

PSR Sacramento 2016 Scholarship Essay Contest Second Place Winner

Piecing Peace Together

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The 14th Dalai Lama, Tenzin Gyatso, received his Nobel Peace Prize in 1989 for his “constant resistance to the use of violence in his people’s struggle to regain their liberty.” While Gyatso was willing to practice the policy of nonviolence while advocating for the liberation of Tibet from China, he noted how “peace can only last where human rights are respected, where the people are fed, and where individuals and nations are free”. This insightful statement supposes that peace cannot be forced, rather, it emerges from an underlying trust between the government and its people. This trust can only exist when a government unconditionally upholds its peoples’ unenumerated rights, and when this trust is broken, conflict inevitably ensues.

The United Nations International Bill of Human Rights covers the modern-day interpretation of what these unenumerated rights are. It cites that the right to economic, social, and cultural development is interconnected with our political and civic freedoms, such as freedom of expression, religion, or association. These freedoms are generally harder for governments to violate because they are so foundational to human existence. Unfortunately, economic, social, and cultural rights like the right to education or adequate standard of living are not as well-recognized and tend to be neglected on a larger scale. In such instances, whether it is dictatorial oppression in North Korea and Saudi Arabia, human rights violations in Syria and Myanmar, or rampant corruption in Venezuela and Somalia, peace can only be forced for so long. Each of these states are facing immense pressure, either internally or externally, to amend their ways and promote the welfare of their citizens.

Thus, Tenzin Gyatso’s quote is not simply some philosophical concept that exists in an isolated time and place. It has vital implications that must be understood in context with today’s world. In this age of globalization, all humans have become more socially, economically, technologically, and ideologically acquainted. Thus, governments have no excuse to violate their constituents’ rights, nor may they justify such actions by appealing to dubious historical traditions or a lack of awareness. In order for peace to last, governments must be held accountable for their actions, and at the very least, must uphold every individual’s economic, social, and cultural rights.

Upholding these rights and encouraging social responsibility is especially important today, considering the unprecedented crossroads we have now reached. The planet and its natural resources are in a uniquely fragile state, scientific advancement is occurring on a daily basis, and even the most archaic social norms and perceptions are being broken and redefined. As long as human rights are respected, people are fed, and individuals and nations are free, everyone can live with a sense of security that we as human beings are all entitled to, regardless of what country we are from. Ultimately, being in a state of security and peace allows humans to thrive and continue doing what they do best - endure, imagine, and innovate.