It was extremely inspiring to attend the High Level Forum at the International Maritime Organization’s headquarters in London on May 15th, 2018. The morning was spent learning about the history of the organization, the work that has been done during the last 70 years and the role of the IMO in the future. Throughout the course of the day, I kept hearing key words that have been surrounding discussions within the maritime industry for the past few years. These words included: change, growth, impact and sustainability. Many of the panelists elaborated on these topics and discussed the heavy regulations that are forcing the maritime companies to reevaluate their operations and environmental footprint. Among many of the initiatives, the IMO is working diligently to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and the transfer of invasive species through ballast water. Several ideas and strategies were presented, and I enjoyed learning about new concepts being utilized from other industries, such as aviation, to help propel the industry forward.
During the High Level Forum and discussions about the future of the industry, I couldn’t help but look around the main hall and notice the lack of youth in the room. The debate did take several questions from the live Twitter feed from people listening to the discussion all around the globe, but the presence in the room was high level, consisting of heads of state and representations from ministries around the world. I saw a few cadets in their dress white uniforms, but they were visiting as guests from their maritime institutions and did not have a stakeholder position or formal role. As the IMO is a specialized organization within the United Nations, it is essential that the next generation has a role in the future policies being developed. Therefore, I want to start a non-profit for youth and young professionals in the maritime industry who want to make an impact and drive change to contribute to the necessary advancement of the maritime world. This High Level Forum solidified how necessary it is to have a platform for those who want to work on solving the most complex challenges in the maritime industry and have a seat at the table during high level meetings. I believe that it is essential to have a multidisciplinary approach and a wide array of experience and ideas to make change and impact.
I was able to meet many admirable contacts during the networking session and at the closing reception. During the closing reception, I was able to talk to the Secretary-General of the IMO, Mr. Kitack Lim. It was truly an honor to meet him and to discuss how critical it is for youth and young professionals to become involved in the future of shipping. I also met Ms. Despina Theodosiou, CEO of Toteitheo Maritime and President of WISTA (Women’s International Shipping and Trading Association). We had a long discussion about women in the maritime industry and the importance of mentorships and opportunities to attend conferences, workshops and other career building events. I told her more about my idea for a maritime non-profit centered around youth involvement in the future of the industry. She was amazed as well that the crowd gathered at the forum on the future of shipping did not have many youth and young professionals. We also discussed some of the challenges surrounding the maritime industry right now, including emission control standards and autonomous shipping. It was a wonderful conversation and I look forward to working with her, and many others, to build a global platform that will support access to high level conferences to present research, fellowships, internships, webinars and accelerator programs that will connect innovators and investors to solve the most pressing issues in the maritime community. I look forward to working with many of those contacts to establish the non-profit and to continue my passion for advancing the maritime industry.