

For children's sake

18/2/04

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Life, as we knew it before Sept. 11, 2001, no longer exists. The horrid attacks on New York and Washington were a Pandora's box, out of which emerged fear, panic, wars, violence, bloodshed, suspicion, uncertainty, mistrust, prejudice, discrimination, racism, fanaticism, dangerous nationalism, politicization of world religions, lack of respect for humanity and for world cultures, flagrant breach of international law, a media that is actively driving a wedge between nations, hostility toward Islam, and a vicious campaign, which portrays all Muslims as potential terrorists and all Arabs as enemies of Western civilization.

A Muslim man with beard strikes fear in a few hearts in the West. The scarf that has for centuries covered the hair of modest Muslim women, and which the beautiful Mona Lisa dons; is today considered a symbol of female oppression, a threat to secularism and a menace to integration.

The standard definitions for "democracy", "liberation", "terrorists", "freedom fighters", "human rights" are no longer valid. The 21st century news bulletins and the language of politician and journalism is fraught with terms which were little known before the attacks on America and little used prior to the war on Afghanistan and Iraq. The TV and radio channels that we tuned to for reliable information before Sept. 11, 2001, have lost their credibility. Many politicians who commanded the highest respect of their people are no longer trusted and revered. We live in a confused and confusing world. Is it not time we asked how our children fare in the dangerous global situation, which we have created? Is it not time we found out how our irrational decisions and reckless actions affect their lives and what impact they might have on their future?

Today's children are tomorrow's parents of millions of innocent children yet to be born. They are the politicians, the world leaders and the decision maker, who will take our places when we retire. They will lead when our generation is too old to guide, too exhausted to rule, and too weak to plan; too tired to influence and direct world affairs. They are the unfortunate generation who will bear the burden of cleaning the mess we are creating and clearing the environment we are polluting.

Are we being fair to our children? Are we giving them the training and the education that will help them successfully as-

sume their future roles in society? Are we preparing them to meet the daunting challenges of an increasingly dangerous and increasingly interdependent world? Are we showing them how to reconstruct the world we are destroying with lethal weapons and sophisticated arms? Are we teaching them love, compassion, respect for all humanity, reverence for world religions, hatred of injustice and discrimination? Are we teaching them the universal values that will make them staunch enemies of crimes, wars, assassination, and destruction of all forms of life? Are we teaching them to be true promoters of human rights and faithful lovers of a democracy that does not favor the mighty and crush the weak? Are we providing them with the knowledge that would make them good citizens of their countries and caring citizens of the world? Are we being good role models for them to emulate?

Alas, the children of the world are the victims of our cruelty, our irresponsible actions and our unwise decisions. We are destroying their world and harming their prospects in life. We are inflicting upon them misery, which they are too helpless to ward off and pain, which they are too fragile to bear. We often teach them to discriminate against people who follow different faiths, speak different languages and belong to different cultures. The media is showing them live scenes of violence, bloodshed and ruthless killing, which are the natural products of our madness. From the moment they learn to think, walk and speak we teach them arrogance and prejudice. We often teach them to rate money and material objects over love and noble principles. We teach them to hate potential friends that we dub "the enemy". They often learn, by example, to exploit the poor, to rush the weak and to covet what is not theirs.

There are scientists in our world, who spend their time working quietly in their laboratories, trying to discover cures for fatal illnesses. There are humanitarians, who spend their lives feeding the hungry, rescuing people in dangerous cities, tending to the wounded and recovering dead bodies in battlefields and in disaster-stricken areas. They are ideal role models for our children and our youth to imitate. Unfortunately, politicians take little interest in their work, and their efforts rarely catch the eye of the world media. Sadly, their work and efforts receive scant support from rich governments and wealthy organizations, which shower arm industries

with billions in hard currency. The sensational media prefers to focus on men and women who lie, spin, distort facts, deceive with a glib tongue, and make promises that are rarely kept. We often teach our children deceit, cruelty and injustice. We wage wars in the name of religion, democracy and human rights. We search for weapons of mass destruction, where they do not exist. We allow the children in Africa and the Third World starve and be homeless. We injure and kill many innocent souls. We deprive many children of their parents and hijack their young dreams.

We ask education authorities to spend money, time and effort on removing from textbooks words, sentences, chapters or lessons that might promote hatred and violence, while we expose many children to the horrid consequences of raging violence and humanitarian disasters. We allow them to watch on their TV screens mighty soldiers and armed men killing innocent civilians, demolishing homes, crushing children and old men and woman, polluting the environment and spreading fear and sorrow in every heart. The world is plagued with high rates of illiteracy. According to UNESCO, 861 million people, 20 percent of the world's adults, cannot read and write or participate fully in the organization of their societies and 113 million children are out of school. Owning a book, having an adult read it to you, sitting in classroom, playing with schoolmates your age, eating enough food, drinking clean water, receiving medical care, sleeping in a comfortable bed, wearing shoes and warm clothes are all experiences unknown to many children in poor countries.

Should we not direct all efforts and all world resources toward the eradication of poverty and illiteracy and the elimination of diseases, violence and injustice? Should we not promote harmony, friendship, peace and respect for all humanity in a world that we like to describe as a global village?

Should not our generation mobilize and breathe new life into friendships that reckless actions and unwise decisions have destroyed? Should not the world's political and religious leaders embrace attitudes that would makes them role models of love, and benevolence to the children of the world?

For our children's sake, let us end our folly and bring peace to the world.

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Special to Arab News**