



**Conference Weaving**  
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**The Dynamics of Inclusive Leadership**  
**ILA 18<sup>th</sup> Annual Global Conference**  
**Atlanta, GA, November 2-5, 2016**

The decision to return to Atlanta for ILA's annual conference in this particular year feels prescient, as does the theme, *The Dynamics of Inclusive Leadership*. This is a time in which we are seeing a resurgence of fear and anger, of prejudice and bigotry, projection and exclusion. The city of Atlanta has worked hard to become a place known as "The City Too Busy to Hate." Its' beauty and increased diversity almost overshadow the painful history of slavery and the era of Jim Crow that followed and in some places still exist. It has had the courage to remember their *whole* story and that of those around the world, and it chose to share it in the Center for Civil and Human Rights.

Those of us who marched or were bused over to the Center will not forget the majestic rise of that regal building and the rhythmic beats of drums as we approached it. While there we experienced the warm Georgia hospitality from Janet Rechtman (chair of the conference) and Deborah Richardson (EVP of the Center). The tour of the Center took us to sights and displays that reminded us of why we must always know and tell our stories, and never be silenced or imprisoned by them.

The opening plenary began with Rachmaninoff's "Prelude" that framed welcoming remarks by ILA's President and CEO, Cynthia Cherrey. She called our attention to the melody and movements from harmony to dissonance; and a cacophony of complexity, depth, and elegance – movements comparable to the significant shifts in our time and in the field of leadership. She spoke of how globalization is changing our perspectives and our expectations; and said that what is required of us is the acquisition of a global mindset, global acumen and the capacity to work with differences and diversity.

Our first keynote speaker, the African Ambassador to the European Union, Ajay Bramdeo, spoke about "Inclusive Leadership in Real Time" in a thoughtful, conversational manner describing the corrosive nature that incivility has on individuals and communities. He shared that as Apartheid was ending, their work was to "talk about talking," learning to listen and developing a process of engaging in dialogue.



We entered into a deep dive while listening to Ron Heifetz's keynote on "Authority, Trust and the Challenges of Inclusion." He began with identifying the dissonance and cacophony that exists in the leadership field, and called for more precise language, greater discipline in using it, and clarity and understanding of the basic principles of leadership. He believes we need a more analytical vocabulary and must make finer distinctions between the meaning of authority and leadership. The former is a transactional relationship; the latter involves working with people who *are* the problem.

For those of us who were troubled by the cultural dynamics of the presidential race in the United States he provided his reading of reality: people are feeling betrayed by those they authorized in exchange for addressing and solving their problems. This feeling of betrayal has left them feeling distrustful of those in authority to meet their needs. As a result one of the greatest adaptive challenges we face is the rebuilding of trust.

There was no formally scheduled time in the Conference to address the angst and pain that many feel and that is induced by the possibility that this same sense of betrayal could lead so many to elect someone, who has exploited their fears and alienation, and given voice to hatred and nearly every "ism" that exists.

Fortunately, there were the spaces like the reflection writing session in between the vast array of ILA offerings in which some of us found one another, making vital connections and engaging in deep work. The hope is that we will be intentional in making space for such issues when we meet in Brussels.

Throughout the conference I heard authentic, courageous conversations, creative ideas being affirmed and/or challenged, new questions raised and seriously considered, and vulnerability shown.

George Papandreou, former Prime Minister of Greece, took us deeper, sharing his story, and reminded us of the state of and concern for politics globally. This, and his relationship with Ron Heifetz, is what drew him here today. I treasure his revelation of self-discovery and claiming of a different way of leading. This was a powerful example of how the skilled use of adaptive leadership can shift beliefs, actions, and culture and cause significant change. It also was a superb example of the power of ILA's unique practice of integrating scholarship and practice.



When we are seen and heard, when we make visible the invisible, we can breathe, let go, listen, and experience the movement from intolerance to acceptance, from anxiety to calm, from being cut off to being included. As George said, when you serve your soul you can serve the souls of others!

As always we have celebrated and recognized the giants in our field. This year's Lifetime Achievement Award – Leadership Legacy – recipients are true pioneers with a compelling purpose and body of work.

We have experienced the melody, harmony, and cacophony of our work together. Work that began with a march and drumbeats – drumbeats that would have been banned in Georgia during slavery, but are now the sounds of freedom and inclusion!

I will end with excerpts from a sermon delivered in Atlanta by The Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, on February 4, 1968: “Let us look calmly and honestly at ourselves; and we will discover that we too have the same basic desires for recognition...we all want to lead the parade...It is good to seek achievement; to want to lead **if** it is not distorted or perverted; **if** it is tempered with love, moral excellence, generosity and service. We all aspire to be drum majors...let us be drum majors for justice.”

I can only add; let us be drum majors for justice, for truth, for peace, and for inclusive leadership.