

Behind Compelling Eyes, A Citizen Diplomat

by **Pan Xin**

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One

Patrick has a face filled with large, curious eyes, dark brown eyes shining with childlike light, as if everything around is full of interest, with enthusiasm. He was the Chairman of the 2016 Global Youth Summit at the United Nations, during the opening welcomes, arranging for speakers, and other presentations at UN Headquarters.

Mr. Sciarratta exudes limitless energy, eyeful smile, and with his captivating voice, he instantly ignites the atmosphere. He amidst every participant: young people hugging, smiling, photos with them, asking about their dreams. When you hear the students from China express their thoughts or ideas on Sino-US relations and international affairs with views expressed in less-than-fluent in English, he leans in, eyes wide open, showing infinite interest, patiently discussing, as if to give young people a path to their own strength.

When he told me that he was 65 years of age, it's my turn to see those incredible eyes, wide open, sincere and playful elderly? It's really difficult to use "old" as the word to describe Patrick, in terms of appearance, acting style, or mentality. Patrick is like a 30-year-old, and indeed he has been working alongside or at the United Nations, first through his nonprofit work then as a Special Adviser to the Permanent Mission of Sao Tome and Principe, for nearly two decades.



*Patrick Sciarratta at an informal greeting,
Youth Summit at the UN 2016.*

He is the founder of the annual Youth Assembly at the United Nations, which is the largest youth rally on the United Nations' annual calendar. He was also the Friendship Ambassadors Foundation (FAF) chief executive before retiring from the NGO to move full time to the UN. At the NGO, he was committed to the promotion of cultural exchanges, which help to achieve sustainable economic development, and promote world peace through the cooperation and mutual understanding those exchanges engender.

In 1989, his outstanding contribution in the field of culture and the arts was the revitalization of America's first arts colony, [Palenville Interarts](#). The project was awarded the MacArthur "Genius" Award; New York University awarded Patrick the Gallatin Achievement Award during that period. In 1995, Patrick was US President Bill Clinton's Presidential Representative. In the same year, the United Nations selected Mr. Sciarratta to attend the UN Conference on Women as an observer. The conference was held in Beijing. He was also a guest at the invitation of the King of Jordan, speaking at the fourth Petra Conference of Nobel Laureates, and late at the Fifth Nobel Laureates Conference by King Mohammed. Recently, he addressed over 3000 high school youth at the Model UN programme in Montreal, Canada.

Mr. Sciarratta is also co-editor of the *NGO Reporter*, and a member of the UN DPI NGO Planning Committee. The *NGO Reporter* ([here](#)) reaches 5000 non-governmental organizations spread around the world, formally associated with the United Nations. A member of every planning committee since 2003, he was Chair of the Development Subcommittee for the recent 2016 UN DPI Conference in the Republic of Korea ([here](#)). That conference included 4,000 delegates, the largest ever in the UN's 70+ year history, with many of the youth leader delegates from throughout Asia.



The Youth Leaders Panel at the 2016 Youth Summit, led by Ms. Ediola Pashollari, Secretary General, World Assembly of Youth with UN Youth Leaders

If you want to write about Patrick's legendary life, I am afraid that a book might never reach completion until his ultimate end. Taking a bite out of that life, at the orientation for the Global Youth Summit at the United Nations, in Washington DC, with the White House in the near distance, in a small restaurant, Patrick and I conducted a recent, informal interview.

The reason this was an informal interview was because before I met Patrick I had no idea about all these experiences, and titles. It began with my interest in his tie. It was yellow silk, with black calligraphy of Chinese characters. As a little joke, I asked this then stranger if the tie was part of a uniform for United Nations officials. He smiled and shook his head, proudly said: "I purchased this in Xi'an because of the artistic, Chinese calligraphy – only later did I learn that the Chinese was an ancient poem, which made the artwork all the more special to me."

Two

It's difficult to imagine that before entering the work of the United Nations, Patrick was a professional actor. Mr. Sciarratta has appeared in theatre, film, and even on television. He had the male principal lead in "The Orchestra," the first ever High Definition television presentation in the United States. The piece premiered on Great Performances in the USA but

eventually won more awards worldwide than any other television production in 1991 ([here](#) - including an Emmy, the Priz Italia in Europe, and Best Picture in China). Prior to that, Patrick and his theatre ensemble appeared in a soap opera, called "Search for Tomorrow."

Speaking about his art and how he used it in the pursuit of peace – and to escape the Vietnam War, he told a lunch guest, "I was only a teenager, I never understood the reason for this war, I did not want to kill Asians, so I was fortunate to seek and receive a transfer to study theatre in, of all places, Sweden." At that time, the peace-loving, freedom-loving American boy did not think about the fact that he was selecting a life-long path to safeguard world peace with the pursuit of this transfer.

A year later, back to the US from Sweden, Patrick began to create, direct, and act in the theater, but not on Broadway. The genre he chose was an updated, socially-conscious 'commedia dell'arte' (open-air theater): to play to the common people who might not be able to afford tickets.

He promoted the view that a direct, theater dialogue with the audience was their payment back to his ensemble at the end of each of his shows, to understand what people thought they saw or wanted to express. His Italian descent led Patrick to the Italian comedy, where his pair of deep eyes can



speak, and his many skills could add to that expression. He is a natural-born speaker and performer and soon he became a theater leader, with his troupe touring in the United States and abroad.

American society's anti-war sentiment was rooted in the

comedy in his early plays, yet there were many topics in these agit-prop

works, like themes of democracy, freedom, the eradication of poverty, global negotiations related to the atomic bomb, the former Soviet Union, and more broadly, the Cold War. After each show, his ensemble and an enthusiastic audience engaged in discussion, and exchanged opinions, in the heart of New York City and other global capitals.

These artistic efforts gradually brought him onto the international political scene. By those exchanges, he realized that every civilization has their own understanding and insight, so he began to stand at a higher level, with a global perspective that took him in his own direction, the direction of the world.

In 1989, Patrick and his arts organization at the time redeveloped America's first and oldest arts colony, and within five years received the highest honor on the American cultural scene – the MacArthur Award. Two years later, he officially entered the international nonprofit world (FAF), and started a completely different life than the one intrinsically linked to the theater. In essence, he was becoming a citizen diplomat, beginning with the cultural exchanges that promote mutual understanding and create a global partnership for deep and lasting global relationships. His visited Morocco, Finland, Albania, Mexico, the Caribbean, Israel, China, Philippines, Slovakia, Turkey, Bulgaria, Hungary, and many other developed and undeveloped countries during his long relationship with the foundation. He witnessed a blue sky with many sick and suffering, but also with his unique insight and wisdom found in the light of hope within the devastated.



Patrick is a Delegate at the United Nations

From the Philippines, he met a young man, who, at 16 years old, experienced a tsunami that collapsed his school. The young Ilac Diaz realized that plastic bottles buried under the high mud covered drainage ditches, and so he asked himself: how do I make my enemy, my friend?

Ilac collected the plastic bottles and filled them with the mud, to create bricks when the mud dried inside the bottles. With those, he rebuilt the school. Later he discovered that he could take advantage of refraction of light in a very useful way. He cut holes in the roofs of slum dwellings that had no electricity. In those holes he placed the bottles, halfway in. They were filled with water (and chlorine). The intense sun refracted through the half-way-in bottles and brought light inside these poor homes – for the first time ever.

During a visit to Jordan, Mr. Sciarratta met a 19 year-old boy and introduced him to the United Nations. Patrick remains very proud to this day to be the one who brought Ahmad Alhendawi to the UN: Mr. Alhendawi is currently the first ever Youth Envoy at the United Nations and the youngest Special Envoy of the UN Secretary General, ever. Ahmad aided



Patrick as he developed the Youth Assembly at the United Nations, building a global, youth-friendly communication platform to enable friendship between young people, the exchange culture, visits to United Nations Headquarters, and participation in a major new conference format about youth inclusion into UN policy discussions, as well as a series of activities to help and encourage young people to develop world-citizenship.

Patrick and Ahmad at the recent UN DPI Conference, Gyeongju, Korea, May 2016.

As with so many other youth initiatives he founded, led, or nurtured others to achieve, the youth programming he pioneered for NGOs and youth at the UN, between 2002 – 2015, asked youth to join the quest for improved public welfare, that youth establish a new code of ethics, "based on their own ideals, and care for the world" with an international outlook, incorporated into the vision behind the United Nations Millennium Development Goals.

Last year, the United Nations launched the 2030 Agenda: A new, 15-year, global challenge: The Sustainable Development Goals. Since then, Patrick has sought to be part of programming that included the SDGs within Sino-US youth exchanges. The Global Youth Leadership Summit, aimed at the selection and training of Young Global Leaders so that they may more actively participate in international activities, within the context of the Sustainable Development Goals, and encourage youth from these two great nations, including with awards, to find *collaborative* solutions to the SDG challenges.

Three

For nearly half a decade, here is a hard-working life in service to humanity, first as an artist and playwright, then through a noteworthy foundation and currently at the United Nations.

Patrick, in countless large and small settings, at world-class cultural gatherings, or in speeches delivered at Youth Leadership Summits, treats each interaction like another dynamic moment in the creation of its most promising newborn thoughts. He sees a different light in this generation of Chinese young people; they are booming in a resurgent, return to the center stage of the world. His nurturing helped train some of my great country's freshest blood; for many of them, his presence alone demonstrated the power of the most vivid burst of energy!

Patrick is now a man living in New York, a distance of twenty kilometers outside of Manhattan, facing the sea, alone yet busy as ever. He is an active Delegate in the Permanent Mission of Sao Tome and Principe and is working with a consortium of talented women to create the "First Ladies of the World Conference" in 2017 ([here](#)). He has created a new foundation that links sponsors with excellent NGO projects ([here](#)). It is called the Vinculum Foundation; its boyish, fun meaning is consistent with Patrick's persona. He has also been involved since 2015 as a development manager for UN related programming produced by the World Development Foundation ([here](#)).

That said, in nearly fifty years of continual, successful work in the arts, leading an NGO, and at the UN, he has traveled the world four times – so now, his most anticipated holiday remains elusive but is in his own home.

Mr. Sciarratta said that when he ever retires, he might write a book, "... an autobiography, No, wait: a fictionalized autobiography." Patrick is still blinking his pair of childlike curiosity eyes as he explained to me: "In general fiction or autobiography, the writer always places himself or the lead character as the first person, but I want the first person to be the world. This would be a story about time, and I happen to be there among the moments. "

In the summit's opening ceremony, Patrick's passionate voice to the newcomer Chinese youth leaders was: "Ah youth, you are the future leaders, you will soon become the center of the world. So now is your moment: ignite your passion and ideals, learn from your elders' wisdom, but challenge yourself to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals for all humanity, have the courage to take responsibility! Be Here Now, in your moment. To paraphrase Gandhi: Be the Change you hope to see in the world, in *your* lifetime."



Patrick, kneeling, center, with some of the Chinese delegation, at the Permanent Mission of the United States to the United Nations, with Ms. Pashollari and Ms. Peggy Kerry, standing just behind him.