

2023 International Essay Contest for Young People
Results and 1st-3rd prize winning essays

Theme:
“Youth Creating a Peaceful Future”

The Goi Peace Foundation
www.goipeace.or.jp

October 31st, 2023

Congratulatory message for the 2023 International Essay Contest for Young People

I sincerely congratulate the Goi Peace Foundation on the success of the 2023 International Essay Contest for Young People.

I would like to express my profound respect and wholehearted gratitude for the great efforts and dedication of everyone who has helped to promote world peace and create sustainable societies and communities through diverse activities.

I learned that this year's contest received some 20,000 entries on the theme of "Youth Creating a Peaceful Future," from children and youth in 168 countries around the world.

My congratulations go to the two first prize winners, who have both received the Minister of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology Award, and to all the other prize winners.

For today's young people, who face an uncertain and unpredictable future, I believe it is important to continue refining their own values, by being exposed to diverse perspectives and deepening their sense of mutual understanding and respect.

I am aware that the International Essay Contest for Young People receives many wonderful essays each year. Through this initiative, I sincerely hope that young people from all over the world, who are tomorrow's leaders, can meet and interact with one another, helping to bring about world peace and the creation of sustainable societies and communities.

October 31st, 2023

FUJIWARA Akio

Vice Minister of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology of Japan

2023 International Essay Contest for Young People

List of Winners

Theme: "Youth Creating a Peaceful Future"

No. of participating countries: 168

No. of entries: 20,674 (Children's category: 6,922 / Youth category: 13,752)

*All ages are as of June 15, 2023.

1st Prize

Children's category (1 entrant)

- *NO HORRORS*
Chimamanda Kaitlyn Uzoechi
(Age 8, Nigeria)

Youth category (1 entrant)

- *The Power of Dreams*
Michiho Shimazaki (Age 17, Japan)

2nd Prize

Children's category (3 entrants)

- *Seeing Things from the Other Point of View*
Ayumi Kuroiwa (Age 13, Japan)
- *WE ARE COLOUR PALETTES*
Anelis Kristel Huarhuachi Quispe
(Age 14, Perú)
- *The Legacy of Loving the Next: Young People Transforming the World into a Better Place*
Marinna Laura Soares Azevedo
(Age 14, Brazil)

Youth category (3 entrants)

- *Here is My Peaceful World*
Feyisola Maria Bolarinwa
(Age 17, Nigeria)
- *700 Hundred Words About Peace*
Yan Korolev (Age 17, Belarus
<Living in Poland>)
- *Embracing Disparities for a Peaceful Tomorrow*
Haseeb Iqbal (Age 22, Pakistan)

3rd Prize

Children's category (5 entrants)

- *I'm only seven*
Sydor Yaroslav (Age 7, Ukraine)
- *For a Peaceful World*
Haruka Someya (Age 13, Japan)
- *What Is Justice?*
Soma Sagai (Age 14, Japan)

Youth category (5 entrants)

- *The Importance of Taking Down Barriers: Why We Mustn't Cling on to Labels*
Mizuki Hayakawa (Age 15, Japan)
- *Redefining our Institutions Through Love: The Youth's Path to Peace*
Ghena Kubba (Age 16, U.S.A.)

- *Entrust in Peace: Simple Acts*
Tanishka Aglave (Age 14, U.S.A.)
- *Changing Our Awareness for a Peaceful World*
Hayato Yuge (Age 15, Japan)
- *birthday cake candles*
Mira (Age 18, Belarus)
- *Cuius regio, eius religio?- From Blood-Stained Bridges to a Bright Future: Uniting Youth For Better Tomorrow*
Aiša Muhić (Age 20, Bosnia and Herzegovina)
- *Find Peace in Compassion*
Folasade Bolarinwa (Age 21, Nigeria)

Honorable Mention

Children's category (25 entrants)

- Naqiyyah Afrah (Age 6, Brunei)
- Riyo Nokami (Age 10, Japan
<Living in U.S.A.>)
- Qihang Chen (Age 11, China)
- Sinzogan Boris Prudent M. U. (Age 11, Benin)
- Cluoe Esthyrbelle G. Labrador (Age 12, Philippines)
- Crystal Kim (Age 12, South Korea)
- Kokoha Sato (Age 12, Japan)
- Rinka Hato (Age 12, Japan)
- Taiki Sasaki (Age 12, Japan)
- Tomoki Kamiya (Age 12, Japan)
- Hana Gollop (Age 13, Japan & U.K.
<Living in China>)
- Hisa Yamada (Age 13, Japan)
- Kayleigh Claire Go So (Age 13, Philippines)
- Noa Murashita (Age 13, Japan)
- Yuuki Sue (Age 13, Japan)
- Chloe Kim (Age 14, U.S.A.)
- Claire Tang (Age 14, U.S.A.)
- Diana Oshan (Age 14, Kazakhstan)
- Lim Enn Kii (Age 14, Malaysia & Taiwan
of China <Living in Japan>)
- Jessica Jubrail (Age 14, Jordan)
- Karin Daito (Age 14, Japan)

Youth category (25 entrants)

- Chit Khone Cho Thar (Age 15, Myanmar)
- Hyunjin Vicky Lee (Age 15, South Korea)
- Lujain Swaiss (Age 15, Jordan)
- Myat Thiri Zaw (Age 15, Myanmar)
- Honoka Inui (Age 16, Japan)
- Nil Mızraklı (Age 16, Türkiye)
- Rin Yanagisawa (Age 16, Japan)
- Yotsuba Tanaka (Age 16, Japan)
- Zaki Hafizh Zen (Age 16, Indonesia)
- Cecilia Trisollini Barrientos (Age 17, Perú)
- Michael Levie M. Alilio (Age 17, Philippines)
- Sachiko Aoki (Age 17, Japan)
- Saki Honda (Age 17, Japan)
- Shiori Nishida (Age 17, Japan)
- Tatyana Markevich (Age 17, Belarus)
- Angelica Wayneth Bernardo (Age 18, Philippines)
- Lamees Anza Khan (Age 18, Pakistan)
- Anastasiia Radutna (Age 20, Ukraine)
- Metsongmalem M Chang (Age 20, India)
- Lopamudra Ghosh (age 21, India)
- Noy Ben-Sade (Age 21, Israel)
- Hudda Amjad (Age 22, Pakistan)
- Luís Gustavo Gonçalves Barreira (Age 22, Brazil)

- Mao Kuroda (Age 14, Japan)
- Prashansa Shrestha (Age 14, Nepal)
- Tan Le En (Age 14, Malaysia)
- Thauan Sachet de Figueiredo (Age 14, Brazil)
- Rafia Ahmad (Age 23, Pakistan)
- Sesam Rana Magar (Age 23, Nepal)

Best School Award (3 schools)

- Koka Gakuen Junior and Senior High School for Girls, Tokyo (Japan)
- Setagaya Junior High School attached to Tokyo Gakugei University (Japan)
- Tokyo Metropolitan Oizumi Junior High School (Japan)

School Incentive Award (74 schools)

- Aichi Prefectural Chigusa High School (Japan)
- Antique Vocational School- Special Program in Journalism (Philippines)
- Arsakeio Secondary Schools of Thessaloniki (Greece)
- Bal Bharati Public School, Delhi (India)
- Beaconhouse Sri Inai International School, Selangor (Malaysia)
- Bilingual Kopalinski School, Bielsko-Biala (Poland)
- Bukhara region Karavulbazar district School N1 (Uzbekistan)
- Buyukcekmece Doga Koleji, Istanbul (Türkiye)
- Chicago Futabakai Japanese School-Saturday School, Illinois (U.S.A.)
- Clark Memorial International High School, Aichi (Japan)
- Colégio Santa Maria, São Paulo (Brazil)
- Colégio Vital Brazil, São Paulo (Brazil)
- De La Salle Lipa, Inc. (Philippines)
- Destiny International College, Osogbo (Nigeria)
- Écoles Al Madina Site Polo, Casablanca (Morocco)
- Escuela Preparatoria No. 8 Universidad de Guadalajara (México)
- FPT University, Hanoi (Viet Nam)
- Fuji Sacred Heart School, Shizuoka (Japan)
- Fukushima Prefectural Aizu Gakuho Junior and Senior High School (Japan)
- Fukushima Prefectural Asakakaisei Senior High School (Japan)
- Ghiyasuddin International School, Male' (Maldives)
- Gymnázium Šrobárova, Kosice (Slovakia)
- Hougang Secondary School (Singapore)
- Ikeda Junior High School attached to Osaka Kyoiku University (Japan)

- International School of Milan (Italy)
- Jamaluddin School, Male' (Maldives)
- Japaniche Schule in Zurich (Hoshuko) (Switzerland)
- Jonan Gakuen Junior High School, Senior High School, Osaka (Japan)
- Joso Gakuin Junior & Senior High School, Ibaraki (Japan)
- Kagoshima Gyokuryu Junior & Senior High School of Kagoshima City (Japan)
- Keimei Gakuen Elementary School, Tokyo (Japan)
- Kokugojuku KURU, Tokyo (Japan)
- Kyoto University of Advanced Science Junior & Senior High School (Japan)
- Labuan International School, Labuan (Malaysia)
- Liceul Mathias Hammer in Anina, Caras-Severin (Romania)
- Matsumoto Shuho Secondary School, Nagano (Japan)
- Midori Elementary School of Itabashi City, Tokyo (Japan)
- Miwada Gakuen Girls' Junior & Senior High School, Tokyo (Japan)
- Motherland Secondary School, Pokhara Lekhnath (Nepal)
- Nan Hua Primary School (Singapore)
- Nobeoka Technical High School, Miyazaki (Japan)
- Omori 6th Junior High School of Ota City, Tokyo (Japan)
- OOU Lazo Trpovski, Skopje (North Macedonia)
- Ozel Cagdas Bilim Koleji, Muğla (Türkiye)
- PECHS Girls School, Karachi (Pakistan)
- Preparatoria Regional de Colotlán, Jalisco (México)
- Santo Tomas Elementary School-Annex, Laguna (Philippines)
- Satriwithaya School, Bangkok (Thailand)
- School 11, Cherkasy (Ukraine)
- ȘCOALA GIMNAZIALĂ „SPIRU HARET” BACĂU (Romania)
- Sekolah Kebangsaan Minden Height, Pinang (Malaysia)
- Sekolah Menengah Kebangsaan Sri Nipah, Kelantan (Malaysia)
- Senior High School at Sakado, University of Tsukuba, Saitama (Japan)
- Showa Women's University Junior-Senior High School, Tokyo (Japan)
- Shinjuku Nishitoyama Junior High School of Shinjuku City, Tokyo (Japan)
- SJKC Kong Min Cawangan Kedua, Penang (Malaysia)
- Škola pre mimoriadne nadané deti a Gymnázium, Bratislava (Slovakia)
- SMJK Chio Min, Kedah (Malaysia)
- SMK Taman Pelangi Indah, Johor (Malaysia)

- SMP Islam Al Izhar Pondok Labu, South Jakarta (Indonesia)
- Southern Taiwan University of Science and Technology (Taiwan of China)
- St. Agnes' Junior & Senior High School, Kyoto (Japan)
- Sydney Saturday School of Japanese, New South Wales (Australia)
- SESI ESCOLA, Mossoró (Brazil)
- St. Joseph Convent School Quetta (Pakistan)
- Suma Gakuen Junior High School, Hyogo (Japan)
- Teacher Su International School, Yangon (Myanmar)
- TED Mersin College (Türkiye)
- Toho Girls' Junior and Senior High School, Tokyo (Japan)
- Tokyo Bay International School (Japan)
- Tunku Abdul Rahman University of Management and Technology, Kota Kinabalu (Malaysia)
- Yamanouchi Junior High School of Yamanouchi Town, Nagano (Japan)
- Yaroslavl College of Industry and Economy, Yaroslavl (Russia)
- Základná škola Bernoláková 16, Košice (Slovakia)

International Essay Contest for Young People

Panel of Judges:

Chairman	Genshitsu Sen	Former Grand Tea Master of Urasenke, UNESCO Goodwill Ambassador
	Masami Saionji	Chairperson, The Goi Peace Foundation
	Shunichi Tokura	Composer
	Junji Narita	Senior Advisor, Hakuhodo Inc.
	Shinji Hattori	Chairman & Group CEO, CCO SEIKO GROUP CORPORATION
	Koïchiro Matsuura	President of The Africa Society of Japan, Former Director-General of UNESCO
	Suzue Miuchi	Cartoonist
	Kazuhiko Yazaki	President & CEO, FELISSIMO CORPORATION
	Shomei Yoh	Picture book author

Organized by: The Goi Peace Foundation

Endorsed by: Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology of Japan,
Japanese National Commission for UNESCO, Japan Private High School
Federation, Tokyo Metropolitan Board of Education, Japanese
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NO HORRORS

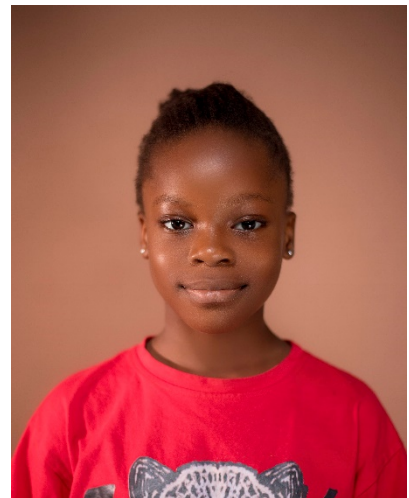
(Original)

Chimamanda Kaitlyn Uzoechi

(Age 8, Nigeria)

A peaceful world is a world without the horrors of violence, corruption or danger. Where I don't hear gunshots or stories of people dying including kids my age.

Even though we live on the topmost floor, I always like to sleep with my windows closed because I am scared of robbers or kidnappers. I usually hear strange sounds outside and wonder if they are gunshots, firecrackers or our transformer blowing up. My mum would always scold me to leave the windows open for ventilation and assure me that nothing would happen. Well, nothing ever happened until that evening in May this year. My mum, brothers and I had just gotten home some minutes earlier when we heard a loud noise. It was scary but we could not tell if it was one of those usual noises or something else. My mum looked out the window but she didn't see anything. Next, we heard a woman screaming and my mum ran out saying "maybe that woman is being assaulted, I have to make sure she is alright". My mum was out for so long and when she finally came in, she told us the woman was robbed at gunpoint. Her car, phones, keys were taken and her baby was almost taken too. Mummy helped her hold her baby because she was shaken and she with other neighbors tried to help in any way they could to recover what was stolen.



That woman and her baby could have been us seeing as we came in just a few minutes earlier. It felt like a horror movie but unlike the horror movies where there is no safe place, my mum became a safe place for that lady. She found solace and peace in my mum's arms because my mum chose to help someone in need rather than ignore. She found peace because my mum and others chose to be kind.

The song 'We Are the World' by Michael Jackson says "We are the ones who'll make a brighter day so let's start giving". I always thought giving in that song was just about donating money but I now understand it actually represents giving love because you cannot give when you hate. I now know that love is really all we need. This is because from love comes kindness, hope, understanding, compassion, patience, fairness, joy, harmony and peace.

Each person has a role to play especially us the young since we are in charge of the future, we have to start making it right. So this is me calling on everyone today to fill the world with love. This is because in a world filled with love, there can be no horrors because the next person can be your safe place. We can also be the safe place of others just by checking if the next person is okay. No more ignoring others in school because they are not my friends. No more minding my business when I see a schoolmate being bullied. No more greeting only my friends in school. No more hoarding my pens because I want to have extra even when I know my classmate needs one. This is me choosing to be kind when I know someone is being mean. This is me cheering my classmates when they are answering a question even though they are not getting it right. This is me correcting my friend when I see them being mean. This is me lending a helping hand when someone needs it. I want to create my peaceful future, a brighter world and I know it starts with me.

There would always be bad people who want to promote violence, corruption and danger but with plenty of love and all its fruits, the good would always win. Maybe those people are bad because they have never received love. Just remember that our loving words and actions can make a lot of positive changes in creating our peaceful future. A future with no horrors.

The Power of Dreams

(Original in Japanese)

Michiho Shimazaki

(Age 17, Japan)

Seijo Gakuen Senior High School, Tokyo

When you hear the words ‘peaceful world,’ what kind of world do you imagine? A world where there is no conflict or poverty, and where no one’s human rights are violated. Many people are taking action on today’s problems in the hopes that such a world will be realized. However, I also think that dreaming of a peaceful world is meaningful in itself. If someone is pushing us or forcing us to solve social problems, our motivation won’t last long. But the power to dream, which is active and voluntary, lasts much longer. The power to dream about the future is the greatest power that young people possess, and it should be the driving force for world peace.



The year before last, I was a member of a Japanese delegation that had the opportunity to discuss social issues with American high school students. All the participants talked about their ideal future. Listening to them, I looked forward to the future that each of them wanted to create, and at the same time, I started to think, “What is my ideal future?” I also felt that I wanted to support them in making their ideal society a reality.

Incidentally, not only do I take part in out-of-school activities myself, but for the past three years I have been active in an organization called The Off-Campus Program Portal. The organization is run entirely by high school students, and provides information on its website about summer programs, internships, competitions, and other activities for high school students. The website also features articles interviewing high school students who are involved in starting businesses, setting up organizations, or conducting research to address social issues—for example, “Myanmar Support Project Established by High School Students”

and “What Are High School Students Doing to Spread the Word about Orthostatic Intolerance?”

In other words, these articles are spreading the ‘power of dreams’ of high school students. In some cases, other students read the articles and are inspired to take action themselves. By spreading the message, we can influence young people who do not yet have their own dream.

Through these experiences, I realized the importance of openly discussing our vision for the future. By sharing our dreams with others, giving each other advice, and encouraging each other, we become more determined to make those dreams come true. Anyone who has a person to talk with or access to the internet can experience this. It takes courage to speak our mind, but if we take the first step, we can potentially influence not only those around us, but people on the other side of the world, and even those who think they have no interest in the subject. If young people recognize this potential, I think the power of dreams will spread to more and more young people. And if young people who share the same dream gather together, it will convey to society that this is public opinion among young people, and we could influence society.

To make this a reality, we need to draw out the power of dreams in more young people. We also need to ensure that young people who are trying to realize their dream don’t give up halfway. It is, of course, important for governments and large organizations to reach out to and support young people. But it’s even more essential for the young people involved to support each other. This is because large organizations do not necessarily have more influence in communities, or on social media. After all, not just young people but all people tend to resonate with the voices and support of their peers. Creating lots of friends, colleagues, and role models who take the same view of society is a shortcut to spreading the power of dreams.

I, too, would like to share the power of dreams with many young people through my organization, even if the scope is limited to Japan. My own dream is to use theater education to improve the communication, expression, concentration, and imagination of children around the world, and to create a society in which everyone can live their lives in their own way. In order to realize this dream, I would like to take action and become someone who emanates the power of dreams.

Seeing Things from the Other Point of View

(Original in Japanese)

Ayumi Kuroiwa

(Age 13, Japan)

Tokyo Metropolitan Oizumi Junior High School

For young people to take the initiative in building Japan's future, I believe that when someone's opinion clashes with our own, it is important to consider the other person's point of view, and to convey our own opinions using words that will reach the other person.

The other day in my moral education class, we read an article entitled "Protecting Wild Birds of Prey." The article made a strong impression on me personally, especially the part about communicating one's opinion in words that will reach the other party.

The article was written by a veterinarian based on his actual experience confronting hunters in a case where lead bullets in the flesh of deer and other hunted animals were causing lead poisoning in hawks and killing them. Normally, the author wrote, most of us would state our opinion to the hunters using words that criticize hunting and the use of lead bullets. But when speaking to the hunters, the author didn't say, "Don't use lead bullets" or "Please stop hunting," because at that time, hunting was not prohibited, and some people said that they needed to protect their livelihoods from the overpopulation of deer. If I were in the hunters' position, I think I would have felt antagonistic toward the author, wondering why I should stop hunting if it's not prohibited.

In this situation, the author continued to appeal to the hunters, suggesting that they change from lead bullets to copper bullets. That way, they could continue hunting without causing damage to the hawks. In the end, the author's wish was understood, and hunting with lead bullets was banned in Hokkaido.

When I read this article, I was moved by the way the author considered the hunters' point of view and thought about what to say to them.

When I was in about grade 5, the new coronavirus started to spread. Nowadays, we see people all over the city taking off their masks, but at the beginning people were wary of the virus, and it was normal to wear a mask even outdoors in the summertime. My elementary school was no exception, and everyone wore masks at all times. During that time, there was a boy in my class who took his mask off during recess and for a while afterwards. He didn't have any special medical condition; he just wanted to take it off. A lot of the kids who were in the same class told him to put his mask on. I myself spoke to him directly. But no matter how much we reminded him, he wouldn't put his mask on, so eventually we went to the teacher. After meeting with the teacher, the boy stood in front of the whole class and said, "I'm sorry for taking off my mask without permission, not considering that it would make some people uncomfortable in these times. I took it off because I was so hot after recess and really wanted to take my mask off. Please let me take it off for a little while." I was surprised at his behavior, yet I could also understand what he was saying. After that, no one told him to put his mask on. As I thought back on it, I realized that it was because he honestly expressed his feelings that his thoughts reached everyone.

Today, with the spread of the Internet, it's possible to post one's opinions online without revealing one's true identity. On the other hand, more people are suffering abuse because people believe what they hear without knowing the person's circumstances, and some even end up committing suicide. This might sound like glossing over the problem, but I think it's very important to see things from the other point of view, and to convey our opinions in words that reach the other person.

WE ARE COLOUR PALETTES

(Original)

Anelis Kristel Huarhuachi Quispe

(Age 14, Perú)

How many colours are there? There must be thousands, millions, and who knows there may even be billions. Each colour is unique, even if there are limited base colours, the tones and shades create new colours. In the same way, each person is a canvas given by beautiful cultural brushstrokes according to the unique context of each of us.

Many people may not appreciate the beauty of our colours, I lived it and I remember it very well. When once in a cooking workshop I was taking, I burned myself with some hot water, and I said: "Achachau!", an expression that in Quechua means "Hot hot!"; when I said that, a girl near me muttered "How vulgar it is...", I felt bewildered and ashamed. I felt bewildered and embarrassed, all my life I had said that phrase, since my family has Quechua ancestry and it was normal to use those expressions; I did not know that people found it vulgar.

Another time, my mom came to school and said, "How did my beautiful girl do today?", she had always called me that affectionately. Then I heard that some kids started spreading rumours that I was spoiled and that I was still being treated like a baby. When I heard what they were saying about me, I felt very ashamed and angry towards my mother for being the "cause of all the rumours".

The next day my mother was helping me with my homework, when she said to me in a congratulatory way "How can my precious girl be so smart?". "Precious girl", again she had said it; out of nowhere, I got annoyed with her and shouted at her to never call me that again, after that I could not hold back the tears that welled up in my eyes. Mum was shocked because it had all happened in an instant. When I realised what I had done, I apologised to her and tried to hold back the tears running down my cheeks.

My mother was now very concerned about why I was crying, so she asked me in a kind voice what had happened to me; at that moment, I blurted out everything that had been happening to me for a few years, told her about how different I felt compared to my peers, and how they talked about it. My mum understood my situation, comforted me and explained that everyone in the world is different and unique, some more than others, but that does not make us less or more important. She told me: "We all have a different palette of colours within us and what we paint with it will be unique and priceless". I could not understand that sentence at the time she said it, but I had been able to understand the message of everything else.

After that moment, it was very difficult, but little by little I stopped caring what others said or thought about me and started to focus on loving myself; as well as helping others who are going through the same situation as me.

Now I have finally come to understand what my mother meant to tell me on that occasion and her phrase has become the centre of my life. For the differences we have are not meant to separate, hate or reject each other; we are meant to unite, respect and love each other.

If there are green apples, when the standard is for them to be red; if the sky that is usually blue is tinged with orange and amber brushstrokes in the sunsets, why do people offend those who are different from them?

Although I still do not know many things because I am a child, I am very sure that if we ever observe or experience discriminatory situations, we must face them and not let the opinion of others keep us from being ourselves. We are the path that will lead to peace. Because a world of peace is not white where colour is absent, it must be a world where all colour palettes live together in harmony and will create the most beautiful canvas in all of history.

**The Legacy of Loving the Next:
Young People Transforming the World into a Better Place
(Original)**

Marinna Laura Soares Azevedo

(Age 14, Brazil)

Sesi Escola - São Gonçalo Do Amante, Rio Grande Do Norte

From the moment my grandmother departed this world, I felt like a part of me had been abruptly ripped away. Her absence left an emptiness in my heart and the peace that once reigned in my life dissipated like a breath of wind. The loss of my grandmother brought with it a whirlwind of emotions and challenges, transforming my worldview in ways I could never have imagined.

Her presence was an inexhaustible source of wisdom, love, and comfort. She taught me many of the values that I carry with me to this day, the simple idea of not being able to share laughter, hugs and deep conversations with her was devastating, losing the love of my life was devastating.

I found myself facing the challenge of rebuilding my identity without influence or guidance, now the uncertainty of my position in a world so uncertain, I was just a young girl. My grandmother Vera Lúcia was a living example of love for others and dedication to the community. Her concern extended beyond family boundaries, she genuinely cared for everyone around her. She brought groups of people together, regardless of their differences, and welcomed them with generosity and compassion. His welcoming spirit and ability to bring people together was inspiring, his actions and caring are still remembered today. With her example, I learned that building a world of peace for young people begins with the commitment to love one another, to take care of everyone, without distinction. It is by uniting groups and welcoming diversity that we can build a more harmonious society, where each individual feels valued and included.

Through this splendid example I had in childhood and adolescence, I learned that rebuilding

a peaceful world begins with the commitment to love your neighbor and take care of everyone, without distinction. It is by creating and bringing together groups and welcoming everyone regardless of race, way of thinking, belief, disability, that we can build a harmonious and more humane society where each individual feels valued and respected.

I learned that the loss of my grandmother should not be the end of my peace, but an opportunity to grow, to put into practice everything that was passed and inherited to me. I found solace in the certainty that her presence is woven into my essence because I am her blood of blood, and that her legacy lives on through me and everyone she sowed without wanting anything in return. The peace that seemed lost was slowly being rebuilt.

Nowadays my biggest motivations and aspirations are to try to help others in any way, be it a simple gesture like a hug, a message of comfort, making donations with my family to those in need because a little becomes a lot. Our society lacks empathy, loving each other more and supporting their ideas and what the other has to say. In 2023 I became a class leader, a project developed at my school so that young people have more autonomy, practice citizenship and be responsible. When we are away from the problems, being just a young person, we are not so worried about everything that is happening around us, when you are given the responsibility and the possibility to look beyond, you realize how young people are full of conflicts and difficulties. As peace has been taken from them lately, we need to show that unity makes strength, expressing that we are human and we are temporary yes, but what we sow in the lives of others will never be forgotten and our flame will still be lit, and we will be inspirations through compassion, projects, and dedication.

Young people play a key role in this peacebuilding journey. Young people are agents of change, capable of bringing incredible ideas and an innovative vision for the reconstruction of a more peaceful world, so we are the new generation, and we need to act and learn from the mistakes of past generations so as not to make mistakes again in the future.

HERE IS MY PEACEFUL WORLD

(Original)

Feyisola Maria Bolarinwa

(Age 17, Nigeria)

University of Jos

It was turmoil, battle and violence killing. It was an experience of conflict all year long in my community. Gunshots, clashing of machetes and blood bath was the order of the day. Running several kilometers with bare feet, I struggled with my feeble and wobbly legs. My tongue completely dried up in my mouth. Fear engulfed my entire body. I could never tell if I would survive to see the next day. Many children were orphaned by the constant and unending feud, many were killed just when they barely opened their eyes for the first time on earth.

There were series of dialogues and mediations, these yielded no fruit. So I woke up one day very determined to contribute to build peace and end violence. I decided to use indigenous 'tools' from the two feuding communities to pass the message of peace and love for one another. I compiled songs from all the indigenous folktales and folklores that border on peace, love, charity, forgiveness and care for one another. I also developed some other songs from the native proverbs and chanting.

Though seen as a youth and might not be listened to, I met my father and told him I had a message of peace that I would like the elders to hear. He listened to what I had to say and agreed I should go further with it. On the next dialogue day, I came with my message of peace in songs, parables and folklores. After my presentation, the message sank deep into their hearts. One of the songs requested them to reflect on what they have done to themselves and to their fellow humans. They could contemplate on humane means of settling scores other than being barbaric.

The next dialogue day when the two parties in conflict met, I was asked to go there. I was nervous when I began by telling them I came for peace and not for war. I appealed to them

to give peace a chance. Fortunately, they permitted me but reluctantly. They recorded every bit of my songs and folktales. I was able to shape their minds towards peace in my own little ways. They asked me to repeat every bit of it, I obeyed. Though they were happy to see that I was determined to bring peace to the land of the fighting communities, they were all overwhelmed with guilt. My goal was to build a sustainable peace. I returned home very happy. I barely rested when the elders from my community sent for me. They wanted to learn more about what I had done. I updated them and added more to what they heard before. They were excited, this led them to sponsor me to make fliers and records. I did it. The next day, the songs and recitations I had done was shown on TV and announced on the radio.

I was encouraged by the outcome, so I did more by adding drama and sculpting to the program. I could not do all these alone, so I made all the youth who were interested in my cause to be involved. When I noticed we had made impact, I crossed to the other community that was fighting with us and got more youth from there into the group. All the songs, dance and other performances carried the message of peace. We also performed in village square of many communities in addition to the two communities in conflict. Our performances and the whole program yielded results. The fighting communities agreed to embrace peace. They continued to coexist peacefully. A world of peace is all about love, care, forgiving one another and to live in harmony. We, the youth can build peace in the world today by coming together to spread the message of peace. We can make it happen everywhere. I have many unforgettable performances with strong messages of peace. Looking at how I started, the young people can come together to use our creativity and innovation to find solutions to the main causes of conflicts that affect our hearts, our homes, our countries and the whole world. Why don't you give us a chance?

700 Hundred Words About Peace

(Original)

Yan Korolev

(Age 17, Belarus <Living in Poland>)

Liceum Mary Curie in Warsaw

All people want peace but in all times they have had wars and nobody has believed in peaceful future. Can this situation ever be changed? – It can. Only if our generation gets different the world will be different. Only if all people change. Only if my brother and my classmates change... This is what I thought first.

When the war in the Ukraine began I asked my granddad what my brother and I can do to stop wars. He said: “Each time before you enter your brother’s room think: you want to make him happy or you come to hurt him. Respect the others’ territory and behave friendly on it. When you do anything, think if you can do it better. Ask your parents and grandparents to tell you about good, positive things from their lives. Learn from good things they have done. Start to play this game with your brother.”

This is what we have learnt from this game.

My brother wanted to start doing wrestling. Doing wrestling is a good thing we thought. But what could be better? A better wrestling, of course! - Not offensive but defensive. Do you want to attack and beat others or defend yourself and protect your friends? So we made the right choice. My brother chose judo. We learned to be non-aggressive.

When 2022 protests in Belarus started, an acquaintance of us used to say that peaceful demonstrations could not change anything. We started to play our game. We searched “peaceful revolutions” on Google and found information about successful peaceful changes in Poland, the GDR and other European countries. Hurrah! Non-violent protests were the right thing. We learnt to be patient and peaceful.

Many Orthodox priests teach that other believers do not go to Heaven. That was a challenge for us. We have many non-Orthodox friends. Our granddad recommended us to compare

the works of people during the war in the Ukraine. "Do not listen to words", he said. We saw – there are many other people in all religions who love God, people and peace. So we learnt to be **tolerant**.

When granddad was young he traveled with a song band and raised money for sick Chernobyl children. Their first concert was in Germany in a holiday house for gays. After the concert he spoke with some of them. One of the gays told though he was accepted by many friends, he knew, he was not like the majority of men and he was not happy. So we learned **to understand strange or different people and have mercy with them**.

A boy was bullying me at school and my granddad stopped it after speaking friendly with the parents of that boy. Later my younger brother experienced the same. My brother was a good judoka and I recommended him to fight the boy, to teach him a lesson. But my brother reminded me how our granddad had settled a similar situation with me. My brother taught me to **settle conflicts peacefully**.

When our mother was small she lived in Germany and met many Germans. They were friendly. They helped Chernobyl children. But in Belarus she heard bad propaganda-things about Germans in the kindergarten. She protested: "No, Germans are good people! They do not kill, they help." So **we learnt to forgive**.

We asked our granddad to tell what he did for peace. He was an officer. His task was to call enemy's soldiers to surrender. In 1982 they wanted to send him to the war in Afghanistan. He refused and was dismissed from the army. He could make his career but he did not. So we learnt to **not participate in unjust wars**.

We still continue playing our granddad's game. This game has taught me, that there won't be peace if not others but **I** become better, if my brother and I don't teach my future children and grandchildren to compete being more peaceful, tolerant, respectful, kinder. Probably we will not live in a peaceful world yet, but our children or grandchildren will. We want so much you to join our game. Compete and practice in doing good and peaceful things now for the future peace sake. Let's play and live this game together worldwide!

*Note: The word limit for the Essay Contest is 700 words.

Embracing Disparities for a Peaceful Tomorrow

(Original)

Haseeb Iqbal

(Age 22, Pakistan)

University of Education, Lahore

I am living in a country that has a diverse population, from Sindhis and Balochis to Punjabis and Puchtuns with their own distinctive cultures. I've had the honor of experiencing personally the beautiful blend of cultures, dialects, and customs that compose our versatile nation.

While growing up in Pakistan, I observed the chaotic aftereffects of the Afghan war in the days following the 9/11 attacks. The consequences of the conflict echoed throughout our communities, notably in the tribal regions bordering Afghanistan. These areas became incubators for aggression and radicalization, shattering families and ripping communities apart.

In the midst of the perplexity and insecurity, I recollect a story of perseverance and solidarity that arose from catastrophe. Faced with enormous suffering, the inhabitants of these tribal communities, young and old, discovered a road to peace. They figured out the only way to break the pattern of violence was to embrace their disparities and build respect among themselves.

Prompted by this story, youth-led activities sprung like fragile seedlings in thirsty soil. These organizations brought together young people from various backgrounds—tribal villages, urban areas, and various ethnicities—to participate in debate, discuss thoughts, and foster reconciliation efforts.

A similar initiative established peace discussions where young people from all backgrounds may freely share their incidents and anticipations. These forums became an amalgamation of viewpoints, allowing people to relate the sufferings they faced during the conflict, the problems they encountered and the desires they kept dear.

During these interactions, I was reminded of Palwasha, a young Pashtun girl whose entire family had been directly touched by violence. Regardless of her wounds of battle, she stayed resolute to construct a peaceful future. "We experienced the catastrophic consequences of prejudice and division," she stated through tears. It is entirely up to us, youngsters, to establish a new road, one founded on compassion, comprehension, and acceptance."

The moving tales and discussions served as accelerators for change. The youngsters collaborated to create community initiatives that cut across socioeconomic divides. They started learning initiatives, vocational training courses, and exchange of cultures efforts to build understanding and peace.

The effect of these youth-led peace projects proceeded to spread throughout the tribal regions in the months and years that followed. Towns that had previously been tormented by aggression and misery gradually found consolation in the sprouts of mutual comprehension that had been planted. Educational institutions and schools were safe havens for young minds to study and grow alongside one another, knocking down religious and cultural boundaries.

Moving ahead, it is critical for us, as a Pakistani youth, to carry the peace flame forward. We must acknowledge that creating long-term peace is a process that takes perseverance, commitment, and an unflinching devotion to accept our disparities.

We may have significant impacts as youth by actively connecting with one another, supporting discourse, and creating understanding across varied cultures. We may cultivate the seeds of peace in our culture by confronting prejudices, eliminating illusions, and building compassion.

We can provide subsequent generations with the skills they need to create bonds of solidarity by encouraging tolerance and cross-cultural comprehension through educational programs that foster peace and mutual respect. We can create an atmosphere where every individual feel welcome by pushing inclusive legislation, highlighting minority perspectives, and favoring a just society.

The path to peace in the aftermath of the Afghan war explained us the transformational potential of accepting our divergent views. We can establish a tomorrow where the scars of yesterday are healed. Let us keep singing humanity's symphony, collaborating to achieve a harmonious and welcoming Pakistan for the future.

I'm only seven

(Original)

Sydor Yaroslav

(Age 7, Ukraine)

I'm only seven. I'm just a kid. I go to school, I have friends, favorite toys, loving parents, I love music, especially rock music, and I dream of creating my own rock band, similar to the famous "Queen", and also I learn to play the guitar. I dream that my mother and father will be with me at all my performances. It seems that what can be difficult in life when you are seven? However, war came to my country.

One morning I woke up to the sound of sirens. It was very scary. There was a huge traffic jam on the road. There were empty shelves at many stores. And then the long, cold nights in the shelter began. It seems that what can be difficult in life when you are seven? But in my seven years, I saw rockets fly and they hit buildings and explodes. In my seven years, I know what war is. And that's why I know how important peace is. The wish for peace has now become the main thing at all events. Blowing out the candles on the cake - everyone wants only one thing - peace. Because it doesn't matter how many toys they give you, if a rocket can fly into your house and destroy everything. Destroying your children's room, scattering toys in different directions...

Peace is a happy future. We are just kids but we really want peace. A peaceful future. A future in which you can travel to any country as a whole family, a future where there is no fear, a future where people are friends with nature, a future where people help each other.

I am only a little child. I'm only seven. I cannot write laws, make important decisions that will help build peace around. But as a kid I take part to build peace on Earth. I protect nature. I care for peace between human and living beings. I protect insects. And I invite you to join this initiative. Do you see the ladybug crawling along the road? Pick it up and place it on the grass. Do you see that the garden chafer has turned onto his back and helplessly moving his paws? Turn it over. Small steps make the world a better place. I do

not pollute the environment. Because the Earth is our shared home. I care about peace between human and the planet.

I'm just a kid. But I want to surround myself with peace, I am friendly to my classmates - and I believe that peace in the classroom will lead to peace in the school, and peace in the school will lead to peace in our neighborhood, which in turn will lead to peace in the city and the whole country. I believe that love is the basis of peace. After all, only a lack of love gives rise to envy, selfishness, anger, and hatred. I encourage the world to love their lives. Unique life. One life. To protect the lives of those who cannot protect themselves. I protect the life of insects, my mother and father protect my life, my parents' life is protected by my grandparents. God protects our lives. And I believe that with God's help, peace, like a beautiful butterfly, will fly to my Ukraine.

We are children and we believe that soon peace will come not only in our country, but also on all continents. Because although I am only seven, I know how many continents and oceans there are, I know on which continent people lack water and medicine. So I dream that peace will come for all people in the world. Because every person deserves peace. Peace as the absence of war. Peace, as the absence of quarrels. Peace, like the absence of lack of food and water. Peace, like clean seas and rivers. Peace, like the absence of circuses with animals and cages in zoos.

Everyone needs peace...

For a Peaceful World

(Original in Japanese)

Haruka Someya

(Age 13, Japan)

Joso Gakuin Junior High School, Ibaraki

Although the chocolate we eat is sweet, in reality it is bitter. I learned this in my social studies class. In Ghana, Africa, children as young as ten years old work on cacao farms from morning to evening. Instead of going to school, they climb up the cacao trees, some as high as ten meters, to harvest the cacao fruit. It is very dangerous work, because they climb out on branches too thin to support adults, and if they fall they could lose their life. The children harvesting the cacao said that they had never eaten chocolate. I wonder how many people know that there are lots of children risking their lives for the delicious chocolate we eat.

In recent years, the fair trade movement has grown up in response to this situation. The idea is that we should consider not only our own interests, but also the lives of people in other countries. In other words, it is a way of looking at things from two different perspectives—our own side and the other side. In addition, the Table for Two initiative is working to eliminate hunger. The way it works is that, when people eat at certain restaurants and company cafeterias, money is automatically donated to developing countries. These initiatives are not just looking at the problems, but are working toward solutions.

The Sustainable Development Goals, including “No Poverty,” “Quality Education,” and “Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions,” have not yet been achieved. However, I believe that the world can change if everyone takes a broader perspective, rather than looking only at their immediate surroundings. To do this, I think the first step is knowledge.

Recently, I saw a play at school called “Grandpa’s Sky.” It was a story about a kamikaze pilot. The mother said in a trembling voice to her son, who had become a kamikaze pilot, “Please come back safely,” even though she knew he would not come back. How painful it

must have been for the young men who died as suicide pilots. There was one scene where a kamikaze pilot fled home, and was beaten by a superior officer. I shook in fear to think that even in Japan, which I thought was a peaceful country, there had been such cruel times. After the play, a member of the theatre troupe told us that they visit schools and perform this play in order to convey the brutality of war.

Actually, I have visited the Yokaren Peace Memorial Museum. There were real letters and photos on display that had been left behind, and seeing them, I had a vivid sense of the reality of war. I was pained by the sad history of the war, which I had not known before. For the sake of national interests and the wishes of adults, people who had been born into this world died without having the chance to let their lives shine. I felt that war should never be allowed to happen. I think it's essential that we make the world a place where wars are not started.

A peaceful world is one where everyone can feel happiness, cherish life, and laugh with each other. To create a peaceful world, what we need is knowledge. We need to know about children who cannot go to school, about children who are hungry but do not have food, about children who are not permitted to receive an education, about conflicts taking place around the world, about the wars that have taken place in our own country, about the global environment, and about the war between Ukraine and Russia. There are realities that make us want to turn away. There are still many important things that we need to know.

I think the first step I can take is to learn about each of these things, and think about them earnestly without looking away. The next thing I can do is to understand things from other people's points of view, and take action to achieve solutions.

Just as the world started fair trade for the children of Ghana, in the same way, I would like to continue learning and thinking, so that chocolate can become truly sweet, and our world can truly merge together.

What Is Justice?

(Original in Japanese)

Soma Sagai

(Age 14, Japan)

Omori 6th Junior High School of Ota City, Tokyo

Two questions were posed to us in our social studies class: "What is justice?" and "Does war exist for the sake of justice?"

I answered as follows:

Justice is what I myself believe to be right. Because it is about my own beliefs, I think that justice means something different to everyone. There are 36 students in my class, so we will have 36 different views on justice. There are more than 7.8 billion people in the world, so there are over 7.8 billion different definitions of justice.

Because of this, it sometimes happens that two people's views on justice do not mesh well. When this happens, people fight. When it happens between countries, the countries go to war. If country A and country B are at war, country A is at war because it thinks it is 'right,' and country B is at war because it thinks it is 'right.' Therefore, I do think that war exists for the sake of justice. At the same time, I also think that what makes war so terrible is that neither side wants to stop fighting because both sides believe that they are right.

However, when I showed my answer to my friend, he was surprised. He said, "There's no such thing as a war for justice." I listened to my friend's answer, but I didn't understand it. Although I didn't say it out loud, I felt that my answer had better logic and was the right one. Then, I realized something amazing.

Wasn't this a form of justice, too?

I was sure about my answer. But I guess my friend felt the same way. He was confident in

his answer, and that's why my answer surprised him. When I thought about that, I broke out in a cold sweat. Just a little while ago, I was thinking that war is terrible because each side is proclaiming its own self-righteous view of justice, and without realizing it, I was imposing my own self-righteous view of justice on my friend.

Right now, there are various conflicts taking place around the world, starting with Russia's invasion of Ukraine. We young people see these scenes on TV, but all we can do is raise money and provide temporary support. Only a few cabinet ministers and others are involved in finding fundamental solutions, and young people can't do anything about it. So, it seems that there is very little that young people can do. But that is wrong, because we young people can change the future. We have the greatest advantage, and so we carry the greatest responsibility. Whether we create a peaceful future or a future filled with war is up to us.

Of course, everyone wants peace, but for many people, the feeling of "I should do something for peace!" is too vague, and they don't know what to do. So, what kinds of things can we do right away for the sake of peace? What I think is important here is to recognize the differences in our views on justice. For example, we can try to see the other person's view of justice in a positive light, and even we don't like the person much, we can listen carefully to their view of justice. When some kind of conflict arises with another person, rather than striking first, we can share each other's views of justice and make efforts to understand one another. By broadening our perspective, starting with the word 'justice,' we will find more and more things that we can do. Justice can be troublesome at times, but if we give it careful thought and deepen our understanding of it, justice can also be a reliable ally. Justice and peace are connected.

In the end, there are no shortcuts to peace. The tiny measures of care and consideration that we take, though nearly invisible on a global scale, are a long but sure path to a peaceful future.

Justice means something different for everyone. With this as my foundation—or rather, as the foundation for all youth, who bear the future on our shoulders—I would like to build a peaceful future.

Entrust in Peace: Simple Acts

(Original)

Tanishka Aglave

(Age 14, U.S.A.)

Williams Middle School, Florida

I have met numerous pessimistic people in my life- those who convey peace has ceased to exist. In fact, I have been told a plethora of statements that are righteous to one extent but also despondent of the world we reside in. "Don't believe anyone. Otherwise, you will be deceived". "In this world, no one will come to help you." As a naïve child eight years ago, I would have been oblivious to the contradiction lying on the opposite end of this literary life spectrum. However, I am now enlightened to have strived for hope and peace in the world, rooting for faith. Sometimes, the most unprecedented situations of adversity pave the path for peculiar individuals to trespass your life and make a difference discretely. That, I assert, is my perception of the indefinite void of peace: A society brimming with kindness.

When I was reminded of this prompt, I recalled a life-changing incident that occurred in 2015 when I was boarding a train in New Delhi. Suddenly, I was taken back to the screeching sounds of the train halting on tracks amid the bustling, renowned train station. People running to get on the train first, loved ones rushing to hug their relatives, and the announcers announcing the arrival of the recent train. My mother clutched my hand in her clasps, asking me not to release her hand. Yes, yes, I repeated to myself. I am from America- a foreign country. I am wearing Nike shoes and ripped jeans and a nice blouse. People are dangerous; they would not hesitate to steal from me. I was getting weary of the shoves from hundreds of pushing people behind me. When my laces came undone, I crouched down to fix them. Looking up, I realized my mother was nowhere near my premise. My heart was racing, my backpack was weighing me down as faces blurred in the crowd. Tears streamed. Lost, pushed, fell on knees. Insignificance engulfed me amidst indifferent strangers.

A lady in a blue "Saree" looked down and crouched to lend me a hand." Don't trust her, I instinctively engraved in my mind. She might be dangerous.

"Beta (child), are you all right?" she asked.

Despite my internal denial to share, my voice started quivering, speechless on how to share everything.

"I-I-I'm lost. My mother is somewhere; I cannot find her!"

She asked me where I was going and offered to take me to my mother. I depicted my mother to my utmost ability. As her eyes lit up, I could tell she had picked up on something. We navigated through the maze of people until I found my mother also looking for me in the crowd. I ran to her, relief washing over me. The lady beamed, and my mother thanked her in gratitude.

That day, the horrific incident gave me a voice renewing my loyalty to kindness/peace. As a 14-year girl today, I am aware the scenario is marginal comparative to thousands of struggles today, in some havocked locations. But as a child frail and terrified of the treacherous world illusioned, I take immense pride in having painted a new vision. Today, I live in a world where terrible things do happen, but they are preventable. As a teenager, I use social media daily, seeing individuals share their issues and arising global crises. It has occurred to me, without being cliché, that messages can be spread within blinks. If so, one can send messages to help unknown people through acts of kindness, spread awareness, and gain support.

During COVID-19, I realized vast populations were being decimated within days in rural areas globally. Responsively, I engaged in a collaborative effort to help raise money to supply oxygen concentrators to these resource-scarce locations. Triumphantly, more than \$50,000 were raised, saving innumerable lives, and social media was the promoting platform.

Peace is a multi-faceted notion, branching numerous perceptions- but it embarks on its journey through kindness. The journey that I gained through my experience. I envision a peaceful world where we reside in a society possibly struggling, and another person arrives to offer their shoulder. Entrusting, we pour our faith into a stranger and believe the world will do us good.

Changing Our Awareness for a Peaceful World

(Original in Japanese)

Hayato Yuge

(Age 15, Japan)

Setagaya Junior High School attached to Tokyo Gakugei University

As I set out to write this essay, the word 'peace' brought up a string of associations. Peace made me think of doves, doves made me think of animals, animals made me think of living things, living things made me think of the earth, and the earth made me think of the ocean. So, I decided to write about the ocean, which is also the birthplace of life on earth.

Since starting junior high school, I've volunteered a few times for beach cleanups, and I've been amazed at how much garbage there is by the ocean. From candy wrappers to plastic bottles, there is so much garbage. I was also shocked to see how much of it had broken up into microplastics and covered the sand. At first, I felt that picking up the pieces of garbage one by one was unpleasant, painful, and tedious. But once I really got into it, I realized a number of things. First, I was impressed by our leader's words: "Some of you might think that picking up garbage is dull and no fun, but it's important to make it fun." When I actually gave it a try, I felt a sense of accomplishment in picking up the garbage and making the beach a little cleaner and prettier, and I was able to enjoy it. I realized that I was biased toward thinking that it would be dull and boring, and that my impression changed when I actually experienced it. Our leader also said, "We can't do anything on our own, but nothing will change unless someone starts to act." These words gave me a push to actually do something.

I was thinking about what I could do, when I learned about a contest to create an ocean-cleaning robot, and I decided to enter. While thinking about a robot to clean the oceans, I also thought about how to reduce the amount of garbage in the first place. That was when I realized something important. Two things are essential for cleaning up the oceans. The first is changing people's awareness. If we ask questions like "What is happening in the oceans now?" and "Why are these problems happening?" and learn the reality of the situation, I

think we wouldn't throw so much garbage in the ocean. As our leader at the beach cleanup also said, "Knowledge leads to change." The second thing I realized is that we need both a way to clean up the garbage in the oceans and the funds to do it. Otherwise, if we just leave the garbage in the ocean, the earth will become more and more polluted.

My idea to promote awareness is to broadcast a "Clean Forecast" on the news. Like the weather forecast, it would be broadcast daily, and would quantify what is happening in the marine environment, where the most garbage is located in rivers and oceans, and which areas have improved or not improved in terms of littering. By making people aware of this information, I hope we can change their attitudes about littering. I'd like for people to care about the cleanliness of the ocean the same way they care about the daily weather. To raise funds and clean up the garbage in the ocean, my idea is to ask companies to sponsor the Clean Forecast. I think companies could improve their image by publicizing that they are participating in cleanup efforts. We would also look at the numbers and impose fines on areas where littering is particularly bad. As a result, these areas with a lot of garbage would make efforts to improve their environment.

To change our awareness, we need to change our way of thinking. If we can have fun while working to solve problems, then I think children and young people will become interested as well. I participated in a workshop on garbage cleanup, and in the workshop I learned about a unique initiative. When the popularity of tapioca drinks led to an increase in litter from cups, cute, specially-made trash bins were set up, and trash bags shaped like rugby balls were distributed at sports stadiums. People were invited to fill the bags with trash and try to score with their trash balls, and the amount of garbage decreased dramatically. When urged on in this way, people's awareness changes, and their behavior changes, too.

By changing our awareness, we can perhaps see all the world's problems differently. It is my hope that even if the action we take is a small one, it will ripple outward and create a better and more peaceful world.

**The Importance of Taking Down Barriers:
Why We Mustn't Cling on to Labels**
(Original)

Mizuki Hayakawa

(Age 15, Japan)

Senzoku Gakuen Senior High School, Tokyo

I open Instagram and I find a post on the Israeli-Palestine Conflict. I scroll through the comments which are either “team Palestine” or “team Israel.” There isn’t a single comment which truly addresses the root of the Israeli-Palestine Conflict, and I don’t find any solutions in the comments. When I turn on TV, I see protesters who are for and against the overturning of Roe v. Wade. Left-wing media only interviews pro-choice protesters, while right-wing media only interviews pro-life protesters. From these, I realize that everybody is focused solely on the label they put on themselves. This situation has become so natural for us that we don’t question it; however, why is it that we all have to be in a particular category and either agree or disagree on a topic? Why can’t we at least try to understand what the opposing side is trying to claim? This is precisely the reason why we aren’t able to achieve peace: because nobody tries to understand each other.

Our society is obsessed with categorizing people because this makes us feel as though we belong in a particular place. However, what we don’t see is that these categories are meaningless, and that by labeling ourselves, we are simply putting up walls which prevent people with different opinions from understanding each other. When we categorize ourselves as being in a category, we naturally refuse to even consider the other side’s claims. In the United States, division is now a problem larger than ever, with most people categorizing themselves as either democrats or republicans. Unity and cooperation is necessary in order to solve international issues, and because this division is preventing us from understanding each other, we are ultimately preventing ourselves from solving these social issues.

I have had the privilege of living in Singapore, one of the most racially diverse countries in

the world and there, I experienced true diversity. "Look around, isn't it beautiful that people of so many skin colors and religions are gathered in this classroom?" Every year, we would have Culture Day, where we would all present our own unique cultures; it was a day when everybody would be proud of their own culture. I would go home, prouder of my Japanese ethnicity than ever. We were different, but that didn't mean anything to us because we didn't have values set by society that said one race was superior while one wasn't. It was only when I started to pay attention to politics and started social media that I first realized how divided people were. That was when I realized that us young people need to be the ones taking action, since we are going to be the ones shaping the future.

In order to finally take down the wall among ourselves, we mustn't cling onto our categorization by society, and we should strive to educate ourselves on all sides of an issue. My friend and I, who realized that there are very few platforms which truly look at an issue from all perspectives, have been planning to set up a website and a social media account in order to raise awareness of the fact that we aren't truly trying to understand other people's opinions. What we realized was that young people do care about social issues, and what we are missing is our understanding of each other. Therefore, the opportunity to learn about the other stance is key to solving social issues. If we do not even know what other people's opinions are, how are we even able to argue against that opinion?

It might seem as though social issues in our current world are impossible to solve, because nobody is willing to change their opinions. But even before trying to convince others, we need to start with understanding why others believe in what they believe. There are even many cases in which both sides of an argument are ultimately trying to achieve the same goal; it is simply that the way they are trying to achieve it is different. Therefore, I strongly believe that breaking down barriers between us and cooperating with each other will surely lead us to a peaceful path.

Redefining our Institutions Through Love: The Youth's Path to Peace (Original)

Ghena Kubba

(Age 16, U.S.A.)

Phillips Exeter Academy, New Hampshire

A peaceful world is not one devoid of conflict but one devoid of needless suffering. Conflict at the expense of others' dignity and well-being threatens humanity. Despite the threat, we lack urgency in attempting to understand why fundamentally we are complicit in systems of exploitation and oppression. Efforts towards a more just and peaceful world can begin with the youth as we closely examine how we think and perceive the world around us. Our more complex institutions and systems are rooted in a way of thinking about the world. The organization of society is dependent on core beliefs. We see this in our precise cultures and routines, from schooling to our economies. The tenets of our systems naturally become ones we also uphold. These tenets are threaded through all societal structures—you sever one end, and it all collapses. We try to conform all our communities to a single doctrine. It is natural for the cosmos to lean towards chaos, yet we cling arduously to rigid order. Our 'modern' societies rely on the foundation of organized systems and structures. Yet, this is exactly what is harming us. Maintaining this order demands that we uphold the underlying beliefs that comprise these systems. The youth can fracture this rigid order. By being agents in our institutions, we can play a crucial role in changing our system.

To eliminate needless suffering, younger generations can begin to challenge the underpinning beliefs of our systems and adopt different approaches. Society does not encourage youth to stop and question if there are errors in the way we are viewing the world and consequently how we treat it. The youth have the power to become more compassionate and aware of themselves, to close gaps worldwide. We are more networked than ever before, yet the threads that tie us together are wearing thinner and thinner. We are stressing the planet and ourselves. We have become engrossed in a state of constant production and activity. It is the job of the youth to recapture the tenacity of love to mend and heal our relationships with each other and the natural world. We cannot expect peace

agreements to be made and wars to be stopped if we do not know what compels us to live collectively and compassionately with one another. Focusing on what makes us uniquely human starts with the youth. Goals of freedom, sustainability, justice, and democracy are unattainable if we cannot be selfless and love completely. Younger generations have the capacity to foster an appreciation of the world around us. The sooner we begin this reconfiguration, the more integrated it can become in our societies. By harnessing the power of love, we can bring ourselves closer to a peaceful world.

We have created neat plastic containers to isolate and preserve ourselves in. Societies impose limited, if any, obligations to the treatment and respect of life. We buy our livestock on Styrofoam plates wrapped in plastic, already pumped to perfection. We do not see nor respect the life that was killed to feed us. We take planes to vacate and escape the stifling airs of our cities, oblivious to the emissions injected into our atmosphere. We are more advanced than ever, yet we do not know how to love. What are we to each other, ourselves, and the rest of the world if we cannot love? Money only feeds an empty heart. Love teaches us the value of reciprocity, collective growth, and respect. To love is to fully appreciate something in its essence. If we extend love to the world, perhaps we would begin to embrace the disorder of the cosmos. Our oppressive institutions can be eradicated with compassion. Love allows us to resist injustice. It is a willingness to transform the world. Imagine what is possible if we begin with the youth loving radically, how the beliefs that constitute our systems would come from a foundation of love. A peaceful world is possible if we as young agents, are willing to challenge the status quo with our hearts.

birthday cake candles

(Original)

Mira

(Age 18, Belarus)

I wasn't ready to die. Some say peace requires people to lay their lives down for it. *"I'm not like this. My 15-year-old body would not change anything—it would just be stepped on and forgotten"*, I thought trembling in the car, passing the protesting people on the streets of my hometown, Minsk. 2020—defrauded elections and thousands of broken lives caused my rose-coloured glasses of child-like idealism to shutter inwardly—that was the first time I got to experience the bleeding truth of what peace is NOT. I couldn't understand the mere possibility of violence as a phenomenon, but now I stopped denying that others do. With the regime covering my mouth and my heart bursting, feeling paltry as ever but resolutely unwilling to endure injustice, I started my battle.

What could I do? Find the others that shared my viewpoint and ambitions. Ambiguity of *international youth* as a stakeholder in the world-game evaporates once you truly meet it. For me, the European Scholarship Program in Tbilisi, Georgia, volunteering and activism across three countries and online were the paths to becoming a part of it—learning what matters and how I can contribute to the communal goals of improving lives. It was among people like me where I learned the value of consciousness, teamwork, honesty, dedication, power of care and desire to help others.

All of us, striving to improve our communities through actions, have faced the devastation of the current order: as I'm embracing my friends from different places, clutching their hearts to mine, warming them up, I feel my body resonating with their pain. Some (me included) can't return home and be accepted, empowered and safe there; we lost (or weren't ever given) our human rights, whether we belonged to a fragile societal group or to the majority; faced devastation from intra- and interstate military conflicts — and all of it created a never-ending blur hurting inside us, but also pushing us to each other and forward. Robbed of the right and opportunity to live in a peaceful world, we keep trying to

create it.

In school I learnt to verbalise the whole complexity of the word “peace” in one of its definitions—*the absence of war*. How sophisticated does the concept have to be, to get the world to agree on the three single words, continuing to debate the rest? Still, I believe with all its complexity there is nothing impossible for humankind to handle within our societies. Yet, everything comes to a standstill the moment privileged and powerful people decide they can determine fates: having studied dozens of global and local conflicts of different nature, I believe power dynamics is the core plague preventing the world from being *more* peaceful.

I might be idealistic, but I wholeheartedly believe that the best we can do is create the closest state to when people’s individual choices don’t limit the freedoms of others. Everyone deserves a life with fulfilled human rights and opportunities. I know it is impossible to be done completely, but I’m just 18, I want to stay alive and human, and I want other people to, so I believe we can find a way. Every action, or its absence, done by humankind starts with the mindset and values of the individuals. Through peer-to-peer education, exchange of thoughts, ideas and experiences among the youth, we can approach the worldwide community that evolves and improves for everyone equitably. Focusing on integrating young people in NGOs and other entities of civic society, creating conferences and platforms for them to collaborate with each other (e.g. MUNs), with the governments (e.g. European Youth Forum), to represent the ideas and opinions of youth on regional & international levels, and further empowering us to take action—is the necessary mainland supporting the world towards peace.

Blowing candles on my birthday cakes, I’ve always wished for *world peace*: mentally reiterating the wish and keeping quiet, or it won’t come true. I used to *hope* for peace, thinking it’s the only right thing. I don’t hope anymore, I *believe*. Believe, because I know: me and thousands, millions of others work for it together. Absolute peace is never fully possible, but I want to feel it closer, and I know WE’ll make it.

**Cuius regio, eius religio?—From Blood-Stained Bridges to a Bright Future:
Uniting Youth For Better Tomorrow**
(Original)

Aiša Muhić

(Age 20, Bosnia and Herzegovina)

International University of Sarajevo

It has always been said: kill or be killed. There is no right or wrong option here, just an option. We as a nation always chose to be on the receiving side of the knife and never fought against “neighbor's blade”. Balkan Muslims have been exterminated over the course of ten horrifying genocides that stretched through history from 1683 till 1995. Oppressors excused their behaviour based on what Church taught: “Outside of Church there is no truth, justice, goodness and true relationship with God”. How can these words justify genocides against non-Christians?

God did not give anyone right to take something that is not theirs to be taken. Life is something to be treasured. Why is it portrayed as something good if it pains another human? Why can something so heinous be done in the name of something sacred like religion? Is religion something that should oppress people?

While I was looking for more information on all genocides, I noticed that there was hardly any on the ones before the last one and a thought suddenly struck me. This cycle will keep repeating as long as we keep forgetting and forgiving once the 100 year mark passes as if there is an expiration date for genocide.

Life is like a river, it has its beginning, turbulent times filled with obstacles and an ending where everything dies down and only memories remain. Every big river has that one bridge. The one that followed us through many unfortunate events was “The Mehemed Paša Sokolović Bridge”, built in 16th century. A bridge so beautiful yet soiled by blood of its own people. Hard stones carry so much pain and anguish that it is a wonder how they did not break.

Peace is as fragile as human bones. Once broken and if it does not heal properly, it will be strained and hurt every time it "rains".

No one is born purely evil, but life is not a fairytale with guaranteed happy ending for the good people. Evil and good reside in everyone. It is up to people and their environment to choose which side will govern.

Hate directed towards other ethnicities is the main ingredient for misery. No healthy apple survives in such an environment. It is horrifying how children get affected just because they were surrounded by people who believed in inequalities based off of religion and ethnicity.

While older generations cannot be changed, it is important that youth does not get affected by their discrimination.

Once we start listening to what our hearts tell us and stop complying with unreasonable demands of adult world we will start seeing progress. It will be slow, but progress nonetheless. Some things have already been achieved through social activism and I believe that everything will be resolved naturally as children do not judge people based on their skin or ethnicity without parental influence.

History is very dark and scary, but we cannot live in it. We have to look ahead and keep fighting.

The future is being built on new generations, not on the past. The world can still be saved if every child unites and works on creating peaceful future. The most innocent and creative ones are those that do not look for their selfish needs and personal gain, but enhancing overall life conditions. While there will always be battles between good and evil, good will always come out victorious. Sometimes you need to learn the lesson the hard way. You will not be able to feel others' pain unless you experience it on your own skin. You should not allow anything to go into the land of forgotten memories, but you also do not have to base your whole life on the past. The most valuable thing you could do is not forget, neither forgive but allow the pain to help us grow together.

Long ago, the world was completely divided based on status, race, ethnicity and those on the throne made all decisions. We have come so far where young people make huge impact.

We have to get up, unite and say NO to oppressors, because we represent the bright future, while they symbolize a bloody past.

FIND PEACE IN COMPASSION

(Original)

Folasade Bolarinwa

(Age 21, Nigeria)

In my country Nigeria, the place I lived and grew up was in conflict with other communities. There were constant terrifying sounds of gunshot. More terrifying was the killing and huge losses of lives and properties. Whenever the war erupted, we flee to neighboring allied communities. At the end of each episode of the conflict, the winning side became happy to have killed so many people.

The questions flashed in my mind and I asked, 'Why should a person kill another human being and rejoice over it? Why are we killing each other?' But nobody gave me the answers I needed.

My community was always at the receiving end. We were the victims of the ordeal. After days that led to weeks and months, we returned to our shattered homes and prepared ourselves to attend classes. Another serious battle was the humiliation and frustration we faced in school. It was an unending battle for us. Going to the same school with the youth from the communities that waged war against us resulted to series of bullying, ridicule and mockery. The teachers were aware of this but did nothing about it.

The maltreatment we received in school deeply affected our concentration and our zeal in learning, as well as our general wellbeing. Many of the students performed poorly in class while some dropped out of school. I will not say I was not affected as well.

Rather than drop out of school, I made friends with our bullies. I took it upon myself to talk to them about the values of peace and how great it would be if we live together peacefully. Compassion was my theme.

I started a practice that drew the attention of everyone in the school to what the values of

compassion are. The school we attended was poorly furnished and we did not have enough chairs. The classrooms were always filled with pool of water during rainy season because the roofs were leaking. This caused us to scramble for seats within the dry portion of the class. The conditions generated more quarrels, and chaos sprung up. Rather than fight for seats, I decided to go to school an hour early each rainy day to sweep out the water in the class. After that, I mopped the wet portions, the class became comfortable and engender calmness and peace.

At first, the students from the feuding communities did not feel free to sit where I did the nice job. However, I beckoned them to feel free to sit wherever they want. The places I mopped, I said to them, were not only for my mates from the same community with me. I did it for every one of us in the class. I had compassion for everyone because it was sad to see us fighting with one another.

I continued working to make the class comfortable for everyone regardless of ethnicity. I did this throughout the period of the rainy season. Along the line, the other students collaborated with me. I spoke to the students from the opposing community and those from my own community to have compassion, love and care for one another. We continued to work together and shared whatever we had. Peace was restored and it spread among us.

Fortunately, the classroom got dried up after the rainy season but the peace that grew among us did not dry up. We started to visit each other, and our parents did not stop us. This impacted on others all over the class and the school. Today, we have forgotten the imperfect past and live together peacefully. The crises have also reduced and not as rampant as before.

Be kind, show others you care. All these are encompassed in compassion. The youth all over the globe could unite to show a little compassion here and there to one another. We would get there. The youth can correct the error of the past and build a future where people coexist peacefully regardless of race, age, gender or religion.

If everyone, especially the youth, care and have compassion, we would achieve a peaceful world we yearn for.

