

2016 International Essay Contest for Young People

【Youth Category – 2<sup>nd</sup> Prize】

## **Education for Awareness**

(Original)

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Education is a fundamental part of society. Younger generations inherit the world, and treat it according to the knowledge, policies and opinions they have learned. Therefore, what we teach our children today, decides the fate and future of our world.

Currently, the world is in a state of controversy. Our generation is considered the most advanced, having done a lot to lessen prejudices such as racism, gender inequality, homophobia and anti-Semitism. Yet, women continue to have inferior standing to men worldwide. The drugs menace, according to the UN, is a 320-billion-dollar-a-year industry that causes over 200,000 deaths per year. Additionally, global warming and pollution remain serious issues, with ecosystems being destroyed and important species going extinct; in other words, human activity is accelerating natural degradation. On another note, technology, while making work massively easier, has resulted in mass global unemployment. By 2020 up to 500 million new jobs will need to be created to cater for the unemployed and new workers. Food security is another glaring problem; annually 3.1 million Sub-Saharan African children die of malnutrition, but we are still wasting about one third of the food we produce.

This is our unfortunate present reality and it is difficult to say whether it will improve any time soon. However, the human race is capable of a more meaningful existence. Through learning and teaching peaceful co-existence, open-minded unanimity, tolerance, respect, caring and consciousness, we would stand a chance to challenge these issues.

The question "How would education and learning help us address these challenges and create a sustainable world and a better life for all?" made me wonder what could have been done differently in my own education to better equip me to address such challenges. Then I realized that my education has completely ignored the part that I as a human being have to play in this

world; that my learning should serve a purpose greater than my own life. The main focus has been my own academic success, leading to a good career and life for me and my family. My eyes were never opened to the fact that my life and purpose are not reserved for only myself.

Therefore, for a better and sustainable world, we must create a generation who are aware and involved in what occurs around them.

I would implement this through education by introducing a new, compulsory subject to promote a humane and aware attitude in future generations. It should have same attention and weight as other academic subjects and be influential in deciding a student's acceptance into universities and colleges. Such acceptance should require qualification in academics, extracurricular activities *and* humanity (they are qualified as humans, not only as individuals). This subject would be graded according to overall approach, interest and result.

The subject would be broken down into sectors such as the environment, gender inequality, drug and alcohol addiction, poverty and so on. The advantage is that they are already exposed to them through their other studies; this subject would help them better understand them as realities.

This subject would include programs allowing students to gain hands-on experience. For example, students looking at the environment would go on field trips to ecologically endangered locations, to expose them to that reality and enable them understand the importance of preservation. They should then practically use this learning to maintain an existing ecological area, or raise funds for a preservation cause. For addiction, students would visit local rehabilitation clinics to observe the patients, to open their eyes to the realities of drug abuse, prevent them from falling into the trap and perhaps motivate them to work and help further in this regard. The students could make presentations regarding what they have learned from these experiences; these could then be shared as widely as possible.

Such a subject would be vital; it would grant students awareness of the world around them and involve them in something greater than themselves from an early point in their lives. Moreover, it would prepare them for an adulthood in which they would encounter such issues frequently. Through this, we would be creating the most efficient, humane and truly advanced generation that has ever existed.