

2023 International Essay Contest for Young People

【Youth Category – Honorable Mention】

## **Hand in Hand for a Peaceful Tomorrow**

(Original)

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If I were a Norwegian, a Swede, a Finn, or a Dane, I would imagine a peaceful world as a place where every human is content in their being, where the depths of every heart are clean enough to be revealed, where no language other than kindness is known, and where love and understanding form everlasting bonds.

But I am in Pakistan, and this painting of paradise is as far to my vision as the paradise itself.

When I step out of the house, I see lifeless entities. I see 5-year-olds searching the garbage cans, drifting their fingers through dirty plastic bags to see if any food remnants have remained. Some are older and aware, facing a greater plight due to the ignorant bliss they no longer have.

I see laborers, janitors, waitstaff, greeters, and cobblers with the weight of the world reflected on their faces, as they contemplate the choices they will have to make at the end of the day. Will it be clothes for their kids or medicine for themselves? A meal beyond routine quantity or health aid for aging parents?

They do want to rest. They do want to see the wonders God placed on this earth to be seen. But were they to do so, they might not be able to afford the next meal.

They are told that being born poor is not their fault, but dying poor will be. They are advised to upskill themselves and break free from their circumstances. They are encouraged to enroll their kids in school instead of subjecting them to child labor, to save future generations from this blight.

Someone among them tried to do so. He worked extra hours and managed to send his child to a public school. However, the child consistently underperformed.

Soon, this child grew up into a man. Now, he is a father working 15 hours a day. Unlike his ancestors, his case is different. He believes he had a chance to improve his life, but he didn't seize it. He regrets not reproducing the exact text given in his grade-8 book to pass the exam, which was the sole criterion used to measure his ability and determine his eligibility for a better fate.

He lives, blaming himself, unaware of what passed him.

What passed him?

Who will assure him that it isn't his fault? That he was thrust into an unequal competition, where his peers had the advantage of educated parents, greater resources, and a clear vision of education's uplifting power. That his peers were not taught in a language they had never heard, as in Pakistan, the school curriculum is delivered in English, which is a foreign language to underprivileged children.

If you try telling him this, he would readily find another excuse to blame himself. Because one thing he has learnt for sure is that the education system judged everyone on the same scales. So, if he stayed still behind, he must know his place.

We, the young people, who are aware of this pattern, who are aware that breaking generational poverty is an uphill and unimaginable task, must acknowledge our responsibility to uplift them.

Merely bashing politicians on Twitter can make us a famous Twitterati, but it can do little to nothing in bringing about any tangible change.

To truly make a difference, we have to first cultivate empathy, respect, and compassion for those trapped in this cycle. We have to understand that instead of the privileges we are born into, we could have ended up in the house of a laborer, a mine worker, or an auto driver.

We have to educate their children. We have to enable them to learn, to earn, to live, and be alive again. Finance a child, if you can't, spare an hour a week to mentor him. If you can't, treat him with respect. Pass him a smile. That's kind. That's encouraging. That's needed.

To me, a peaceful world looks like the one in which no child ever regrets being born, where no one is ever looked down upon, where no father tries to find refuge in death, and where no human has to sacrifice his being for mere survival.