This year’s Global Health Conference, organised by the Australian Medical Students’ Association, was hosted by the University of Tasmania in Hobart, under the theme “Smalls Steps, Big Picture”. This theme embodies the nature of the global health movement, which requires global participation and empowerment in order to reach common goals. Desmond Tutu, Archbishop Emeritus of Cape Town, summed up this approach in his directive; “Do your little bit of good where you are: It’s those little bits of good put together that overwhelm the world.” With these thoughts in mind, hundreds of likeminded medical students from around Australia and New Zealand descended on Hobart in July 2010 seeking to learn from those who have gone before us, who are now experts in their fields and still passionately seeking to improve health in various ways around the world.

The academic programme featured many renowned speakers from around Australia, including Senator Dr Bob Brown, Associate Professor Ngaire Brown, Dr Helen Caldicott and Reverend Tim Costello AO. The keynote presentations covered various pressing topics ranging from climate change and the threat of nuclear war, to Indigenous health and child and maternal health in the developing world.

With the support of the Faculty of Medicine, Nursing and Health Sciences, I was privileged to be a part of this inspiring conference, which challenged my thinking on a number of issues and encouraged me to dedicate myself to working for those in need. In addition to the impressive keynote presentations, I was particularly inspired by the smaller presentations by a number of Australian doctors who had devoted a significant amount of time volunteering with organisations such as Médecins Sans Frontières or working with refugees living in Australia.

A medical education is a fantastic stepping stone, equipping students with skills which enable us to reach out to those in need. Events such as the Global Health Conference provide students with a glimpse of the big picture; what the needs are, how to work towards meeting them and how to advocate for change.