First S’porean on top-level YMCA panel

BY CHERYL ONG

A SINGAPOREAN has earned himself the distinction of being the first person from his country to be elected to the highest representative body of the YMCA (Young Men’s Christian Association) youth movement, with the highest number of votes to boot.

Undergraduate Oliver Loke, 23, won the election held in Hong Kong on July 23 to join the YMCA World Alliance committee, which oversees about 45 million young members in 130 countries.

With 140 votes from the 150 voting members of the council, more than the 31 other candidates from all over the world, he was ushered into the highest level of the YMCA, a 108-year-old voluntary welfare organisation that champions youth causes and volunteerism.

YMCA of Singapore president Stephen Loh hopes Mr Loke’s appointment will encourage more Singaporean youth to get involved in such causes. “With Oliver’s wealth of experience, excellent leadership capabilities and passion to improve the lives of the less privileged, we believe that he will contribute effectively to the mission and vision of the YMCA movement at the international level,” he said.

For the next four years, Mr Loke will serve as an executive committee member representing the Asia-Pacific region in the global youth movement, and oversee the development of youth leadership and how resources like money and volunteers should be utilised.

Mr Loke said he was surprised by the amount of support, even though he expected to be elected to the committee – he was the only nominee from the Asia-Pacific region.

“It’s quite daunting, I find myself overwhelmed by what the YMCA can do in a world with so much conflict,” he said. “We have to address not just issues at the world level, but those on the local and community level as well.”

Currently a third-year business undergraduate at the Singapore Management University, Mr Loke said he first got involved in volunteerism when he was in the Boys’ Brigade at Anglo-Chinese School (Independent).

His friends later urged him to develop his interest in serving the community by joining the YMCA in 2008. The past two years have seen him ascend the ranks in the organisation to chair the committee representing 27 countries in the Asia-Pacific region.

Mr Loke has clear goals he wants to achieve in the international committee, one of which is to make the century-old organisation more relevant to youth today.

“We need a paradigm shift in the way we look at community service. We should not think of it as a service, but an act of social responsibility when we reach out and volunteer. It’s about compassion.”