

[REDACTED]

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**In what ways does BERMUN strengthen international relationships and cultural tolerance?**

Written for CertiLingua®

Student: [REDACTED]

CertiLingua® coordinator: [REDACTED]

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## I. Introduction

### 1.1. My motivation

Ever since I joined the Model United Nations Club of our school, I have been eager to participate at conferences every chance I get. Model United Nations conferences are the best way to get to know the real MUN procedures while also getting in touch with other students. BERMUN, one of the biggest and most famous MUN conferences around the world had always been highlighted by our teachers. It was always my dream to participate in BERMUN since alone the size of the conference cannot be compared to other smaller conferences I attended.

I wanted to join BERMUN because I wanted to get out of my comfort zone and experience how MUN works on the other side of the globe. I wanted to get an insight into MUN procedures at BERMUN, learn how delegates in Berlin and from all over the world debate and exchange knowledge. Additionally, in all honesty, I wanted to be able to say: “I have participated in BERMUN” with the BERMUN certificate in my hands. I wanted to not only get this certificate but to earn it, for it to be the suitable reward for my engagement and motivation.

Every year, BERMUN is held twice, once in fall and once in spring time. Students from all over the world fly to Berlin to get together and participate at the multiple-day conference. The first time I took part in BERMUN was in fall of 2022, online. Since the pandemic had not fully been combatted yet, flights in and out of China for a school project were not allowed. However, BERMUN offered the chance to participate in hybrid committees, which consist of online and offline delegates.

The year after, my dream came true as we took our flight to Berlin, ready to take on the conference in person.

### 1.2. My expectations towards BERMUN

Since I now knew that I would be attending the conference, what did I expect to learn and experience?

My first expectation towards the conference was to strengthen my debating skills and improve my MUN knowledge. I strongly believed that BERMUN was the perfect opportunity for me to get better at MUN, since there would be so many other delegates and MUNers from whom I could learn.

My next expectation towards the conference was to get to know new people and to make some new friends. The educational aspect is not the only thing incorporated into a conference, since the social aspect plays another big role and it was my goal to use this social aspect for my own good. I expected BERMUN to be the perfect opportunity for me to improve my debating skills as well as my socializing skills since both of these skills are equally important in my opinion.

My last expectation for the conference was for it to improve my motivation for MUN. Even though I have been a member of our school MUN club for multiple years, I have to admit that it gets boring sometimes. And that was the case shortly before BERMUN. I hoped for BERMUN to fuel my engagement and motivation for MUN. When I would come back from the trip, I expected to dive back into MUN with more motivation and excitement than ever before!

## II. Arrival in Berlin

### 2.1. First impressions

Before I share my thoughts about BERMUN as a conference, I would like to dedicate a paragraph to Berlin as a city. For me, Berlin is not only a capital city but it has actually been my home for 7 years. I used to live in Berlin as a child and came back to the city every couple of years. Therefore, I could not wait to visit my old home city again and see what has changed in the last few years!

We arrived in Berlin at midnight, not exactly the best time for first impressions, which is why I do have to say that my first impression of Berlin was rather bad. The train station reeked badly of body fluids and we walked past a few homeless and drunk people. I remember not feeling comfortable at all and wondering if Berlin had always been like this. However, I decided not to let this bad first impression bring my happiness down.

On the next morning, we woke up bright and early, ready to start the day. That was when I realized the difference between Berlin at night and Berlin at daytime. I prefer the city at daytime. We walked along the streets and took in the new views. I noticed that Berlin does not only distinguish itself from Shanghai in architecture but also in the people. Berlin is home to a variety of people, all with different ethnic backgrounds while Shanghai is home to mostly Chinese people.

We met some people on our first day who asked us where we were from. Every time our teacher revealed that we came all the way from Shanghai, we were met with curiosity and interest. To my surprise, nobody had negative things to say to us about China, everybody was tolerant and curious! I felt warm and welcome.

### III. BERMUN

#### 3.1. The conference

The conference started on Wednesday with the grand Opening Ceremony and ended on Saturday with the Closing Ceremony and BERMUN dance. The Opening Ceremony was already a big day for me. When we arrived at the location, we were informed that the Opening Ceremony was not held at one, not two but three locations! This was due to the overwhelming amount of delegates and directors attending the conference, which marks its extraordinary size. The three locations stayed in contact over a video call so everybody could listen to every speaker. The majority of guests would enjoy the Opening Ceremony as a listener only, however BERMUN wanted a speaker from each attending school to provide an Opening Speech at the Opening Ceremony. I put myself up for that job weeks before BERMUN and had prepared an amazing speech about Shanghai and our school. Since I had the role as the delegate and ambassador of Iran and the speeches were held alphabetically, I had some time to listen to the speeches of delegates of Albania, Austria and so on, all the countries' speeches with letters that came before the letter "I".

When the first few speeches were held, I was shocked. All of the delegates had prepared a detailed speech not about their home country and school but about the country they would be representing in the conference, which would be Iran in my case. I started panicking since I could not go on stage and embarrass myself in front of hundreds of people with my speech about Shanghai and the German School. Luckily, there was a 20 minute break before the conference went on and I used this break to craft a new speech from scratch about Iran and "Sustainable Development in a Capitalist World", the conference's theme. After the break, it was my turn to speak and to present my speech. I am proud to say that I mastered my new speech and in fact did not embarrass myself in front of everyone. Relieved about this success, I returned back to my seat.

Since the Opening Ceremony was several hours long, I had plenty of time to get to know the girls that sat next to me for these hours. [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] quickly became my new friends as we talked about our lives and homes. Once again, I was met with openmindedness and curiosity as soon as I mentioned Shanghai as my home city.

The next two days were fully planned out with the conference. We took the overcrowded bus every morning to the John F. Kennedy school in Berlin which hosts BERMUN. I was the delegate of Iran in the Environmental Committee (EC) and when I entered the room, I did not know anybody except for [REDACTED], who happened to be an EC delegate as well. The room for EC was originally a music room, which could be identified by the big piano in one corner. Four rows of chairs were organized slightly elevated in order to offer a seat to every delegate. I found my seat in the third row but I did not have a table. In fact, nobody in the room had a table except for the Chairs, who sat in the front and led the debates. For me, EC was the biggest committee I had ever been in. In all the other conferences I attended in Shanghai, the committee sizes were 15-20 people in each committee. This time, we were about 50 delegates, which makes a big difference when debating.

In debate time, I used my chance to raise my placard as often as possible to ask POIs or hold speeches. However, half of the people in my committee had the same idea, which made it impossible for the Chairs to let everyone talk. The skill level of the delegates in EC was very different. As a 12<sup>th</sup> grader, I was one of the oldest delegates attending. There were delegates who attended BERMUN as their first conference ever, while others had been taking part in conferences for multiple years. Additionally, the skills of the delegates differentiated in the various tasks during the two days. Some delegates were amazing at writing and formulating the resolution while others had great communication and debating skills. Some had both, while others were completely new to MUN. Not only did I learn from experienced delegates, I also taught new delegates the “How-To’s” on MUN.

When talking about the conference itself, it is important to mention that the conference did not only consist of delegates. The Chairs, Admin Staff and students of the host school contributed a lot to my experience.

For instance, the Chairs were open and happy to help me with any questions I had. They also took criticism seriously since I once asked them to let me hold a speech because they accidentally ignored my previous attempts. I was able to hold my speech and practice speaking as well as answering to all of the questions that delegates asked.

The students of the host school organized a Cloak Room to hang up all the jackets since there was not enough room in the conference rooms for them. In addition to that, they provided cookies and baked goods during cookie break which kept us delegates happy and relaxed. I used the cookie breaks to see my friends in the other committees and talk about our different experiences. At lunch time, I got lunch with some new friends that I made and we deepened our friendships by talking about our home countries, our schools and upcoming projects. The conference itself was also a big discussion topic.

Even though I fully enjoyed the conference, the debates and time management of the conference could have been improved in my opinion. We had many resolutions all ready to debate on which shows our engagement to draft these resolutions but we fought against time as our biggest competitor. There was simply not enough time to go into detail while debating which I found disappointing since the debates were cut short and did not develop their full potential.

Another aspect worthy mentioning is that no delegate had access to a table in our room. This positively contributed to us socializing since it is difficult to not talk to someone who is sitting directly next to you. However, the missing table was quite impractical since I had to balance my laptop and notebook on my lap. Furthermore, the coziness of all delegates sitting so close to each other caused the room to get very warm and uncomfortable.

I do want to state that I am aware of the difficulty of these problems since a conference cannot provide enough time and go on forever. A debate can always go on for a very long time. The space problem in the room however was acknowledged by the host school and taken into consideration for their next conferences.

Apart from these little aspects I criticised, BERMUN fully lived up to my expectations and even went beyond them. With 4 days of conference, it was the longest I had ever attended but these 4 days were necessary to have an effective debate considering the size of the conference and committees. The BERMUN conference ended on Saturday night with the BERMUN dance, a tradition held by the host school for years. The dance was the perfect occasion for us delegates to end the conference by socializing and dancing. With karaoke and dance competitions as well as snacks and soft drinks, the dance never got boring. My favorite part about the dance was the photobooth, where we could take vintage-looking pictures together.

Having explained the conference itself in detail now, I want to continue talking about the people that contributed to my experience and made BERMUN a great time for me!

### 3.2. People

During the two full days of conference, I managed to get to know lots of people. There were people from Germany, the United Kingdom, Finland, Greece, Italy and so on. We were a variety of different people mixed up in one room talking and debating about one topic.

For me, this situation was fun and exciting, since I rarely meet so many people my age from numerous different countries! In EC, I was the only person from Shanghai but not the only Chinese person. There was a girl that was from Shenzhen who now lives in Frankfurt and another one from Hongkong who lives in London. We bonded over China and its culture together and how it is for them to live in other countries.

There was also a girl from Milan who told us about Italy and her school there which was again a new perspective for me to listen to! Her school follows the IB system in contrast to mine and her final exams are a month earlier than mine! Additionally, applying for university and college is part of a mandatory program in school, meaning every student is applying for university during school time. I thought this was on the one hand a great implementation because this program prevents students from procrastinating the application process. On the other hand, I can imagine that it is a big stress factor too because she told me how nervous she was about the results of her applications.

And of course, I do not want to exclude ██████, a girl from Berlin who became my closest friend. She was excited to hear all of our stories about the different countries and expressed her interest in travelling all of these countries! I loved our conversations since I could tell her about China and Asian culture which fascinated her while she could fill me in on her life in Berlin and how she likes living in Berlin as a city. Additionally, she told me about her exchange year in the United States which helped her see a different side of the world and improve her English speaking abilities. Her story about her exchange year also sparked my interest in exchange programs since I never knew of all the advantages and new experiences one could make in just one year at a new school in a different country!

██████ also showed me a part of Berlin on Friday afternoon, she agreed to take the metro with me to Alexanderplatz and to show me around. We went shopping together and not only did I get the full tourist-experience when walking around the mall, I also got insider tips and opinions from her as a local citizen! As a tourist, you mostly visit popular places but you rarely get insight into a person's life who lives in the city and regularly visits these places. To add to that, it was comforting to be with someone who knew the way because I would have been lost on my own.



When we took the metro, we also stopped at “Museumsinsel” the most beautiful metro station in Berlin. It has a dark blue ceiling with thousands of shining lights that replicate stars in the night sky. On top of that, our stop at Museumsinsel was spontaneous which made the whole experience ten times better since I saw another part of Berlin which I did not have in mind.

Before I sum up my experience with the people, I want to talk about another moment of BERMUN. On the last day of BERMUN, most schools took the same train from the Closing Ceremony to their hotels. The Closing Ceremony ended Saturday afternoon and as soon as we BERMUNers entered the “S-Bahn”, it got crowded. An older couple sat in front of me in the train and happened to be intrigued and curious as to why the train is crowded on a Saturday afternoon when nobody is going to school or work. They started a conversation with me asking what occasion there was and I explained BERMUN to them and that all of the schools travelled to Berlin from different countries to take part in the conference. The older couple was fascinated by BERMUN which they had never heard of and showed interest in our multicultural constellation of delegates. I found this moment to be a small but important moment that made me happy and I will touch on it later on in the essay.

To sum up, all the people I met contributed positively to the conference and my feelings about it. Not a single person I met was rude or affected me negatively. I do want to point out that this is a real success of the conference, when I have the size of it in mind. So many people and not one of them ruined my experience or worsened it. In my opinion, all of this has to do with the cultural tolerance and the community desire to build strong international relationships.

### 3.3. International Relationships and Cultural Tolerance

Before I explain this aspect, I want to ask a question: What is meant with international relationships and cultural tolerance? I want to define these terms in order to eliminate possible confusion.

The Oxford languages dictionary defines “international” as “existing, occurring or carried on between nations.” Relationships are defined as “the way in which two or more people or things are connected, or the state of being connected”.

Therefore, international relationships are like the name says, connections between people of different countries. In my essay, I will use the word “relationships” based on forming friendly relationships or acquaintances.

The Oxford languages dictionary defines “tolerance” as “the ability or willingness to tolerate the existence of opinions or behaviour that one dislikes or disagrees with.”

This definition might be correct, it however does not fit well into this essay. I do not think that one can really dislike or disagree with a culture, I want to rather focus on the exploration of new cultures. This is why I researched another definition:

Britannica describes the term “tolerance” as the willingness to accept feelings, habits or beliefs that are different from your own. I like this definition better since it captures the difference more than the dislike.

When I talk about cultural tolerance, I talk about the openmindedness of people to different cultures, meaning they are open to hear about other cultures, they are interested and most importantly, they let themselves accept cultures that they do not embody. Cultural tolerance has nothing to do with changing cultures or having to dive into other cultures, since I want to focus on the tolerance, not on the recruitment of new people for a culture.

International relationships are important for broadening our world view and our connections. It’s always good to know someone in a country, to have talked to someone. Connections are one of the most important things nowadays that lead to success in work life as well as social life. The more connections one has, the better. Of course, these connections do not have to last a lifetime or be as strong as connections with family or hometown friends. But having friends and having connections all over the world can only be looked at positively in my opinion.

To add on to that point, I want to stress the importance of self-development. Sometimes we might not even know that we are narrow-minded or unknowing of the great aspects of countries other than our own. When we are in a new surrounding, like I was at the conference, confronted with new people from different countries, that is what adds on to our world view.

Humans prefer to stay in their comfort zone, to do what they know, to eat what they know, to meet only who they know. This is however not the ideal mindset for self-development. Sometimes it is necessary to put ourselves out there, to take that step and go to that conference where we know we will be confronted with a completely different surrounding that we have to adapt to. We will also be confronted with people who then unload their opinions and knowledge of their country and culture on us. We have to be able to deal with all kinds of change, we should accept other opinions too and that will lead to us broadening our world view.

This is why I believe international relationships are not only advantageous for our future but also ourselves. Successful people always work on themselves and make an effort to change and accept change.

Cultural tolerance is important in similar ways. Being openminded and accepting change is the only way to deal with new situations. How can you form international relationships if you believe your own country to be superior to others? Who would want to form a relationship with you then? Or vice versa, would you be friends with someone who does not accept your culture or talks it down? I would not.

For me, culture is crucial and important. I am proud of my culture, it makes me happy to be surrounded by people with the same culture as me while we take part in traditional activities, for example eating moon cake on the moon festival. Of course I want to share this happiness I feel and the great aspects of my culture with everyone else. I want to introduce people to my culture, I want to recommend places to go and foods to try. If the other person does not have cultural tolerance, it is not only hard for me to convince them to try something new, it is also tiring and frustrating to talk to that person.

This is why we should aim for ideal self-development by bonding internationally and forming new relationships as well as tolerating other cultures.

#### IV. BERMUN's role in strengthening international relationships and cultural tolerance

##### 4.1. My analysis

Why exactly are both of these aspects relevant to BERMUN? I have mentioned the aspect of the conference being a place for various people to meet and get to know each other. Since so many students arrive from countless different countries, the aspect of forming international relationships is embodied in BERMUN. When will you have the opportunity again to meet so many different people at once who grew up in different countries, speak different languages and go to different schools? Probably never!

My point is that BERMUN is the perfect occasion for all of us to build international relationships. That is however not the only aspect that BERMUN encourages. Most people already build international relationships whenever they travel. One could argue that the aspect of building international relationships is already implemented in the brains of the majority of

people. What is BERMUN's role then? I believe that BERMUN promotes, builds and even strengthens international relationships between participants. To further elaborate on my aspect, I want to point out the relevance of the social environment in BERMUN.

I mentioned that all people I met were openminded, tolerant and intrigued whenever they got to know a new culture. Obviously I have not talked to all people at BERMUN which could make my experience a lucky example. My hypothesis is that so many people at BERMUN embody the mindset of an openminded, tolerant person, who is open to change and open to new cultures that this overall mindset influences those, who are not used to having that mindset.

Humans like to be a part of a group, an organization. The overall atmosphere at BERMUN is tolerant and openminded and this group mindset convinces, influences or even pressures people to agree on the importance of cultural tolerance and international relationships. Students want to be part of the community and in order to integrate themselves into the BERMUN community, they adapt the group mindset because a person who does not adapt the tolerant mindset would draw attention to themselves in a negative way. The community aspect also plays into the desire of wanting to connect with others and make friends. Nobody wants to be alone for days in the conference.

And this is why BERMUN strengthens our openness because even people who do not agree on the principle of cultural tolerance are put into this tolerant open environment for multiple days. All environments that we are put into influence us, if we want to or not. In the case of this conference, a single person with the opposite opinion does not want to make enemies when they express their narrow-mindedness.

The conference therefore encourages building strong international relationships with their mix of different participants. BERMUN itself does not have programs to actively promote cultural tolerance and strengthen relationships, the participants do all the work themselves. That is exactly how it should be, participants learning through others and not being forced by teachers or special programs to improve their relations. By attending the conference, they develop the want and need to socialize and to make friends which they turn into reality as they adapt to the community mindset.

## V. Conclusion

### 5.1. What I learned

After the conference was over, I can say confidently that all of my expectations from the beginning were met. For me, BERMUN was truly an inspiring experience that I would recommend every student to make. Not only did it improve my debating and communication skills, it also broadened my circle of friends and opened my eyes. Travelling to Berlin for this conference was something completely different than driving 20 minutes to the next international school in Shanghai for a small local conference.

BERMUN incorporated the real community aspect since our committee grew together as a group and supported each other during debates. The whole atmosphere throughout the conference can be described as friendly, supportive and tolerant. When I came back from Berlin, I was excited to join the next MUN club session and tell everyone how great of an experience this was and teach them what I learned.

My conclusion is therefore, that BERMUN is not famous without a reason. It improves MUN skills as well as social skills and self-development. I think I entered BERMUN as one person and left it as another, that is truly how much the conference shaped me as a person.

### 5.2. My conclusion

Coming back to my original topic: "In what ways does BERMUN strengthen international relations and cultural tolerance?", I want to touch upon the most important conclusions I have made. First, the atmosphere and environment of the conference alone contribute to strong international relationships and cultural tolerance. Second, the participants make the step to strengthen relationships on their own, nobody forces them or tells them to, they are simply influenced by their surroundings. Third, the conference as a multinational gettogether promotes cultural tolerance and international relationships more than any local conference since it can be seen as a meeting for people from all around the world. Our school conference does not strengthen any of these two aspects in particular because we are not confronted with other nations.

Lastly, I want to come back to Berlin and cultural tolerance in the city. My first impression of Berlin was that there are more people with different ethnic backgrounds living in Berlin than in Shanghai. Students at BERMUN were not the only ones that embodied a strong cultural tolerance, citizens of Berlin did too. My hypothesis is that the variety of different ethnicities living in Berlin strengthens the cultural tolerance of local citizens because the migrants and foreigners are important to their city. Of course I do not want to generalize and point every citizen out to be tolerant and inclusive, there are always exceptions.

However, I believe that Berlin as a city is also a great place for the conference to take part because the mindset of the importance of cultural tolerance is not only spread amongst BERMUNers, it is also adapted by Berlin citizens. That is in my opinion even more heartwarming since I now know that the cultural tolerance is not only a short-term mindset at the times of BERMUN but also a long-term goal in the population of Berlin and other populations around the world.

## VI. Appendix:

### 6.1. Declaration of Independent Work:

I hereby declare that I have written this project documentation on my own.

### 6.2. Permission for anonymous publication:

I hereby authorize the anonymous publication of my project documentation.

### 6.3. Sources:

“Oxford Languages”, unknown publication date, search word: “definition of relationships”, last accessed on May 19, 2024,

URL:

[https://www.google.com/search?q=definition+of+RELATIONSHIPS&sca\\_esv=51c64e6aec99bdf3&sca\\_upv=1&rlz=1C1GCEU\\_enHK918HK918&sxsrf=ADLYWIKMfgGE7jcdpDhIAW3Min7ALEL-eQ%3A1715742854529&ei=hihEzr\\_IH5zh2roPs-iM6Ac&ved=0ahUKEwi\\_wPqa2I6GAxWcsFYBHTM0A30Q4dUDCBA&uact=5&oq=definition+of+RELATIONSHIPS&gs\\_lp=Egxnd3Mtd2l6LXNlcnAiG2RlZmluaXRpb24gb2YgUkVMQVRJT05TSElQUzIFEAAAYgAQyBRAAGIAEMgUQABiABDIFEAAAYgAQyBhAAGBYYHjIGEAAYFhgeMgYQABgWGB4yBhAAGBYYHjIGEAAYFhgeMgYQABgWGB5IIRZQ6QJYxRRwAXgBkAEAmAF\\_oAHMC6oBAzUuObgBA8gBAPgBAZgCD6AC2QzCAgcQIxiwAxgnwgIKEAAYsAMY1gQYR8ICDRAAGIAEGLADGEMYigXCAGoQIxiABBgnGIoFwgIEECMYJ8ICChAAGIAEGEMYigXCAGoQABiABBgUGIcCwgIQEAAYgAQYkQIYigUYRhj5AcICcxAAGIAEGJECGIoFwgIqEAAYgAQYkQIYigUYRhj5ARiXBRiMBRjdBBhGGPkBGPQDGPUDGPYD2AEBmAMaiAYBkAYKugYGCAEQARgTkgcEMi4xM6AHxWw&sclient=gws-wiz-serp](https://www.google.com/search?q=definition+of+RELATIONSHIPS&sca_esv=51c64e6aec99bdf3&sca_upv=1&rlz=1C1GCEU_enHK918HK918&sxsrf=ADLYWIKMfgGE7jcdpDhIAW3Min7ALEL-eQ%3A1715742854529&ei=hihEzr_IH5zh2roPs-iM6Ac&ved=0ahUKEwi_wPqa2I6GAxWcsFYBHTM0A30Q4dUDCBA&uact=5&oq=definition+of+RELATIONSHIPS&gs_lp=Egxnd3Mtd2l6LXNlcnAiG2RlZmluaXRpb24gb2YgUkVMQVRJT05TSElQUzIFEAAAYgAQyBRAAGIAEMgUQABiABDIFEAAAYgAQyBhAAGBYYHjIGEAAYFhgeMgYQABgWGB4yBhAAGBYYHjIGEAAYFhgeMgYQABgWGB5IIRZQ6QJYxRRwAXgBkAEAmAF_oAHMC6oBAzUuObgBA8gBAPgBAZgCD6AC2QzCAgcQIxiwAxgnwgIKEAAYsAMY1gQYR8ICDRAAGIAEGLADGEMYigXCAGoQIxiABBgnGIoFwgIEECMYJ8ICChAAGIAEGEMYigXCAGoQABiABBgUGIcCwgIQEAAYgAQYkQIYigUYRhj5AcICcxAAGIAEGJECGIoFwgIqEAAYgAQYkQIYigUYRhj5ARiXBRiMBRjdBBhGGPkBGPQDGPUDGPYD2AEBmAMaiAYBkAYKugYGCAEQARgTkgcEMi4xM6AHxWw&sclient=gws-wiz-serp)

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