

by Elaina Loveland

## The Power of One

*"I took the one less traveled by,  
And that has made all the difference."*

—ROBERT FROST

JUST RETURNED FROM ATTENDING MY SEVENTH NAFSA annual conference—the largest international education conference in the world. It is always fascinating to me to observe how first-time participants at this conference are awed by the sheer magnitude of event. Each newcomer is just one in a sea of thousands of international educators from around the globe. In some ways, attending a conference of this size seems like a microcosm of our societies—we are one of many, many individuals, and sometimes that can make a person feel that their contribution to their profession or community may not make a meaningful impact.

What resonated with me upon reflecting on this most recent conference is that one person can make the difference in history's most tumultuous and fragile moments. Nobel Laureate Leymah Gbowee's moving speech at the conference reminded us that leaders like Mahatma Gandhi, Nelson Mandela, Martin Luther King Jr., and Rosa Parks were individuals who stood up for their beliefs and their actions made the difference in a historical moment that influenced not only their own generation but those to come after.

Gbowee reminded us that, all too often, people observe wrongdoing and stand by with their arms crossed and do nothing because they don't think their voice or actions will change the situation, or they are afraid to get involved. And she told us that this is the wrong attitude. With conviction, she challenged us: "Unfold your arms!"

On campuses, international educators work tirelessly not just by finding funds for a new education abroad program or managing SEVIS for their international office—they are influencing their students' futures every day. And who knows where these students lives will lead—they could find professions that contribute to the greater good like international educators or they could even become one of the important world leaders who change society with their courage to take the road less traveled by.

Whether it is lobbying for immigration reform for undocumented students, advocating for internationalization efforts on campus, encouraging a reluctant student to study abroad, or making the personal effort to help an international student or scholar succeed, let us "unfold" our arms, raise our voice, and be the shining example to our campus communities of the difference one person can make.

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*International Educator* is published bimonthly by NAFSA: Association of International Educators, 1307 New York Avenue, NW, Eighth Floor, Washington, D.C. 20005-4701 USA.  
Phone: 202.737.3699; Fax: 202.737.3657; [inbox@nafsa.org](mailto:inbox@nafsa.org); [www.nafsa.org](http://www.nafsa.org)

Periodicals postage paid at Washington, D.C., and additional mailing offices.

ISSN 1059-4221

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