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## Diplomatic Circles

# A dozen envoys collect awards for public diplomacy performance

The Ambassador of the Year awards returned for the first time since the early days of the pandemic.

Neil Moss

**T**welve ambassadors and high commissioners received awards last week for their public diplomacy work over the past year and a half.

Envoys representing countries big and small from around the globe were hosted by the University of Ottawa’s Professional Development Institute on June 2 for the fourth annual Ambassador of the Year awards—the first ceremony since the early days of the pandemic.

The winners, master of ceremonies Judée Berthil said, were selected by an independent panel from Diplomat Magazine based in The Netherlands.

The winners were chosen based on their initiatives in public diplomacy, including cultural diplomacy, educational initiatives, work with expats, and digital diplomacy programming.

“The award,” said Bruneian High Commissioner and dean of the diplomatic corps Pengiran Haji Kamal Bashah bin Pengiran Haji Ahmad, “is an extraordi-

nary means to encourage ambassadors and high commissioners to continue putting their efforts and performing their roles and responsibilities in respect of public diplomacy endeavours.”

Each winning envoy received a miniature Inukshuk sculpture handmade by an Indigenous artist using recycled wood.

Three Asian envoys were given the Ambassador of the Year honour: Pengiran Haji Ahmad, Japanese Ambassador Kanji Yamanouchi, and Kuwaiti Ambassador Reem Al Khaled.

Pengiran Haji Ahmad was praised for opening his chancery to more than 2,000 visits from 2017 to 2019 to learn about Brunei Darussalam.

He offered free kayak lessons to fellow diplomats during the pandemic, which has been expanded to include working with youth at a local community centre.

The former officer in the Brunei military, who has been posted to Ottawa since 2014, only recently became dean following Chadian Ambassador Ma-

Winning envoys and civil society figures at the 4th annual Canada’s Ambassadors of the Year Awards on June 2.

hamat Ali Adoum’s departure from Canada, but his deanship will be short-lived.

“I’m sad to announce that it will be my first and also my last involvement in this event,” he said. “I’ll be ending my tour in Canada in the middle of this month after surviving nine gruelling winters. And inshallah to take up my new assignment in other countries which is obviously more warmer than Canada.”

Career diplomat Yamanouchi was celebrated for hosting a national day celebration which included an Indigenous drum group joining one from Japan, as well as holding bonsai flower exhibits and helping to organize the 40th Japan film festival in Canada.

Al Khaled, the first woman to be Kuwait’s ambassador to Canada, has chaired the Women Heads of Diplomatic Missions group in Ottawa, as well as

honoured more than 200 Canadian veterans of the Gulf War with the Kuwait Liberation Medal. She also established the Canada-Kuwait Parliamentary Friendship Group that is chaired by CSG Senator Percy Downe.

Five winners were from African nations, including Rwandan High Commissioner Prosper Higiro, South African High Commissioner Rieaz Shaik; Moroccan Ambassador Soraya Othmani, Nigerian High Commissioner Adeyinka Asekun, and Kenyan High Commissioner Immaculate Wambua.

Higiro, a former Rwandan politician, received praise for launching a Rwandan roadshow in Toronto, Montreal, and Vancouver, as well as the commemoration of the 29th anniversary of the Tutsi genocide.

A past South African intelligence boss, Shaik was trumpeted for speeches he has given since arriving in Ottawa, including the inaugural address of the University of Ottawa's international dialogue, where he spoke about geopolitical turbulence. He has also hosted wine tastings along with diplomats from Armenia and Georgia.

Career diplomat Othmani was commended for her involvement in film festivals across Canada, as well as support for the Moroccan diaspora community in Canada. She also celebrated the 60th anniversary of diplomatic ties between Morocco and Canada.

Asekun, a former businessman, was celebrated for helping to organize past governor general Julie Payette's trip to Nigeria in 2018, as well as more recently the screening of Nollywood film *Two Weeks in Lagos* at the Canadian Museum of Nature alongside then Nigerian

vice-president Yemi Osinbajo during his three-day visit to Canada in 2022.

Wambua was praised for aiding the Kenyan food festival and business exhibit in Toronto, as well as education exchanges and working with the Kenyan Canadian Association.

Two ambassadors from the Americas earned awards: Peruvian Ambassador Roberto Rodríguez Arnillas and Panamanian Ambassador Romy Vasquez.

A career diplomat, Arnillas was praised for promoting Incan history in Canada, as well as organizing a visit of the B.A.P. Unión, one of the world's biggest tall ships, to Vancouver in 2019 to honour 75 years of diplomatic relations between Canada and Peru.

Vasquez was celebrated for organizing dialogues between Indigenous institutions in Panama and Canada as part of the International Day of Women and Girls in Science, as well as for cultural outreach and educational collaboration.

Rounding out the winning ambassadors were Belgian Ambassador Patrick Van Gheel and Albanian Ambassador Ermal Muça.

Van Gheel and his embassy organized book clubs to promote Belgian authors, such as Amélie Nothomb, as well as organizing cultural and educational exchanges.

Muça, who has been posted to Ottawa since 2016, hosted a concert of Albanian music by the Toronto Philharmonic Orchestra to celebrate 35 years of diplomatic relations with Canada. Following Pengiran Haji Ahmad's departure, Muça will be the new dean of the diplomatic corps.

Awards were also given to civil society figures who helped assist the work of the diplomatic community in Canada, including Global Affairs Canada's chief of protocol Stewart Wheeler, his second award; Hill Times publisher Anne Marie Creskey, for the newspaper's coverage of the diplomatic community; University of Ottawa law professor Pierre Thibault, a co-founder of the awards ceremony; and to Berthil, who has hosted the awards since 2018.

[nmoss@hilltimes.com](mailto:nmoss@hilltimes.com) The Hill Times

### Figure:

Bruneian High Commissioner Pengiran Haji Kamal Bashah bin Pengiran Haji Ahmad, left, shares a laugh with South African High Commissioner Rieaz Shaik.

Bruneian High Commissioner Pengiran Haji Kamal Bashah bin Pengiran Haji Ahmad.

University of Ottawa public diplomacy lecturer and former Dominican Republic diplomat Eugene Matos speaks to the audience.

Bruneian High Commissioner Pengiran Haji Kamal Bashah bin Pengiran Haji Ahmad, left, with Kenyan High Commissioner Immaculate Wambua.

Moroccan Ambassador Soraya Othmani, left.

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## Saved documents

South African High Commissioner Ricaz Shaik, left, alongside Israeli Ambassador Ronen Hoffman, and Estonian Ambassador Margus Rava.

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Bruneian High Commissioner Pengiran Haji Kamal Bashah bin Pengiran Haji Ahmad, left, with Hill Times publisher Anne Marie Creskey.

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*The Hill Times photographs by Sam Garcia*