HKUST Hosts First Dialogue with ICRC on the Roles of Technology and Asian Youths in Humanitarian Work

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The Presidents of Hong Kong University of Science and Technology (HKUST) and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) exchanged insights for the first time in an open dialogue today, to explore the opportunities and challenges that technology bring to the humanitarian sector and how Asian youths can play a role in it.

Making his first public speech in Hong Kong, Mr. Peter MAURER, President of ICRC, engaged in a dialogue with Prof. Wei SHYY, President of HKUST, over the theme New horizons in humanitarian diplomacy: The power of new technologies and Asian Youths. The dialogue touched upon issues including the emergence of autonomous weapons, the power of new technologies on humanitarian work, and how Asian youths can make an impact amid Asia’s rise in the international arena. After the warm-up, the Presidents were joined by Dr. Simon SHEN – a high-profile international relations scholar with both local and international recognition, and Prof. Kellee TSAI, Dean of Humanities and Social Science as moderator, to further the discussion in a panel setting.

To further deepen University members’ and the public’s understanding towards international humanitarian work, HKUST is also staging a three-day exhibition on the campus until tomorrow, showcasing innovations deployed or developed by ICRC for people who work in harsh and rough environments. Items on display include a new generation of prosthetic knee made to withstand the harsh environments of countries such as Afghanistan and South Sudan, which can be easily repaired and facilitates a range of movements including religious praying; and a cheap, easy-to-operate and powerful solar lamp which gives light without electricity. The lamp was also designed to charge mobile phones, which are the most empowering tool people have at their disposal when faced with a crisis.

Visitors will also gain first-hand experience of the humanitarian crises happening right now on the other side of the planet – how life is like in an overcrowded prison or crossing a road full of snipers and bombardments, through virtual reality (VR) equipment used for training ICRC staff. Students from HKUST would be invited to contemplate factors to consider – such as users’ practical needs, when developing products and technology, and how their own skills and knowledge can be applied to humanitarian work. Selected student ambassadors will also help introduce these items to the visitors, as well as the scale and gravity of contemporary humanitarian disasters.

Mr. Maurer said, “The humanitarian challenges facing our world are vast. Today more than 120 million people depend on some form of humanitarian assistance. The ICRC welcomes new partners as we know a collective effort is needed to alleviate suffering and protect people from the worst of conflict. I believe the HKUST, a top young university in the world with a strong alumni network, can contribute to creating solutions to pressing global challenges.”

Prof. Shyy said HKUST is much honored to have Mr. Maurer as one of the keynote speakers for the event today. “Mr. Maurer’s insights have shed light on the humanitarian situation. While it is a common knowledge that new technologies such as Artificial Intelligence and robotics are becoming the new tractors of growth, the associated risks and ethical issues need to be better appreciated. I hope the dialogue could help HKUST members to gain new perspective on technological innovation, and offer solutions to address the issues in hand.”

The dialogue and the exhibition are the kick off events in celebration of the 10th Anniversary of HKUST Connect – a community engagement program of the University aims to strengthen student learning and raise civil awareness through sustainable partnership with the wider community. Other upcoming initiatives include Best Service Project Awards for student-initiated projects since the inception of HKUST Connect; and a celebration dinner for students, alumni, faculty, staff and community partners to share their service experiences during the past 10 years.
About The Hong Kong University of Science and Technology

The Hong Kong University of Science and Technology (HKUST) (www.ust.hk) is a world-class research university that focuses on science, technology and business as well as humanities and social science. HKUST offers an international campus, and a holistic and interdisciplinary pedagogy to nurture well-rounded graduates with global vision, a strong entrepreneurial spirit and innovative thinking. HKUST attained the highest proportion of internationally excellent research work in the Research Assessment Exercise 2014 of Hong Kong’s University Grants Committee, and is ranked as the world’s best young university in Times Higher Education’s Young University Rankings 2018. Its graduates were ranked 16th worldwide and top in Greater China in Global Employability University Survey 2018.

About ICRC

Established in 1863, the ICRC operates worldwide, helping people affected by conflict and armed violence and promoting the laws that protect victims of war. An independent and neutral organization, its mandate stems essentially from the Geneva Conventions of 1949. The organization, awarded for 3 times for the Nobel Peace Prize, are based in Geneva, Switzerland, and employ some 16,000 people in more than 80 countries. The ICRC is funded mainly by voluntary donations from governments and from national Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies.

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