

The Peace Imperative - Investment and Inclusion

Democracy, human rights and freedom was the peace dividend from the ashes of World War II but the dream of putting conflict to rest in a peaceful, prosperous, educated and tolerant world has been fractured.

For nearly two-thirds of a century, from 1945 that dream prevailed. The global death rate had fallen from 22 per 100,000 people to 0.3. But today with the Syrian war, an unbelievable bloody conflict emerging from a freedom fight against a dictator - whole communities devastated, hundreds of thousands killed, millions displaced, and multiple foreign powers joining the fight or supporting their proxies geo-politics again takes precedent at the expense of the value of human life. The UN Security Council again shows just how impotent it is as it fails to follow through on its demand to stop the barrel bombs by introducing a 'no fly zone' Inaction has tragically enabled ISIS to carve out a territory and enlarge it into Iraq and beyond.

New conflict seems intractable. South Sudan, Nigeria, Central African Republic, the Congo, Ukraine, Yemen and even the glimmer of hope in Libya is now in pieces with armed groups including ISIS asserting control. The tension in Afghanistan and Iraq and the intractable occupation of Palestine continues with the attacks on Gaza reminding us of how little people matter against weapons and supremacy. And Islamist militants are increasingly taking acts of terrorism to the cities of their perceived enemies.

Yet the very leaders who claim to support an end to conflict know that the value of the military expenditure increased by more than 1% last year with the hypocrisy of the arms trade that fuels the conflict feeding the profits of their own economies. It is time to stop the bombs; stop the killing; stop the deadly arms trade.

People feel powerless and when you add to conflict economic desperation and extreme weather events from climate change risks to life and livelihoods it has all resulted in the worst refugee crisis since WWII.

Building walls, assembling military barriers is not the answer, indeed it is simply a war against people waged by too many of our own political leaders who preach fear and xenophobia.

And then there is the conflict and oppression of purging political and civil opposition that we see in Turkey, in Korea, in Egypt and in the political coup in Brazil.

Violence is a scourge that aides this oppression. Trade union members were murdered in more than 11 nations in 2015 and shrinking democratic space increased by some 22%.

Fundamental rights, such as freedom of assembly, freedom of association and freedom of speech are under attack dressed up as a security measure in many countries with threats of terrorist activity being used as the pretext.

In other countries, austerity measures and the desire to attract foreign investment have been used to propagate repressive laws and policies with corruption and corporate greed fueling historic levels of inequality. Legal and institutional barriers are being introduced in order to limit the capacity of our people to fight injustice. Almost half of the world's states have implemented controls that limit freedom.

And the global workforce is in trouble with historic levels of unemployment, the poverty wages and insecure work of our supply chains and the desperation of no or inadequate social protection. It is fear that is driving the ugly face of xenophobia and global tension; a tension that can morph into fascism, extremism and conflict all too easily.

We have the wealth. The world is three times richer in the last three decades. The answer is an end to corporate greed and corruption and investment in people in every nation; in infrastructure and jobs; in the care economy and jobs, in social protection with the guarantee of essential services such as education, health, childcare and aged care; the guarantee of a minimum wage on which people can live with dignity and the right to bargain for a fair share of prosperity. No country should be denied the right of development, industrialization and of peace. No person should be captive of modern slavery including the Kafala system of the rich gulf states; no person fleeing for a safe and secure life should be excluded from safe haven and the right to work. Germany is showing the way and placing

the moral imperative of humanity before those who seek to exclude. Unions are proud to stand united with these values and say 'refugees are welcome'.

Indeed the peace imperative must be a priority if we are to heal a fractured world that is now a risk for all of us. The only answers are investment in people and their communities, in inclusion of all peoples, all generations.

Trade unions have stood at the frontlines of struggles for democratic change and social justice throughout history. In many countries we are the only organised voice of opposition to governments attacking their own people or operating at the behest of corporate power and vested interests. Unions have and continue to successfully mobilize against and support community opposition to racism, dictatorship slavery and oppression.

There is a long list of proud struggles but most recently the UGTT was central in mobilising and negotiating the democratic transition in Tunisia while avoiding the level of bloodshed in other countries during the “Arab Spring”. Unions mobilized the community groups that were behind the drafting of a Tunisian constitution which guarantees fundamental principles such as the separation of powers, an independent judiciary, freedom of association, the right to organise and the right to strike. And they were rewarded with the Nobel Peace Prize for the 'Dialogue Quartet'.

And in Columbia the promise of peace is possible after fifty years of conflict and the trade unions are organising

for the yes vote in the referendum that will promise future generations freedom from fear.

And Rengo, our Japanese members remain our global conscience on campaigning against nuclear weapons and for disarmament.

Disarmament, including a ban on nuclear weapons, is more important than ever. The massive trade in arms and the public dollars tied up in the trade is both a threat to peace and to investment in social protection or jobs elsewhere in the economy. It is true that there are many jobs in the manufacturing and the trade and services associated with arms but like any political choice the danger is in both not dealing with the issue and the consequences for workers and communities.

Unions face the fall-out from political investment or divestment and changes in global demand and the impact on workers every day. The centrality of social dialogue and the consequent commitment to national and industry plans for managing these shifts is our key demand.

Peace, secure democracy, prosperity - it all requires people to talk to each other; unions know that social dialogue and collective bargaining work. And last week the Prime Minister of Sweden launched with us the call for a New Global Deal based on just that, social dialogue - people working together in peace and unity for the promise of the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

However where democracy, rights and dialogue is absent, in too many places our people are on the frontlines and with sadness but determination last week we launched a global campaign to fight the corruption and corporate take-over of the parliament and the breakdown in the rule of law in Brazil where former President Lula who stood against poverty and inequality is under attack with the ruthless conspiracy of a media conglomerate with too much power.

Let me leave you with the call from some of the most courageous people in the world - the 'White Helmets' who stay in Syria to rescue their people and to help rebuild their communities.

*Barrel bombs - sometimes filled with chlorine -are the biggest killer of civilians in Syria today. Our unarmed and neutral rescue workers have save more than 60,000 people from the attacks in Syria, but there are many we cannot reach. There are children trapped in rubble we cannot hear. Stop the bombs! Please stop the bombs!
Raed Saleh - The White Helmets*

They need our help. They must act to strengthen the call for peace and disarmament all over the world. We stand with you to disrupt the arms trade, to work to bring an end to conflict and to fight for the peace imperative with vital investment and inclusion of the worlds people.

Together we can rebuild and realise the dream of peace and a zero poverty- zero carbon world.

Solidarity

Sharan Burrow
ITUC General Secretary