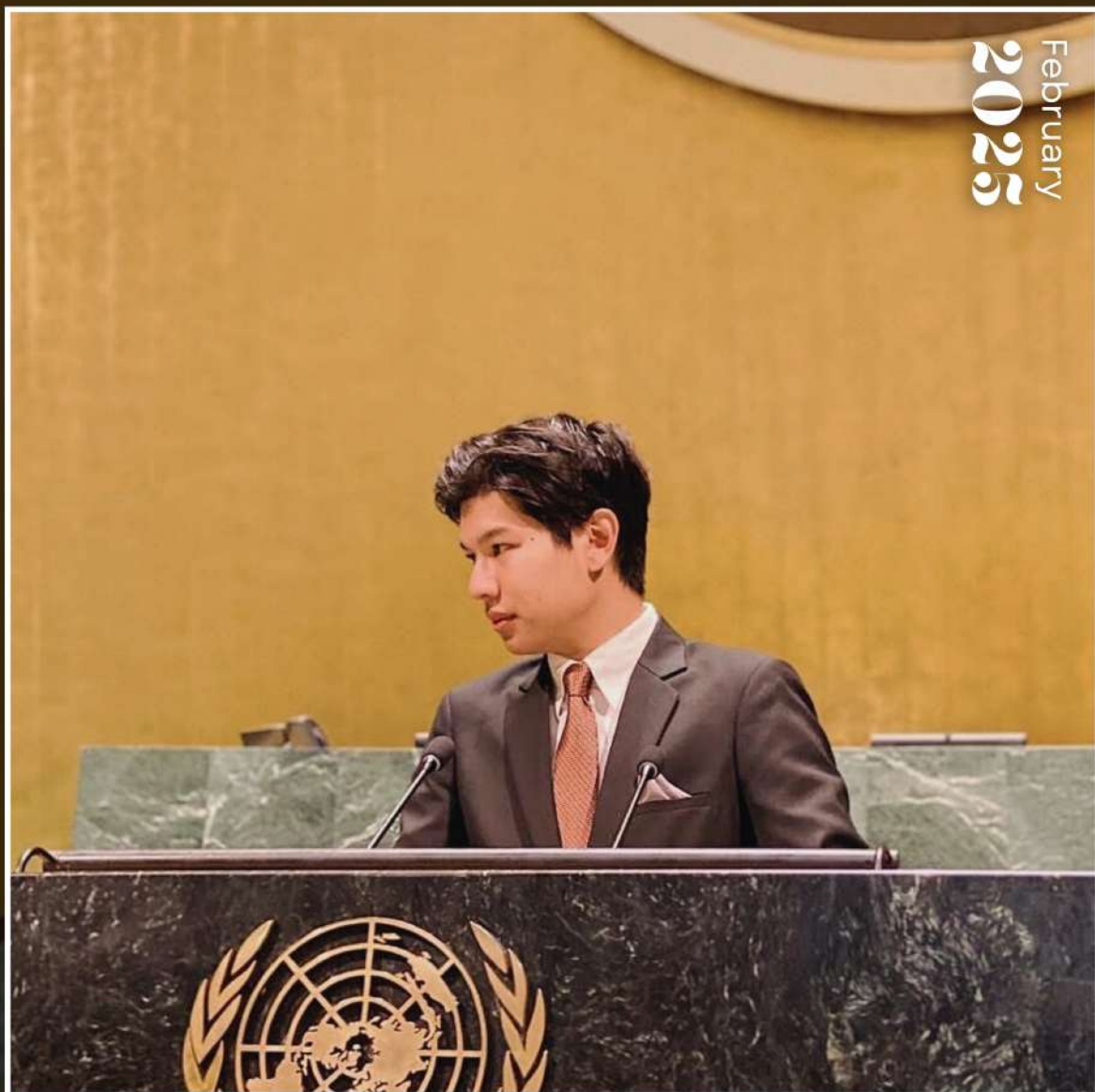


CRAFTING

A CAREER IN DIPLOMACY



Mr. Karin Kunjara Na Ayudhya

MUIC Class of 2013

Major: Social Science

Position: Diplomat at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs



I've been a diplomat for 10 years, mostly working in the multilateral space with organizations like ASEAN and the UN. My focus has been on international security, disarmament, politics, and human rights, but I've also dipped into diplomatic protocol work. Before becoming a diplomat, I worked as a social worker advocating for children's rights and interned at Mahidol University's President's Office and the UN ESCAP's Gender Section. I graduated from MUIC in 2013, then went on to the London School of Economics for a Master's in Political Sociology, which I completed in 2014. Currently, I'm First Secretary in the ASEAN Department, where I lead a team of younger diplomats working on everything from human rights and conflict resolution to nuclear non-proliferation and transnational crime. It's been quite the journey, lots of learning, challenges, and plenty of opportunities to make a difference!



What initially inspired you to pursue a career in international relations, and how did your experiences at MUIC further solidify that path?

My interest in social science grew from living abroad and shadowing my dad on his overseas assignments. Seeing different cultures fascinated me, but it was in India—where I witnessed inequality firsthand, that everything clicked. I realized how much politics shapes societies, and I wanted to understand how power works and impacts people. I chose MUIC because of its focus on global perspectives and its diverse community, which felt like the perfect fit for my interests. It gave me the chance to dive deeper into these issues and solidified my decision to pursue a career in international relations.



Could you walk us through a typical day or week in your role as a diplomat?

A typical day for a diplomat is never the same, but it usually starts with catching up on the news, reading cables from our embassies abroad, and attending internal meetings to align on ongoing projects. I often meet with government officials, key players in various sectors, or diplomats from other countries to discuss important issues. Afternoons are spent drafting reports, writing talking points for high-level officials, or preparing for speeches. Evenings typically involve attending receptions or networking events, though sometimes I'm called upon for crisis management. My week can look completely different if I'm traveling abroad to attend meetings, give speeches, negotiate key agreements, or make courtesy calls to foreign ministries. It's a dynamic role that requires both flexibility and adaptability.



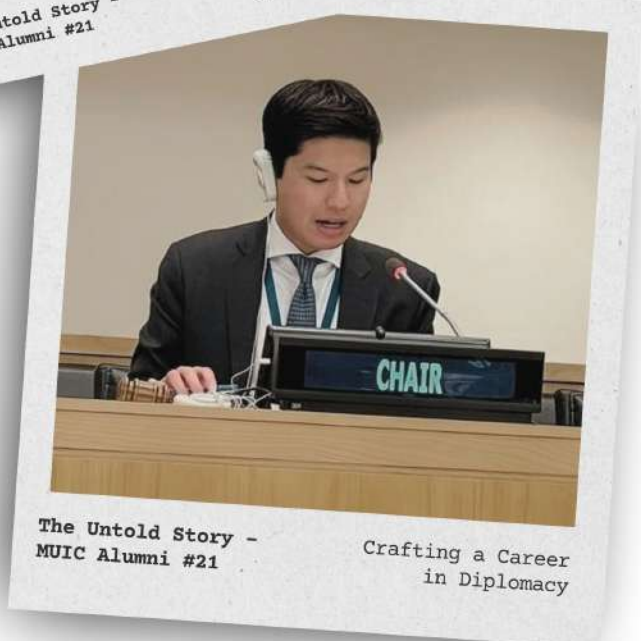
The Untold Story -
MUIC Alumni #21

Crafting a Career
in Diplomacy

From your experience, what are the important qualities a diplomat should possess?

You need to be quick on your feet, able to shift gears and adapt to new challenges, whether you're negotiating a complex deal or dealing with an unexpected crisis. Clear, persuasive communication is key, but it's the ability to listen, understand, and connect on a deeper level that really makes an impact. At the same time, emotional intelligence is

essential, understanding how to read the room, manage tension, and stay calm under pressure allows you to navigate the tricky terrain of diplomacy with grace. It's not just about talking the talk; it's about making meaningful connections and solving problems when it matters most.



The Untold Story -
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Have there been any unexpected challenges or changes in your career? How did you adapt and overcome them?

A tough moment was when I was posted in New York City, right when the city became the epicenter of COVID. The isolation and work restrictions were challenging, with travel bans and in-person meetings put on hold. I had to adapt quickly to remote work, adjusting to virtual meetings and handling diplomatic tasks from a distance. Staying connected with family was harder too, with time zone differences and travel limitations. But I leaned into local networks and made the most of the situation. Ultimately, the experience was a unique one that taught me a lot about resilience, flexibility, and finding new ways to stay engaged and effective in the face of unexpected challenges.



How do you maintain a work-life balance in a demanding profession like diplomacy?

Balancing work and life in diplomacy is always a challenge, especially when posted abroad. While the job demands a lot of attention, I make sure to prioritize my family—my wife and young daughter. The key is finding that balance—being fully present with them when I'm home and focused on my work when I'm at the embassy. It's a constant juggling act, but I wouldn't have it any other way.

How was your student life at MUIC, and how did it shape your career path?

My time at MUIC was a great mix of meaningful studies and some pretty cool experiences outside the classroom. Running for student body president wasn't just about winning votes—it taught me how to lead, compromise, and manage different opinions. The MUIC scholarship to study in the US for a term opened my eyes to a whole new side of international relations and gave me a better understanding of how the world works. As MU's First International Relations Ambassador, I got to attend ASEAN youth activities in Brunei, which was a hands-on crash course in diplomacy and regional cooperation. All of this, along with the lively and diverse campus life, helped me figure out that diplomacy was the path I wanted to follow.



How did the university help you develop soft skills such as teamwork, leadership, or communication?

The diverse makeup of the school really pushed me to navigate different perspectives and connect with people from all walks of life. Whether it was collaborating on projects or just hanging out with classmates from different countries and backgrounds, I had to learn how to blend in, adapt, and build relationships. It taught me how to communicate effectively across cultures, listen deeply, and appreciate different viewpoints—skills that are crucial in diplomacy. It wasn't just about academic learning, but also about understanding others and forming connections that go beyond surface-level interactions.



How can a student interested in diplomacy best prepare themselves for a career in this field, both academically and professionally? What advice would you give to current students considering this path?



If you're dreaming of a career in diplomacy, go big and get ready. Dive into history, keep up with global events, and stay curious. Join debate clubs or student government to sharpen your leadership and negotiation skills. Intern with international organizations to see how things work in the real world. Learn new languages, go on exchange programs, and connect with people from different backgrounds, it'll broaden your perspective. And don't forget to surround yourself with mentors and like-minded friends, they'll help guide you along the way.

MOTTO:

"What you understand today shapes what you'll do tomorrow."

"Grow through what you go through."



Karin Kunjara

DIPLOMAT AT THE MINISTRY OF
FOREIGN AFFAIRS



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