

## PSR Sacramento 2016 Scholarship Essay Contest Finalist

Achieving Peace

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Since our nation was founded 238 years ago, hardly a decade has passed without some sort of war. Declared or not, we have lost millions of lives in battle. And for what? Even after all this time, we seem as far as ever from lasting world peace. It seems to me that the idea of everyone coexisting in harmony, without wars or bloodshed, is an alluring one. Peace would benefit everyone-- so why has it proved next to impossible to achieve?

Attempting to answer this timeless question, The Dalai Lama once remarked, "Peace can only last where human rights are respected, where the people are fed, and where individuals and nations are free." I believe that only when we are willing to work together to achieve these things, will we ever really have a chance at sustaining world peace.

The effort to create a nonviolent world starts at home. Today, America pours more money into the military budget than the next seven countries combined, while simultaneously neglecting to adequately educate our children or feed the hungry. As demonstrated numerous times in the United States and abroad, when people are poor, hungry, and disillusioned, they often feel as if they have no other choice than resorting to violence. One of the first things that we must do if we hope to achieve peace is to stand up against budgets that increase military spending by cutting food stamps. This does nothing but hurt society's most vulnerable and is counterproductive to our goal of achieving lasting peace.

Additionally, we need to be vigilant in affording all people the rights, freedom, and respect that they deserve. It is easy to assume that people who look or think differently than ourselves are wrong or evil. Chances are, however, they are exactly like the rest of us: just trying to get through the day. The key to acceptance is understanding. Sure, it's instinct to fear the unknown, but doesn't mean we cannot overcome our trepidation. Only if we truly take the time to educate ourselves about how other people live, will we be able to achieve tolerance and eventually peace.

In the words of Albert Einstein, "Peace cannot be kept by force. It can only be achieved by understanding." For some reason, many regimes across the world seem more interested in handing out guns than novels, but in the battle for lasting peace, books are the far superior weapon. As The Dalai Lama has warned, "Through violence you may solve one problem, but you sow the seeds for another." Instead of resorting to war, we should instead attack the root of violence by ensuring that everyone has a decent standard of living and that education is accessible to all. I don't know if we'll ever achieve peace but it certainly is the most noble of goals. And one thing is for sure, if we don't start making changes now, the next 238 years will be far too much like the last.