

# Seven countries, seven stories

Standing in front a podium with their cultural identities soon to be exposed, students and community members presented personal stories to depict their struggles with cultural differences and present the value of accepting diversity.

The event, entitled “7 Countries, 7 Stories” and organized by a collaboration of student organizations, follows a “March Against Injustice” led by campus members as a response to President Donald Trump’s executive order banning travel to the United States from seven countries for 90 days.

Vice President of Diversity and Inclusion Dr. Willie McKether was key in bringing the event to fruition and began the evening with a statement regarding the pride the faculty and staff have in all of those they serve.

“The University of Toledo is 100 percent behind our students,” McKether said. “We are very proud of you, and we will continue to do these types of events.”

Francis Mok, an American-born Chinese and first-year student, was among the first to speak and stressed the importance of accepting and conversing with those around us.

“At the end of the day, we want to make the world a more diverse place,” Mok said. “We should do things we normally wouldn’t do. Interact with people you normally wouldn’t think of. Have a conversation. Start a dialogue.”

The succession of speakers progressed, and their message of acceptance continued through personal battles with individuality and the difficulty to assimilate.

A Muslim American student used a poem describing a preschooler

different from those around her to convey the belief that what one says to another matters.

“I wanted to apologize,” said the speaker. “Sorry I don’t look like you. Sorry I don’t have the words. Words are invisible, but they are thicker than milk and honey.”

First-year student Alexx Rayk recognized a message of unity in the presenters’ stories.

“Everyone is coming together from different backgrounds and giving their own take on a situation, yet they are all giving the same message of coming together and unifying and supporting each other,” said Rayk.

The event comes at a time of a political culture dealing with issues of acceptance and, for former professor at the University of Toledo and community member Dr. Samir Abu-Absi, an occasion of this nature strengthened the campus’s culture of inclusion.

“It is really important for the students and the community to be involved,” Abu- Absi said. “I was pleased to see the level of support by the administration.”

Students have the opportunity to continue the conversation surrounding topics of acceptance and may attend an event with McKether, entitled “Lunch with the VP,” March 2 from 12:30 to 1 p.m. in SU room 3016.

Joining him will be Senior Vice President for Student Affairs, Dr. Kaye Patten. This is an opportunity to talk with Dr. McKether and Dr. Kaye in an intimate setting about topics surrounding diversity at UT and in the community.