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Columbia World Affairs Council Merges with Columbia Council for Internationals

*The merger expands regional capacities to host international leaders & students
and to connect with more American professionals & families in the Midlands*

Columbia, S.C. (February 12, 2025)—The Columbia World Affairs Council (CWAC) announces a merger with the Columbia Council for Internationals (CCFI). The merger will expand operational resources and capabilities, while maintaining quality and continuity for welcoming international visitors and students to the Midlands region of South Carolina.

With the merger, CWAC assumes responsibility for CCFI’s extant programs and staff, namely its International Visitor Leadership Program (IVLP), the U.S. Department of State’s foundational professional exchange program, and will be designated by the U.S. Department of State as the Midlands affiliate to host IVLP and other programs administered by the national organization, Global Ties U.S. Sewell Gelberd will continue on as International Visitor Program Director, as will CCFI’s international student support programs.

Since 1965, CCFI has welcomed international visitors and students to Columbia. The all-volunteer, nonprofit organization has been devoted to promoting global understanding and international relationships by connecting international students and visitors with American professionals and families in the Midlands.

“For 60 years CCFI has served to enrich our community and thousands of distinguished international leaders and students visiting Columbia through professional, educational, and cultural programs,” said Jim Byrum, International Committee Chair of CCFI’s Board of Directors. “CCFI has worked closely with CWAC for many years and now we are thrilled to find succession and continuity of our work in our merger with the Columbia World Affairs Council. Together, we will lead valuable public diplomacy efforts into the future.”

From its start, CWAC has collaborated with and supported CCFI’s mission. In recent years, the two nonprofits have worked closely to expand the capacity and quality of their IVLP projects. Now, CWAC is committed to maintain the continuity and quality of their programming efforts along with Gelberd, Byrum, former CCFI Treasurer Pat Lawter, and their team of volunteers.

The new leadership will expand the dedicated staff and volunteers who can leverage CWAC's global network to increase the resources and reach of programs for international visitors and students.

“We applaud CCFI's decades of service to the Midlands and are honored to take the helm of public diplomacy programs enriching the lives of both our community and visitors,” said CWAC Executive Director Dickson Monk. “Our historic close relationship with CCFI, and now the integration of our excellent teams combined with CWAC's network and resources, ensures the quality and capacity of our international visitor programs will only increase in the years to come. The exponential cultural and economic impact of these programs on our local community, as well as pursuing the goal of international peace and security, cannot be overly emphasized.”

International Visitor Program Director Sewell Gelberd can be contacted at a new email address, sgelberd@columbiaworldaffairs.org, or by the same phone number as before, 803.678.8489. Messages sent to his previous email, columbia.ccfi@gmail.com, will be forwarded to the new address.

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About the Columbia World Affairs Council:

Founded in 1993, the Columbia World Affairs Council is a nonpartisan, nonprofit providing global education programming and innovative international exchanges to the Midlands region of South Carolina. The Council administers the City of Columbia's sister city relationships and is a partner to its Office of Economic Development. Beyond the city, the Council works closely with county and state agencies, universities and colleges, businesses, public-private alliances, and other nonprofits to act as a center for international development in the region. Nationally, the Council is a member organization of the World Affairs Councils of America, Sister Cities International, and Global Ties U.S. For more information, visit columbiaworldaffairs.org.