

2023 International Essay Contest for Young People

【Youth Category – Honorable Mention】

## Peace Is Us

(Original)

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*Peace is not the absence of silence. Peace is the silence of chaos.*

Peace is for the buried. Peace is up to the living. Peace values souls' harmony. Peace lies in the differences. Peace is in religion.

Christianity, Judaism, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Islam. Where one has to eat at one, has to wear a hat for another, touch the feet of a third, be quiet for the fourth, and has to wear a scarf and wash hands for the last one. Go to sanctuaries for answers but find more questions. Is it because we seek answers and not faith .....not peace?

War, discrimination, and prejudice are the unflinching cause of violence, but we humans are the flinching seeds of violence. The habit of competing against own friends because the winner can be the only one leads to the nature of refusing to coexist with different races, and the seed of discrimination is born. The habit of declaring one religion superior over the other religions and not letting the chance to learn and explore crawls to the nature of the declaration of other faiths being wrong, and the seed of war is born. The habit of ridiculing someone over their living conditions, practices, and dressing and not breaking this cycle of ridicule shapes the nature of never accepting people for who they are, and the seed of prejudice is born. *This all starts with us not molding young minds and letting misleading habits become second nature to them in adult life; hence, the notion of peace remains using violence to make people bend.*

When I volunteered for the SOS Children's Village Pakistan for three months, among other work-related things, I had to organize with fellow volunteers the 11th annual one-day community project event *Smile for a While* for the orphans. Forming a small amicable community of volunteers working equally, it was the power of togetherness as we came up

with ideas of different arts, music, performances, and other activities to make it a memorable event for the children. Before agreeing I did not think about the early mornings on weekends I had to serve or the late nights I had to commit to on weekdays. That for weeks I will only have thirty minutes of break in-between university and reaching the orphanage to organize the event, how numb my fingers would be by the end of the night by making every single thing from scratch, how hard the fundraising would be, and not to let my tiredness of the day dampen the children around me. Above all, I did not know that working for the happiness and peace of people other than myself would make it all worth it. It was not until I was leaving by the end of the successful event that *Zainab* (an orphan living in the SOS village) stopped me and said, *"You are my favorite Api (elder sister)."*

I was stunned, my eyes watered. I like to think maybe it was my commitment to work or my personality, but I will never know why because till now, Zainab has not told me why I was out of all the volunteers her favorite. Peace lies in the eyes of the seeker and alters according to the perception. Why? Because starving people will eat anything and accept anything. In that moment, I realized that selflessness felt soothing, and this was peace for me.

What we fail to understand is that peace is not just the end of war, it is the end of selfishness. We lack diversified indulgence because particular people of particular regions serve their people, solve their problems only. What about the rest of the regions who lack resources, lack plans, lack volunteers, and lack platforms for their voices to be heard? We need to work towards cultural diplomacy, non-governmental channels of communication so we can foster people-to-people interactions, cut out rigidity and listen to ideas, and work towards different societal norms so nothing is hidden behind closed doors.

*Learn to be selfless, indiscriminately.*