

“Humanity Knows No Borders”

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1. The global sky is full of dark clouds. There is reason, there must be reason, for concern. Humanity has to take time out to reflect. To-day is a good occasion to do so, especially since we have among us Haifa al Mansour and Solmaz Panahi who, together with her mother, has joined us on behalf of Jafar Panahi, her father. The Kant Foundation is honouring two artists from the Middle East, one from Saudi Arabia, the other from Iran. They have taken Immanuel Kant’s demand of yesteryear seriously and have shown the courage to use their minds with all the consequences that this has entailed. They have been swimming against the currents, they have built bridges and they have climbed mountains that try to separate people.

2. The community of nations has created an impressive body of law which is as densely woven as the most magnificent carpets one can find in the Middle East. Life in all its facets is well protected by such law – or so it seems! The UN Charter remains the supreme road map for human life with peace. It echoes what many thinkers and humanists throughout centuries have proclaimed. Can there be any disagreement that the usefulness of a map lies in its use?

3. Emotions? Feelings? - important as they are, must be in harmony with reason! The irrational rejection of Europe by Britain would not have happened if feelings and reason had been in balance! How much more evidence do we need to accept that humanity knows no borders?

4. Let me pause here for a moment and interject... and I know that Berthold Lange, the Founder of the Kant Foundation, does not like to hear such words: we would not be here on this occasion were it not for Berthold’s unfathomable stubbornness, his seemingly tireless reminding us of the ethical and non-material dimensions of life and his continuous and selfless generosity!

(I would like to repeat this also in German and say:

Ich weiß, Berthold Lange, der Gründer der Kantstiftung hört solche Worte nicht gerne, aber ich will sie trotzdem sagen: Wir wären heute nicht beisammen, ohne Berthold Lange's unergründliche Hartnäckigkeit, immer wieder an die ethischen und nicht-materiellen Dimensionen des Lebens zu erinnern und dies verbunden mit einer selbstlosen Großzügigkeit.

5. If indeed 'humanity knows no borders' and communication across borders in 2016 is easier than ever before, why then do we have at the same time so much 'in-humanity' across borders?

6. Why is there this immense gap between the finest rhetoric language is able to give us when our leaders speak in the halls of the United Nations and and at the same time there is the brutal reality in Syria, in Iraq, in Palestine, in Afghanistan, in Libya, in Central and Eastern Europe, in North America and elsewhere?

7. Why is the 21st century quickly becoming the 'century of gaps'?

8. Why is there a gap between political promises and their fulfilment?

9. Why is there a gap between morality and action, between human rights and human obligations?

10. Why is there a gap between culture and civilization?

11. Why is there a widening gap between politics and people's expectations?

12. Why do 62 individuals have more wealth than 50% of the global population? (Oxfam!)

13. Why is there a deepening gap of understanding between the young and the old?

14. Why is there a gap between our 'inner' and our 'outer' voices?

15. and why is there impunity when there should be accountability?

16. The list of gaps is much longer. I will spare you more!

17. An editorial of a respected German newspaper (SZ) recently observed:

".... just when they need to be stronger, our societies seem fragile, tense, stifled by powerful winds of revolt against their elites

and against an economic order that has increased inequalities?”

18. So what? You will say. What is new?

You are right if you react in this way. What needs to happen? What are the ‘whats’ to close these gaps?

19. Before turning to the ‘whats’, I must remain a moment longer with the ‘whys’!

20. The World Population Clock shows that today 7, 5 billion people inhabit our earth. Five decades spent outside of Germany give me the confidence to argue that most human beings whether they live, as my family and I have, in central Europe or in Accra, Ankara, Rangoon, New Delhi, Baghdad, New York, Islamabad or elsewhere want to live in peace. There is no place on earth where the majority does not long for freedom from poverty and freedom from fear.

21. Why then is the eternal Machiavelli in us still gaining the upper hand? Why are politics increasingly dominated by economics and not the other way around? Why is moral integrity again and again surrendering to greed, power and other addictions in trade, in sport, even in education and culture?

22. Easy answers do not exist! However, there is one element, a major element, that cannot be left out in any answer: the imperative of ending impunity!

23. Failure to be held accountable for horrific crimes against humanity, for example in the Middle East, in South Asia or in the former Yugoslavia are major reasons why conflicts in these areas continue. Conditions in Syria, Iraq, Libya, Palestine are well documented, for all to see. These are facts and facts are stubborn!

24. Crimes against innocent people are also taking place this very moment in Yemen, in Bahrain, in Egypt, in Saudi Arabia, the country which has heavily supported ISIS in Iraq and Syria. Navid Kermani, the winner of the 2015 Peace Prize of the German book fair, makes the grave observation:

“There is a 95% identity between the ISIS ideology and the text books of Saudi Arabia!”

25. “If the camel could see its hump, it would fall and break its neck” is a Saudi-Arabian saying. Those who argue for peace should no longer save the camel’s neck!

26. Crimes against humanity? Mass murder? War crimes? Genocide? Let us not engage in a legalistic debate and by doing so deflect from the existence of horrendous crimes that have been committed allegedly in the name of human rights and justice. They have in fact deepened the wounds of injustice!

27. I know, it is time to turn to the ‘what’! What does it take to close the gaps, “ to save us from the scourge of war” and to make dignity, the worth of the human person and the sanctity of life the platform that unites us all, as demanded by the UN Charter?

28. Hear me out before you give your verdict. Let me present 5 theses to make the case for peace:

(1)As individuals, we have inalienable human rights but, lest we forget, we also have inalienable human obligations. It is this combination incorporated within ourselves which defines the dignity of humanity. To put it differently:” we must delve into our buried self and seek the tracts of life” to quote Allama Iqbal, the Pakistani poet and statesman who said this, when his country was born in 1948.

(2)There is the importance of talking ‘with’ not talking ‘at’ each-other. Allow me to expand. I can not forget the excitement with which villagers in the mountains of northern Pakistan or in the Kalahari Desert of Botswana or along the Atlantic coast of Ghana would listen to each-other and absorb what the other had to say. What a difference to the monologues and the resulting battle of words in the UN Security Council I heard when the future of Iraq was the subject in the late 1990s. Monologue invariably ends in confrontation while dialogue may lead to peaceful solutions as we have seen in the 5+1 nuclear disarmament talks with Iran.

(3)The valuable international law of which we have created so much since 1945 must be here to stay and be respected by nations and individuals alike. No more double standards in international courts, no ICC as a ‘court for

Africans'. No more exceptionalism to justify renditions and torture or prisons outside of legal jurisdiction and due process!

(4)The G7 mentality with its tentacles of protectionism is not democratic! It promotes the turmoil and the chaos that surrounds us. Those who belong to western civilizations and western political systems – a mere 12% of the global population – have to accept that globalization must mean 'convergence' and 'sharing' of the achievements of the human mind in education, in health, in technology. This is a pre-condition for stabilizing the world order in which we live.

(5)International communication and the tools for interaction have never been more available than to-day. Welding people from anywhere, of any age and of any background is no longer a utopia but an available opportunity. There is this chance to speak out with a global voice and in the name of 'we, the peoples' – the first three words of the UN Charter. What an incredible but also daunting, even dangerous opportunity! Stéphane Hessel, the great humanist, the global citizen from France whose 'engagez-vous' has travelled around the world in cyber speed time, would agree, were he alive. He undoubtedly would also have warned that technology must not be allowed any longer to outpace humanity! Lena Ben Mhenni, the young female blogger from Tunisia is convinced that the social revolution in her country would not have taken place without social media. An ancient Iranian saying comes to mind: "water will find the pot hole!" Today, it is much easier for people with the same dreams of peace and justice to find this pot hole of like-mindedness!

29. In conclusion: human rights and human responsibilities go together. Life in peace has to do with community and dialogue, not monologue and society. Humanity must remain ahead of technology. Global order without accountability and justice is not possible. Equitable globalization means convergence of progress for all and not just for the West.

These are not small challenges, but they are doable! Sapere Aude!

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