



## Ready to Serve at the Renwick: Atlas Corps Turns 10

December 8, 2016

Written by David Clemens

On a typical Saturday at the Renwick Galley one can view some of the most exciting exhibits on works which play with the mind. After the gallery closes a new world of opportunity emerges. One Fall Saturday Atlas Corps held its 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Gala, an event to commemorate the progress that the organization has made in furthering its mission of providing the skills and knowledge necessary for fellows to develop into leaders that can address social issues back in their home country. Atlas Corps has its fellows placed in a 12-18-month non-profit professional fellowship which gives them the needed training. After completion of the program fellows return to their home country and work for at least a year in the nonprofit sector,

thus giving them the ability to share the best practices to enact change and empower others to join the network of global change makers.

Abby Robinson, who has been a part of Atlas corps since 2008 when starting out as a virtual volunteer, spoke to Diplomatic Courier on the progress that the organization has made since its founding. Abby met founder Scott Beale at an Entrepreneurship conference before Atlas Corps had officially launched. Later, in May of 2008 Abby started reading applications when she got the opportunity to serve in Bogota Columbia; she then applied to the program and got accepted as a Class II Alum. Since 2010 Abby has gone on to become the Chief Development and Engagement Officer for Atlas Corps.

Atlas Corps' core belief is that talent exists throughout the world, opportunity however, does not. Given the challenge of addressing the need to train those who want to implement change in their communities there is no one program nor partnership that can address the range of issues around the world. Atlas Corps addresses this plurality of beliefs by placing Fellows at organizations that are just as diverse as their respective interests within the non-profit sphere.

Multiple partnerships, ranging from governments like Colombia and Australia, to other non-profits such as the Peace Corps have made it possible for Atlas Corps and its fellows to make the changes they wish to address. The partnership with Colombia is the most notable, as it was the first country to have a direct partnership with placing and training Atlas Fellows. With a roster of 500+ fellows from 79 countries, including Cuba and Syria, both geographical and skill diversity are a cornerstone of Atlas Corps' mission to break down barriers.

This year's Gala is a major milestone for the organization, as it is the first time for this style of event for the nonprofit. Just five years ago Atlas corps 5th year was held on a U Street bar. Over the coming years expect a significant expansion of Atlas Corps. The current goal is to soon engage around 100 fellows a year, double the size from its current class of 50. Atlas Corps is also in the process of launching a domestic expansion program outside of major U.S. cities and looking for additional partnerships to further enhance the tools for its fellows. 2016 also saw the introduction of the pilot franchise program for the Foundation for Young Australians, an organization which looks to continue the Atlas Corps mission

Abby's personal motto is *Make it big!*, which is appropriate when applied to a non-profit such as Atlas Corps: it's all about where you are at and what one makes of it, regardless of if it is with a big or small organization, with the right tools anyone can make a difference.

**Editor's Note:** Atlas Corps is a Thought Partner for Diplomatic Courier's World in 2050 Event Series.



## Profile: Kareem Abdul Jabbar, Ambassador of Goodwill

December 5, 2016

Written by C. Naseer Ahmad

On November 22, 2016, President Barack Obama awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom to Kareem Abdul-Jabbar, who remains the NBA's all-time leading scorer and who authored more than a dozen books. The famous basketball champion was among the 21 people honored by President Obama for their meritorious service and contributions to society.

Speaking about Abdul-Jabbar, President Obama said: *"When a sport changes its rule, you are really good."* Further explaining the basketball player's contributions and character, President Obama

continued: “*he stood up for his Muslim faith when it wasn’t easy, it wasn’t popular.*”

In announcing these awards, President Obama said, “*The Presidential Medal of Freedom is not just our nation’s highest civilian honor—it’s a tribute to the idea that all of us, no matter where we come from, have the opportunity to change this country for the better. From scientists, philanthropists, and public servants to activists, athletes, and artists, these 21 individuals have helped push America forward, inspiring millions of people around the world along the way.*”

The National Press Club notes on its website that “*Abdul-Jabbar was the NBA’s MVP six times over during the 20 seasons he played for the Milwaukee Bucks and the Los Angeles Lakers. He was a member of six championship teams and was named an All-Star a record 19 times*”. It also informs the readers that after he retired from his playing career, Abdul-Jabbar became a successful author, publishing graphic novels and books on African-American history.

The sports legend’s stature was already established on the basketball courts, long time ago. The visual image of Abdul-Jabbar standing next to President Obama, a tall figure himself, gives a glimpse about his height. But, the real measure could only be felt in the Bloomberg Room at a National Press Club on October 17, 2016 because his head almost touched the 7 foot 9 inches ceiling.

The traditional National Press Club luncheon is an opportunity for the speaker, an author, a politician, a sportsman or an artist—to pitch his or her own ideas and/or most recent publication or project. This setting makes it possible for the speaker to reach out to the audience in the ballroom—and across the world through radio and C-SPAN—and then responding to the questions from the audience.

It was quite refreshing to note that Abdul-Jabbar spoke for perhaps less than 10 minutes but then spent most of the time listening to the questions. In his answers, Abdul-Jabbar had plenty to say. On the question about a community’s relationship with the police, his advice was to say “*our police*” and “*not the police.*” Likewise, for the police he recommended that it not be “*those people*” but the “*people we serve.*”

In response to a question: “are we Americans yet?” Abdul-Jabbar said that “*we are Americans when we pledge allegiance.*” In this context, he spoke warmly about Mr. Khizr Khan, father of late Captain Humayun Khan and felt honored to introduce him at the Democratic National Convention earlier this year.

Abdul-Jabbar’s latest work, which was published in August 2016 addresses social concerns in an honest way. The book “*Writings on the Wall: Searching for a New Equality Beyond Black and White,*” presents arguments for dialogue which involves both listening and hearing things that on each side of any argument should take sincerely to heart.

In person, Abdul-Jabbar speaks softly and with respect. In his writings, Abdul-Jabbar communicates clarity in a time when clamoring for attention with loud voices and shrill behavior. The Presidential

Medal of Freedom is well deserved for this ambassador of goodwill both on and off the basketball courts around the world.