

my trip to... ICMDA – never a lonely moment

Olivia Abrams reports on the 17th ICMDA World Congress

But thanks be to God, who always leads us as captives in Christ's triumphal procession and uses us to spread the aroma of the knowledge of him everywhere.

(2 Corinthians 2:14)



what even is a World Congress?

This may be a question you are asking and is definitely one I mused over during my journey to Arusha, Tanzania – perhaps something I should have considered before this point. I was attending what I had described to my nearest and dearest as an 'international Christian doctor conference thing', showing a worrying ignorance about exactly why I was boarding two planes, and travelling for 24 hours. My attendance itself is a testament both to the persuasive powers of CMF staff members, and the power of monetary bribes and a free holiday (the CMF student bursary, which covered my flights).

One accidentally deleted visa, three surprise first class upgrades, and 20,000 borrowed Tanzanian shillings later, I found myself seated in the plush, warmly lit main lecture hall of the Arusha International Conference Centre (AICC).

The International Christian Medical and Dental Association (ICMDA) is an umbrella organisation with a mission to 'start and strengthen national Christian medical and dental movements' across the world.¹ There are currently 107 countries with an ICMDA presence, 106 of which were represented in Arusha. Consequently, the gathering of people at the World Congress was a breathtaking witness to the power of the gospel in creating unity. I was struck from the first moment by the depth of relationships, both new and old, formed across geographical, cultural, and linguistic barriers. A particularly poignant demonstration of this was the breaking of bread together on the final day of the conference, as representatives of the global family of God.

There was never a lonely moment at the AICC. United in Christ, and with a passion for healthcare,



Olivia Abrams is a medical student in Birmingham



friendships were formed quickly and deeply, whether that be with your neighbour during a talk, your fellow diners at meals, discussion partners at seminars, elevator buddies, or surrounding loo queuers! During breaks, we eagerly discussed the challenges to faith and healthcare in our array of different home countries, encouraged each other in faith, prayed together, and at times cried together. I feel immensely grateful for every person I met at the World Congress. I was deeply encouraged by the living faith evident in so many of my brothers and sisters across the world, when it can sometimes feel like the gospel in the UK is suppressed and dwindling. At the same time, I was deeply convicted by the heavenly perspective of many of these same brothers and sisters, a light holding of material things which can be lacking in the UK – and is definitely lacking in my own life.

One of the highlights for me was my discussion group during the student conference (this took place for three days preceding the main conference) – a randomly allocated group of students who, between us, represented Namibia, Tanzania, Zimbabwe, Kenya, and the UK. I was mockingly referred to as ‘the first world’, a defunct term which implies global superiority of countries such as the UK.

Although terms like ‘first world’ and ‘third world’ have, thankfully, fallen from favour, I acknowledged how privileged I was in so many ways, as we discussed the state of healthcare, and the safety of Christians within our countries. Frankly, my outrage at the current junior doctor salaries in the UK were put into perspective when I was told that it is common for surgeons in Zimbabwe to buy their own equipment. Every member of my group was honest

and vulnerable about the challenges they had faced across their lives, many of which I could not even comprehend, and demonstrated an incredible love for God, and love for others in the face of adversity. I was humbled by their warm acceptance of me, their concern for the UK, and for my personal challenges, which I felt paled in comparison to theirs. I am so thankful for the laughter and common ground we were able to share as medical students, but more importantly, children of God. I am so grateful for this time, and the WhatsApp group we still use to share prayer requests.

Every morning in Arusha, we worshiped together, led by an incredible worship band and choir from the Tanzanian regional group, who were kindly hosting us all. This was a true highlight of our time together. We heard in the morning from Dr Voddie Baucham, who spoke about the theme of 'service', with a different focus every morning, including endurance, joy, faith, vocation, compassion, and passion.

In the afternoons, we attended seminars of our choosing, picked from an almost impossibly long list of options, before meeting together again late in the afternoon. Lunch was provided, and often dinner and evening entertainment; for example, the incredible international talent show, which showcased the vast number of cultures represented – my camera roll is full of wonderful clips.

All the talks were incredible, and I learned so much from every single one of them. As I re-read my notes to write this article, I have been struck anew by the many wonderful biblical truths conveyed. One talk that has particularly stayed with me is Florence Muindi's 'Transformational Ministry'. A roller coaster of challenge and encouragement, humbly using her own experiences as an example, she reminded us of our commission to make disciples, the power we have to do this through the Holy Spirit in us, and in our constant access to God through prayer. Dr Muindi also warned us about the dangers of earthly comfort and security. In all this, she reminded us of the eternal hope we have, in light of which all earthly joys pale in comparison, liberating us to serve Jesus as he calls. Wow!



so, what even is a World Congress?

I still don't know what it means. I do know, however, that in Arusha I met with brothers and sisters from across the world. We built friendships, had fellowship, worshiped together, encouraged each other, laughed together, celebrated each other's cultures, ate good food, and most importantly, learned more about Jesus with and through one another. We learned how we can serve him using medicine, both at home, and across the globe – and it was transformative.

See you in South Korea 2026! ▀

The 18th ICMDA World Congress will be held in Jeju Island, South Korea in Summer 2026. More details can be found at icmda.net/worldcongress, where you can also see more testimony and pictures from Arusha, and watch many of the talks.