Disclaimer: The conversation and story that follow is all fictional. Nothing written here is a projection or an implication, this is simply an essay that expresses the thoughts and dreams of the writer. The ideas shared here are not aimed at projecting any country’s fate; they are simply used to show how the writer hopes to make decisions based on her life experiences.

Introduction:

It is 2030 at the top of the table mountain in Cape Town – South Africa. The sun is shining bright, there is a slightly warm breeze, the mild cloud coverage is maintaining a good balance in temperature, and the sound of the ocean hitting the rocks is consuming every other noise present. A reporter from BBC has requested an interview with the African Union Chairlady. You are about to get a glimpse of the conversation.

Reporter: Madam Chairlady, you have been the head of the African Union for almost 7 years now, and I must admit you have made some interesting decisions. I would like to discuss some of these decisions with you in this interview. You career seems to have been filled with decisions that are not well understood initially, but prove to be impeccable in the long run. We saw a similar habit even when you were the ambassador of your country to Argentina, the audience would love to know more about your thought process in all of these.

Chairlady: Thank you for this opportunity. I am very honoured to be sitting here with you and sharing the steps that led me to making all these important decisions.

Reporter: Great. 5 years ago Japan went into a state of emergency with the shortage of young labour in the work force. For years we have been aware that the Japanese population was getting older, but we did not foresee a crisis coming in so soon. What led you to making the decision to be the first to have conversations about sharing the African labour force with Japan? I would have expected the other Asian countries to be the first.

Chairlady: Yes, I suppose many individuals thought the way you did but it is different for me. Japan is not another Asian country to me. Japan is a dear friend to me. I watch the news about Japan like they are those of my own country. If a friend of mine is in trouble I do not wait for other friends to jump in, I intervene as soon as I can especially when I have the means to assist.

Reporter: Right. So what about the situation with India? You had the opportunity to take over the whole textile industry and bring it over to the African continent. This would have increased living standards for Africans by 60% and you would have cut down the unemployment rate by half. Why did you choose to only take half of these resources?

Chairlady: Taking away the textile industry from India would have caused a lot of damage on the low-income populations in India. Some families still depend on the revenue that comes from this industry. Though it made sense to feed my people, it did not make sense to me to leave another nation hungry.

Reporter: I am still unclear about the thought process here, but I believe it might be revealed in this next question. When you were a diplomat there was an opportunity for you to choose which country to send African students to for education. You made the decision to take the students to the Netherlands instead of the United States or United Kingdom. Why was this so?
Chairlady: My decision was based on what I believed would have been the most life changing experience for young Africans. There is no doubt that the US & UK have outstanding education institutions, but education is about the full experience, and the Netherlands was the best bet in my thought process.

Reporter: (Frustrated and confused. Closes her questionnaire and stares directly at the chairlady.) With all due respect madam, I must admit I am slightly frustrated by your responses. None of your decisions are based on theory, strategy or economics. What is it that you use to make your decisions?

Chairlady: I understand your frustration and I believe I could tell you a story that will make things clear for you. Seventeen years ago I lived in a place called the International House at UC Berkeley. I can safely say that this experience is what has influenced most of my career decisions. The International house brought the whole world closer to me. Countries were no longer places on a map; they became individuals and living beings. Stereotypes about people from certain nations were violently shaken out of my brain. I left the International House no longer feeling like “I can do it” that was changed to “We can do it” and I believed it.

Reporter: Right, this is beginning to make more sense now, please elaborate.

Chairlady: When I lived at the International House, I met many people from different nations and some of them got closer to me than others. The Japanese people I met there were always kind, respectful and cheerful. Previously, I believed Japanese were these individuals who did nothing but work and had no room for other people. This opinion was changed during that time. I made Japanese friends, thus, Japan no longer became just another Asian country. It became a dear friend to me.

The situation was the same for India. I made Indian friends in all spheres class, work and in social gatherings, I always had an Indian friend. How could I then take away such a big part of their economy without thinking twice about it? Those individuals could be my friend’s cousins, brothers and sisters. The relationship I formed with them could not allow me to make a decision that would completely hurt a section of their population. The idea of “sharing is caring” really came to life for me when I lived at the International House.

Reporter: I get it now, so you made all these good friends at I-House and now you make your decisions based on friendships?

Chairlady: Well, not entirely. I have some experts who advise me but I bring the humane part of the decisions to the table when all is said and done. Also, it was slightly different with the Netherlands. I did not make good friends from the Netherlands. I met a number of individuals who made me change my perception of the Netherlands. Growing up, I was exposed to the gruesome impact of Apartheid in South Africa. Our parents taught us to have certain beliefs about the Dutch, and if you know anything about Apartheid you will know that none of these beliefs were positive. My life was transformed when none of the Dutch I met at I-House were what my elders said. So, my decision to send the African students to the Netherlands was based on the belief that if the next generations learn that the past is certainly in the past, then there is a brighter future for the global citizens. If I went to young people and shared my stories, I am not likely to succeed in convincing them about how the Dutch actually are. However, if I give them the opportunity to experience the nation themselves, then the change will come from within.
Reporter: Thank you madam. This interview took a very unexpected turn, and I must admit this has really got me thinking.

Conclusion:

Life is certainly about the choices we make. We make choices from a young age, minor choices, but there comes a time when we are constantly making life changing and impactful decisions. We make choices in our personal and professional lives, and the choices we make reflect who we are deep within and what we desire the most. Our past experiences affect the choices we make negatively or positively.

I am very certain that I will have an international career, and I am also certain that I will become one of the key decision makers in my field. My hope is that I stay true to these experiences I have had at I-House. I hope that I always remember the laughs at the dining hall, the shared coffee during coffee hour, the shared cultures at Spring Fest, the shared frustrations in the laundry room, and the shared talents at Sunday supper. These past 2 years have revolutionized my international perspective and I will always be grateful for this opportunity to live at the International House.