

# Painting the World

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As the founder of the international youth activist organization [Paint the World](#), Lika Torikashvili '22 has balanced her studies at Bennington College with time spent building relationships abroad—including a leave of absence during which she served as [Georgia's United Nations Youth Delegate](#) to the 73rd session of the General Assembly.

Torikashvili first began Paint the World in her home country of Georgia when she was 14 as a way to engage fellow teens who were interested in activism.

"The idea behind Paint the World is simple; you can even figure it out from the name," said Torikashvili. "It's about brightening the world, making it more colorful, by working with vulnerable groups of youth in different areas."

Through Paint the World, teen volunteers connected with other young people in hospitals, foster homes, orphanages, shelters and schools to host events that included performances, music therapy, games, and more.

"The idea is to use as much youth talent as possible," said Torikashvili. "We always have young people with different talents sign up for our sessions—some are singers, dancers, artists, cooks. Everyone has something we can incorporate into an event. We try to cultivate an atmosphere of positive energy and laughter."

From the start, Paint the World gained media attention and government support in Georgia, including a [2014 spotlight](#) from *Imedi TV*, which named Torikashvili a Young Imedi Hero for founding this movement.

When Torikashvili left Georgia to attend UWC Atlantic College in Wales, she discovered that the work she began at home could have international applications.

"I realized that Paint the World's model could work around the world," said Torikashvili. "Everyone needs those human interactions and support, to have someone be there for you and offer a hug."

At UWC Atlantic College, Torikashvili became friends with Aziza Aznizan, who hailed from Malaysia and was interested in Torikashvili's movement.

"I have a Jewish background and Aziza is Muslim, and we became best friends," said Torikashvili. "She suggested we bring Paint the World to Malaysia and other countries. With our friendship, I realized we could work on peacebuilding, bringing together young people from different faiths, socio-economic backgrounds, skin colors, and continents to paint the world."

Together, Torikashvili and Aznizan brought the Paint the World movement to France, the Netherlands, Belgium, the UK, Malaysia, the Philippines, Indonesia, Timor Leste, Oman, Qatar, and South Africa.

"We traveled to all these countries to find like-minded people to work on these projects with us and continue them after we left," said Torikashvili.



With the Youth Delegates from Poland, Germany, Israel, Belgium and Sri Lanka at the UN Headquarters in New York



Speaking at the Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sports of Georgia





Speaking about Georgian Abkhaz and Ossetian youth at a “Peace-building for the Future” conference at Caucasus University with George Tumasyan, founder of Youth Movement for Reconciliation

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After graduating from UWC Atlantic College, Torikashvili sought to further her own education. She took a gap year to work on Paint the World projects in Swaziland and South Africa.

“I thought if I wanted to be successful, I had to attend an Ivy League school,” said Torikashvili. “But I applied to all of them, and they all rejected me.”

Meanwhile, Torikashvili became more interested in Bennington College, where she had applied and been accepted twice, first following her graduation, and then during her gap year.

“I thought it was interesting that both times I applied to college, Bennington was the school that wanted me most,” said Torikashvili. “It turned out that Bennington was the place I needed to be.”

Shortly after arriving at Bennington for first year orientation, Torikashvili was **asked to speak** at the Changemakerxchange Conference in the Philippines, where she could network and put forth Paint the World to a new audience.

“Kate Child and the Academic Services staff were supportive; they all understood why it was important for me to attend and they helped me do it,” said Torikashvili. “From my first week at Bennington, I’ve understood that this is an environment where I can do what I’m passionate about and get the education that I want to get—not something that someone else decided for me, but something that I will create myself.”

At the conference in the Philippines, Torikashvili connected with **Ashoka Philippines**, an organization that supports young social entrepreneurs, where Torikashvili later spent her first **Field Work Term**.

Once back on campus at Bennington, Torikashvili began designing her **Plan**, which weaves together Public Policy, Politics, Psychology, and Hebrew language.



Paint the World event at the cancer unit of Iashvili Hospital in Tbilisi, Georgia





Youth Delegates meet the UN Secretary General





At the UNHQ, attending ECOSOC summit on behalf of Georgia

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Shortly into her second year at Bennington, Torikashvili had the opportunity to explore politics at a global level when she was selected as Georgia's United Nations Youth Delegate to the 73rd session of the General Assembly.

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**Lika Torikashvili '22**

“The Youth Delegate role is a governmental position, so I was a part of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs,” said Torikashvili. “I got to travel around Georgia to meet with young people, hear about their issues, learn more about the UN’s sustainable development goals, and then I met with the decision makers—the Prime Minister, the President, the Minister of Education—and delivered a report on the situation of young people in Georgia.”

Torikashvili also [addressed the Third Committee](#) at the UN’s General Assembly, speaking on behalf of Georgia’s youth. While many UN countries have Youth Delegates, Georgia is the only Caucasus country to elect a delegate—giving Torikashvili a unique opportunity to speak on behalf of her peers across the region.

“Usually the UN speeches are very formal—speakers thank and greet everybody in attendance—but I didn’t want my speech to be that structured; I wanted to be from the heart,” said Torikashvili. “I saw myself not as the Youth Delegate of Georgia, but as a Youth Delegate representing young people across the world. We all want peace and to live in a world without hunger, suffering, climate issues, or economic problems. I spoke about the borderless society of the future, where we will be united—not divided—by what makes us different.”

Now back at Bennington, Torikashvili is beginning to think about how her international activist and political experiences can shape her academics. Looking down the road at her advanced work, she is considering organizing a peace conference at Bennington, where she could invite UN contacts, Paint the World speakers, and other individuals from her global network.

Torikashvili credits her Bennington advisors, including [David Andergg](#) and [Susan Sgorbati](#), for helping her shape this work.

“Susan has always been supportive of my crazy ideas—whether it’s leaving the College to travel only one week after I arrived, or doing my Field Work Term in the Philippines, or going to work at the UN during my sophomore

year,” said Torikashvili. “She is always saying, ‘Yes, of course you can do this,’ or ‘You should talk to this person who can help you.’”

Though she traveled the world before arriving at Bennington, Torikashvili now believes there’s nowhere else better for her to be.

“I am very happy that I am at Bennington,” said Torikashvili. “Now, I talk to my friends who are in those Ivy League schools, and they don’t even have time to breathe; they don’t have time for anything. And I’m at Bennington doing what I love. I have so many ideas; there is so much I can do, and I know that this is the environment that will support me.”

*By Natalie Redmond, Associate Writer*