and is listed among the leading new voices in Persian poetry in the Oxford Encyclopedia of the Modern Islamic World. Her poetry has also appeared in numerous anthologies around the world.

2022 Atlas Week

Theme: From the Ashes: Rebuilding the Global Scene in the World of COVID-19

Keynote: Prince Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein

Prince Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein of Jordan is the former United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. Known for his outspoken criticism of the fascism, religious radicalism, and threats to civil liberties growing in countries around the world, Zeid was a powerful advocate for human rights and open societies. Zeid was the sixth High Commissioner for Human Rights, serving from 2014 to 2018.

2021 Atlas Week

Theme: The House that Race Built

Keynote: Reverend Nontombi Naomi Tutu

Rev. Tutu's professional experience ranges from being a development consultant in West Africa to program coordinator for programs on race and gender and gender-based violence in education at the African Gender Institute at the University of Cape Town. In addition, Rev. Tutu has taught at the University of Hartford, University of Connecticut and Brevard College in North Carolina. She served as program coordinator for the historic Race Relations Institute at Fisk University and was a part of the Institute's delegation to the World Conference Against Racism in Durban.

Rev. Nontombi Naomi Tutu is a prominent Race and Gender Justice Activist.

2019 Atlas Week

Theme: “This Place That We Come From: Moving Through Our Untold Experiences”

Keynote: John Quinones

John Quinones is an ABC News veteran and anchor on 20/20 and Primetime. Quinones is also the creator and host of the ethical dilemma newsmagazine What Would You Do? His moving presentations focus on his odds-defying journey, celebrating the life-changing power of education, championing the Latino American Dream, and providing thought-provoking insights into human nature and ethical behavior.

2018 Atlas Week

Theme: “From Broken Walls, We Build Bridges: Out of Conflict Rises Community”

Keynote: Ochieng’ Brothers

Fred and Milton Ochieng’, M.D. are the co-founders of The Lwala Community Alliance which is now the largest provider of health services in Western Kenya, serving a population of more than 30,000 people. The Alliance's main focus is health care and has multidimensional programs in education, economic development and public health outreach.

2017 Atlas Week

Theme: “Visions for Global Change: Start Where You Are, Do What You Can”

Keynote: Alison Thompson

Alison Thompson is a full-time global humanitarian volunteer. For the past seventeen years, she has run refugee camps, field hospitals, and resilience command centers in major disaster sites around the world, including Haiti, Sri Lanka, the Philippines, Nepal, Greece, Turkey, and Macedonia. Her work started on September 11, 2001 when she volunteered as a first responder for nine months following the attacks in New York.

2016 Atlas Week

Theme: “Reaching Across Borders: Embracing Our Global Community”

Keynote: Kilian Kleinschmidt

Kilian Kleinschmidt is a humanitarian aid worker and expert in refugee relief and emergency crisis management. For more than twenty years, he served as a Senior Official with the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR). He recently became known as the "Mayor of Za'atari" when he managed the Za'atari refugee camp in Northern Jordan from 2013-2014 on

behalf of the UNHCR. Currently, he is serving as an advisor to the Austrian government on asylum seeker reception.

Distinguished Guest Lecture: Dr. Mukesh Kapila, "Don't Stand By: Lessons from Darfur for Today" Dr. Mukesh Kapila is a medical doctor, humanitarian expert, and international aid diplomat. Currently, he is Professor of Global Health and Humanitarian Affairs at Manchester University. He has experience in over 130 countries serving in senior positions in the British Government, the United Nations, the World Health Organization, and the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies. His dealings with many dictators and despots across the world's premier trouble spots have led him to focus on the prevention of genocide and other most horrible crimes against humanity.

2015 Atlas Week

Theme: "Simple Steps: Global Change Starts with You"

Keynote: Derreck Kayongo

As a child, Derreck Kayongo and his family fled Uganda to Kenya to escape the Idi Amin regime. Ten years later, Kayongo returned to the United States. From there, he beat the odds, earned an education, became a U.S. citizen, and served in some of the world's most respected NGOs. In 2009, Kayongo and his wife Sarah started their own NGO, the Global Soap Project, which repurposes partially used soap from hotels into new soap for vulnerable populations. Kayongo has worked with the American Friends Services Committee, Amnesty International, and CARE International.

2014 Atlas Week

Theme: "Education: Igniting the Flames of Change"

Keynote: Shabana Basi-Rasikh

Basij-Rasikh is co-founder and president of the School of Leadership, Afghanistan (SOLA), a nonprofit that helps exceptional young Afghan women access education worldwide and jobs back home. SOLA helps qualified candidates access good schools in the region and around the world. In 2011 and 2012, Basij-Rasikh was the National Gender Mainstreaming Advisor at the Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development in Kabul.

2013 Atlas Week

Theme: "Advocacy in a Globalized World: From the Classroom to the Frontline"

Keynote: John Prendergast

Prendergast is a human rights activist and best-selling author who has worked for peace in Africa for more than 25 years. Under the Enough Project umbrella, Prendergast has helped create a number of initiatives and campaigns. With George Clooney, he helped launch the Satellite Sentinel Project, which aims to prevent conflict and human rights abuses through satellite imagery. With Tracy McGrady and other NBA stars, he co-founded the Darfur Dream Team Sister Schools Program to fund schools in Darfurian refugee camps and create partnerships with schools in the United States.

2012 Atlas Week

Theme: “Empowering Humanity Through Education and Service”

Keynote: Sheryl WuDunn

WuDunn, the first Asian American reporter to win a Pulitzer Prize, has been an executive and journalist at the New York Times and worked in finance at Goldman Sachs and Bankers Trust. She has also won other journalism prizes, including the George Polk Award and Overseas Press Club Awards. WuDunn was honored for Half the Sky in 2010 with the Beacon Award from the White House Project, a nonpartisan organization that seeks to advance women's leadership in all communities and sectors.

2011 Atlas Week

Theme: “Global Justice: Meeting Basic Human Needs”

Keynote: Irene Khan

Taking the helm of Amnesty International in 2001 as the first woman, first Asian and the first Muslim to guide the world's largest human rights organization, Khan brought a new perspective to the organization. She has been at the helm of broadening its work in areas of economic, social and cultural rights, and initiating a process of internal reform and renewal to enable them to respond flexibly and rapidly to world events.

2010 Atlas Week

Theme: “Global and Local Justice: The United Nations Millennium Development Goals”

Keynote: Hauwa Ibrahim

Ibrahim is a senior partner and the pro bono legal aid counsel in the General Law Practice of the Aries Law Firm in Abuja, Nigeria. One of the top defenders of women's rights in Nigeria, Ibrahim has successfully challenged numerous charges and convictions under strict Islamic Sharia law in her country. She has served as a consultant to the United Nations Development Program, the European Union and Lawyers without Borders.

2009 Atlas Week

Theme: "Voices Around the Globe: Words of Inspiration, Hope, Change, Resistance, and Transformation"

Keynote: Emmanuel Jal

Once a child soldier on the front lines of combat in war-torn Sudan, Jal has been hailed as the "rising star of African hip-hop." At roughly 11 years old, Jal joined more than 400 other child soldiers in a courageous desertion of rebel lines. He was one of only 16 children to survive the journey. He is now a spokesman for Amnesty International and Oxfam, and has done work for Save the Children, UNICEF, World Food Programme, Christian Aid and other charities.