

PSR Sacramento 2016 Scholarship Essay Contest Finalist

Peace Is Not a Shadow

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Peace is not the shadow of a war ending; it is not a legislative exploit, prescribed or demanded by those in authority. We must not trivialize peace into a state of being, of inertia, or of passive silence. It doesn't exist in a vacuum, and thus, we cannot pursue it in isolation as an end in and of itself. Peace comes with our perpetual and vigorous rejection of inequality, injustice, and suffering. As the Dalai Lama ever-so-poignantly, and rather strikingly, once stated, "Peace can only last where human rights are respected, where the people are fed, and where individuals and nations are free."

Each of us is different in identity. We define ourselves, quite openly, by our nationality, gender, color, and most importantly, opinions. We must embrace these differences, though, for only with such an acceptance can we recognize our similarity, our humanity. A peaceful world keeps the promises of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, "All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights" (1). Yet, as profound as these words are, too often the world is plagued by human rights violations: illegal human trafficking in Thailand, forced child labor in Bangladesh, female feticide in India, racial discrimination in the United States, and alas, the list goes on. In these cases, it is not solely law or legislation that has failed us; we have failed each other.

And, while here in the United States we speak from a throne of good-will and privilege, the basic right to food is a daily struggle for many, even in today's technologically advanced world. According to the World Food Program, malnutrition affects close to 795 million people and nearly 66 million primary school-age children attend classes hungry (2). This is shocking, considering recent statistics show that the world grows enough food to feed almost 10 billion people (3). However, corporate greed and neocolonialist tendencies of multinational food corporations shroud any efforts to make nutrition cheaper for the millions of people earning fewer than \$2 a day.

As these problems are multifarious and intricate in nature, our quest for true peace will require consistent effort from the global community. Our first duty must be to create a world in which education is freely accessible for all, regardless of gender or race or any other discriminatory designation. When individuals and communities are educated, they are much more likely to understand their liberties, fight for their rights, and seek justice for others. An educated populous can work together to feed and uplift those less fortunate – to break what we know as the cyclic nature of poverty. In a world of informed individuals, violent and deleterious conflict will be replaced by intellectual and diplomatic discourse. Social inequality will recede and we will find that collective cooperation has taken its place. And in it all, as human rights are respected and people are fed, we will find our sense of freedom – the kind that lasts, the kind that will blossom into peace.

Footnotes: Works Cited:

(1) The Universal Declaration of Human Rights of the United Nations (link: <http://www.un.org/en/universal-declaration-human-rights/>)

(2) World Food Program's Statistics on Hunger (link: <https://www.wfp.org/hunger/stats>)

(3) "We Already Grow Enough Food for 10 Billion People — And Still Can't End Hunger" by Eric Holt Gimenez, agro-ecologist and political economist (link: <http://www.huffingtonpost.com/eric-holt-gimenez/>)