

## **A New Utopia: Promoting Dialogue for a Humane and Sustainable Society**

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### **Harmony: Adoration for Peace, People and Nature.**

Do we live in a Dystopian time? Superficially, it may seem like it but we must use history as a basis of comparison. Although we are liberated from the darkness of the World Wars, the Middle East and mock-cold wars make us read the news daily with an uncertain gaze. Every poignant revolution is overhung by clouds of bloodshed and chaos but hope often follows as observable changes and improved conditions. Transformation is often painful but by focusing on active citizenship we aim to reach Utopia.

Today's millennials are widely criticized for their vices and vain but their virtues are sometimes overlooked. Like any other century or era, this one is painted in shades of grey, a spectrum ranging from the ghastly to the gorgeous. For example, global warming exists, but the goodness of international solidarity can also be seen. Thus when the Donald Trump led US government separated 2,300 children from their parents after crossing the Southern U.S. border, there was widespread outrage and sympathy across the US and the world and eventually the government was forced to reverse their policy. In contrast, Canada pursued an open-door policy, welcoming refugees from the war-ravaged Middle East. Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's administration admitted close to 40,000 Syrian refugees, offering them a stable and safe future in an increasingly uncertain and terror-stricken world.

Though much maligned by right-wing politics, immigrants contribute tremendously to human capital and often increase the real GDP. The Conference Board of Canada believes that raising Canada's current annual

intake of 300,000 immigrants could greatly help Canadians overcome the mounting challenges posed by an aging population and low birth rate, thereby alleviating stagnation in the employed sector. This may also be the reality that prompted Germany's benevolent support for refugees, which is both an example of economic pragmatism as well as philanthropy. Although Chancellor Angela Merkel's actions sparked off controversy and backlash, the economic benefits were evident too. Letting refugees in boosts economies, especially the ones veering towards the dreary grip of stagnation with aging retired populations and decreasing birth rates. Indeed this may explain the softer stance that many West European countries have taken over Middle East refugees recently, an unmistakably humane approach, true to the spirit of lending a helping hand. The spirit of a Welfare State for them extends not only to their own State, also to people globally. In some poor countries, the financial contributions that migrants send home exceed development aid received and contribute largely to the country's revenues. Additionally, raising employment of migrants, raises fiscal transactions and levels with other countries, frequently offering a boom to trade.

While today the refugees head to the West, it would be interesting to note that in the past, several Asian countries played this altruistic role, acting as safe havens for persecuted populations. Countries like India offered refuge to communities like the Jews, shielding them from Anti-Semitism in the 16<sup>th</sup> century and Parsees who presented themselves along the Gujarat coast. Opposition to large scale immigration often boils down to the question, "Does immigration erode native culture?" The answer to that is indeed complex and can be divisive. On the one hand, Culture is ambiguous, always evolving and immigrants are usually microscopic in numbers when compared to the size of existing native population. They may be seen as windows to different cultures. Historically, composite cultures flourished producing fascinating art, food, philosophies, architecture etc. which is now cherished. Thus immigrants may be seen as a resource, economic and cultural. But this often depends on ideas of tolerance and universal brotherhood which should be implanted at the

grassroot level, right from childhood, through socialization and a humanist education.

That brings us to Human rights which are absolutely essential as the foundation of humanitarianism, the absolute acknowledgement of independent needs of an individual that demand respect. Compliance with human rights should be the core of any society. In democracies, minority representation should be fortified and instead of marginalizing dissidents, the pillars of freedom to express must be upheld. A worrying issue is heavy censorship, propaganda and the fear to express. In a democracy, the freedom of expression is indispensable should be revered and collectively fostered. Journalists like Jamal Khashoggi should be esteemed for their service to upholding truth and audacity to honor revelations, rather than be silenced

Women constitute a half of humanity that are often the victims of violations, widespread misogyny and rape. Their human rights are repeatedly denied and they are subjected to innumerable humiliations often justified by religious customs cultural taboos that perpetrate a subservient stereotype. The need of the hour is to embrace feminism or egalitarianism that guarantees fundamental human rights, shatters patriarchy, fights apprehensions and uplifts women and men alike to invoke their truest potential without being intimidated by societal constraints. Again socialization and education, with the backing of legal mechanisms, are tools to reiterate the importance of consent, gender sensitivity and respect for everyone across the spectrum. Sexist language, jokes and behavioral patterns that are immersed in stereotypes and obsolete cultural narratives need to be changed with mindfulness, heartfelt activism, patience and determination. We wish to see a world wherein genital mutilation, human trafficking and sexual abuse are unknown. In spite of disheartening news, I beacons of light, with feminism spreading to the most unlikely places, Saudi Arabia included. Women like Nadia Murad present to us a resilience that galvanizes the activist within.

“Poverty is the greatest form of Violence”, indeed, Impoverishment is more than lack of money. It effects the social fabric, increases crime, impacts health, reduces productivity, crushes the human spirit and denies potential. Often its impact is most crippling to the already marginalized; minorities, children, women and the aged. Even the smallest contribution has an impact, in our individual or national capacity, we can commence by simply controlling consumption, avoiding wastage of food and promoting sustainability. Statistically, 1/3<sup>rd</sup> of the food around the world gets wasted, keeping this gigantic number in mind, responsible consumption is crucial. To alleviate poverty and starvation, a system that facilitates equitable distribution of wealth globally should be adopted and adapted, tailored to the needs of every country. Regions susceptible to famines, prone to natural disasters and struggling countries should be balanced by the surplus resources of low-density, developed nations.

Economic growth should aim beyond boosting the Gross Domestic Product. Emphasis should be on holistic development, harnessing skills, inclusive employment, equity in opportunity and welfare. This inevitably brings us to another large arena: education. Education traverses far beyond just employment or just academics. It should empower people to think critically, examine prevailing practices, develop a world view, harness humanist attitude and strengthen their skill sets. Mental health education, liberal and objective sexual education should be imparted. The Utopian objective is to raise individuals who are more enlightened towards their own feelings and actions as well as others. A tall order indeed which requires altruistic investment, will and effort.

Education Cannot Wait, a recently created global fund for education in crisis situations, is an excellent pole star. Several thousand children are equipped with the ability to study in places like the Lake Chad Basin, severely dilapidated due to environmental degradation and Boko Haram terrorism. A school even in deeply disturbed countries must be a sheltered place for children to experience joy, play and learn.

An ideal world also demands supportive and curative healthcare for all. Ironically the largest health casualties worldwide are due to diarrhea, maternal complications, lack of nutrition and water and other such basic and preventable challenges. Again women and children, refugees and minorities are often the victims as health resources become weapons of neglect. According to the UN, “Globally, adolescent girls and young women face gender-based inequalities, exclusion, discrimination and violence, which put them at increased risk of acquiring HIV.” The reality of people below the poverty line is that their emphasis is not on nutrition or good health- the solitary concern is simply survival. UNICEF shows that 28% of female students do not attend school when on their periods due to the unavailability of hygienic absorbent materials. This results in the “ripple effect”, caused by them dropping out of schools, such as girls being cajoled into child labour, child marriages and trafficking.

For example, the standard of living in India is a mixture of disparities. Rural areas are ravaged with narrow access to health facilities, whereas metropolitans boast world class standards. Poor knowledge of vaccinations is a major hurdle to immunization in India. Conducting vaccination drives for cognizance of immunization is vital. Giving incentives such as free health check-ups, subsidized medicines and nutrition information could be a game changer. It could also help create a tremendous research base for prevalent diseases and underlying causes, thereby being a compass for ascertaining the direction of research. We should, as a society, urge our leaders to expedite the required changes right for furthering facilities right from social healthcare to the accessibility of information and availability of services.

Climate change-related hazards are another serious concern that affects everyone. But while some sections of society may buffer themselves with bottled water, air filters and air-conditioning, we must ask ourselves how long can we hold back the damage and what about those who cannot. Tackling climate change and global poverty is imperative. “Developing countries have 98% of the seriously affected and 99% of

all deaths from weather-related disasters, along with over 90% of the total economic losses, while the 50 Least Developed Countries contribute less than 1% of global carbon emissions.

The Paris Climate Agreement ignites promises and the likelihood of blissful restoration. According to the UNFCCC, “The Paris Agreement’s central aim is to strengthen the global response to the threat of climate change by keeping a global temperature rise this century well below 2 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels and to pursue efforts to limit the temperature increase even further to 1.5 degrees Celsius.” “To reach these ambitious goals, appropriate mobilization and provision of financial resources, a new technology framework and enhanced capacity-building is to be put in place.”

To empower citizens free and fair elections and voting must be encouraged. Hence it is the unspoken duty of the international community to aid countries like Somalia, Democratic Republic of Congo and Afghanistan to reconstitute themselves, one step at a time. The International community must recognize that coexistence is an important aspect of peace and security: not only with respect to diplomatic relations between sovereign states but also border resolutions and freedom from racism. To encapsulate, a Utopia upholds Humanitarianism and Love; not only for one’s own kin but also for the truth and justice. We would practice altruism, actively embodying the greatest gift we as human beings possess, empathy.

We must protect human rights, combat climate change, amplify unity through community ties and conserving our culture. By adoration for peace, people and nature maybe we can channel our universal energy to mitigate misery and for once become a more sustainable and humane global family.