

2023 International Essay Contest for Young People

【Youth Category – Honorable Mention】

## **The Bonsai Tree of Hope**

(Original)

*Zaki Hafizh Zen*

*(Age 16, Indonesia)*

*SMA Progresif Bumi Shalawat, Jawa Timur*

2018 Sunday. I was ecstatic to get off the mind-numbing and exhausting activity of studying. I woke up early so I got more time to relax and do more fun activities. After showering and having breakfast, I rushed to my room, got on my laptop, and opened the internet. I was ready to watch my favorite YouTuber and laugh at their funny commentary. But as I opened Chrome, I saw it. Surabaya, my city, my hometown where I was born, got bombed in 5 different places. When I saw that news, I could not believe it.

My inner voice spoke, "This is a joke, right?"

I scrolled down and continued to read the article. My heart sank. It could not be further from the truth. Finishing the article, I felt unsafe in this world I am living in. I knew about all the horrific news delivered each day about war and conflict happening in the world. But with the bombing of my city, the uncertainty about my safety in my home was getting real.

"Am I safe?" I question myself.

Safe from the horrors of war, the despair of poverty, and the brutality of terrorism. All of those victims did not know that on that same day: they would die.

Misfortune and threatening situations can happen to anyone, anytime, and any place. This can explain because those people that are able and willing to do this act are also everywhere. You might think these people are just evil, like an outlaw, and have no purpose but do this evil act for the sake of it. However, these people do not act without a cause. There is always a reason behind every action, war, terrorism, and crime. Most people are not attentive to their stories because they hate them for what they did. But we need to

understand what makes these people tick to prevent more of these people created.

To think these people that act on the dark side of their human nature are reasonable is absurd. Starving people eat, thirsty people drink, and exhausted people sleep. The dominant reason these people are the way they are is that they experience evil throughout their life, some are still in their younger years, and some are already in their later years. People like them do not know how to process their emotions going through that experience. As a result, they express it negatively. They use evil to gain what they want, whether a burglar stealing to support their family, criminals using violence to entertain themselves, or a president starting a war for a political foothold. Their illness is invisible, preventing them from seeking help. Thus, people surrounding them cannot help and even know their loved one is sick.

As we know the reason behind their deeds, what can we do? Can we change their behavior? Can we fix their destructive behavior when we do not know who they might be because the nature of their illness is less noticeable compared to a physical wound?

The solution is not to fix the old generation that is far beyond repair but to shape the new generation. Think of the elder as a massive old tree. They have a canopy growing above, shrouding what is underneath as their ignorance of the people below them. They have strong trunks that are almost immovable as their hubris and unchangeable mentality. They have roots spreading everywhere like a virus taking every inch of water as their greed. Then, we have the future generation. We have a sapling. We can shape them to be better and put them in a pot to guide their roots like a moral compass. They have a smaller canopy to share the sunshine. This sapling will grow into a bonsai that will be better, more sympathetic, and more virtuous. They will give to the poor so they will not become criminals and respect others' religions so they will not have conflict and terrorism. They are the key to a promising future because they are our future. So, let us not fear and hate them but cherish them just as you would a bonsai.