

HUMANITY & Tolerance – November 2006 Presentation

QUESTIONS:

How can humanity express Tolerance through the MDG's?

If we agree that we share the value of **Tolerance**, in what ways could this help us to achieve the MDGs?

1. Is **Tolerance** a shared value?
2. If so, can **Tolerance** be expressed through one or more of the MDGs?
3. If we live the value of **Tolerance**, could we accomplish these MDGs?
4. If so, what are the obstacles to achieving this?
5. What can we do to overcome these obstacles?

Speaking Points:

Define Tolerance:

The currently accepted definition of tolerance is a loose definition of "putting up" with something, to deal with it, not without bias...but just to "tolerate it." I would like to clarify the definition of this valuable but often ill-perceived word.

There are actually two definitions to tolerance

- a fair, objective, and permissive attitude toward those whose opinions, practices, race, religion, nationality, etc., differ from one's own; freedom from bigotry.
- interest in and concern for ideas, opinions, practices, etc., foreign to one's own; a liberal, undogmatic viewpoint.

The second one is the wider and more applicable definition of tolerance that we must teach.

This is about expanding beyond what the normally accepted definition is of tolerance and teaching about tolerance as looking into other cultures and people with interest, things that might typically make one uncomfortable because they have been taught to discriminate against another. We must switch the paradigm, lest we keep tolerance as a mask over peoples' eyes at the expense of our own humanity.

Points on MDGs and Tolerance:

- The MDGs were created to promote Human Development and to serve as a blueprint for building a better world.
- In order to make achieving the MDGs a reality, there is a fundamental principle that every society must adopt in order to create a better world. This principle is tolerance.
- Tolerance encourages people of different cultures, races, opinions, religions, nationalities to have positive attitudes toward each other, allows for undogmatic viewpoints, and promotes collaboration/unity of various groups/castes/tribes that exist within the same borders. **Tolerance is understanding, acceptance, and cooperation.**

Example of the Cost of Intolerance

The Dalit caste in India. The Dalits are the "untouchables" of India. Due to their status/rank in society, over 160 million people find it arguably impossible to move "above their station".

Without mobility these people find it extremely difficult to buy/own land, move freely within their societies, or to send their children to school (MDG #2). The lack of tolerance leaves the Dalit in a dire situation. Due to the immense discrimination, they are often left in poverty, illiterate, without adequate access to healthcare and forced to frequently migrate (decreasing the chances of them attending school even further).

- Lack of tolerance eliminates solidarity in a society, promotes inequality, and denies those discriminated against their freedoms and basic human rights.
- Tolerance is the gateway for these people to ameliorate their situation.

Obstacles to Intolerance:

- Generational (and inherited) judgments - these pass from one generation to the next and oftentimes people cannot even name why they hold a certain prejudice, other than that their parents felt that way
- Misunderstandings/Miscommunication - as always the root of disagreement is held ground deep in miscommunication, but truly the cost is great as there is blame placed for events that may have never occurred or are irrelevant
- Fear of the unknown – especially in homogeneous groups, there subsists a culture of fearing what is different – not because it is bad, but because of the fear of loss or diminishing of one’s own identity when introduced to the unknown.
- Lack of exposure – the lack of tolerance can often be attributed to lack of awareness which many times is just the void of exposure to foreign groups or “unknowns” which can instill a lack of trust or indifference, or keep alive the old perception of tolerance
- No open dialogue – often, and especially in closed societies, there are no venues for openly discussing particular hot buttons of a society or even tolerance in general. If children are raised in homes and schools where tolerance is not discussed and there is no focus on teaching interest in another’s way of life, children will not often seek it or feel comfortable questioning the way things are.
- Poverty/Hunger – always a barrier between have’s and have not’s, as well as clouding the vision of those who are stuck in poverty or go hungry, who will tend to blame another ethnic group, gender, or group, for their misfortunes. An empty stomach is always a sure path to lack of tolerance.

Solutions to overcoming this issue and instilling tolerance:

- Education - The quintessential elements to achieve tolerance is education and communication; which will open the doors to understanding, sympathy, acceptance, partnerships (MDG#8) and most importantly, Freedom (www.tolerance.org – a website that has classroom activities about teaching tolerance). We must re-teach the teachers, and attempt to teach the parents, who can then teach the children. Through ICTs classrooms around the world can connect teachers and children to facilitate learning about diversity. Websites such as tolerance.org can be used as a forum to exchange best practices and keep an open channel of communication.
- Cultural exchange for understanding, coupled with education (i.e. Seeds of Peace - they work to break down the barriers between Israel and Palestinian intolerance using cultural exchange programs for young Israelis and Palestinians, they are in study programs about the other culture, then they will live in the family homes of each other, to find out about what they are like. Through this manner...seeds of Peace hopes the grudges of the past will "die out" with older generations) Cultural Exchange can come through “virtual communities”. Allowing for a place for people to congregate without race or creed being an issue.
- Treating injustices in the world – resolving the wounds of the past between groups through diplomatic solutions and then encouraging conversation between the groups can take age-old problems and make them a memory of the past.
- Having world leaders and countries be examples of tolerance – practicing what is preached is a good start to having the rest of the world believe that the wealthier countries care and are serious.

This is not an insurmountable problem – there are countless open doors and paths to be walked, but we must first be willing to take that first step, and the path will not be easy. As Nelson Mandela once said, “There is no easy walk to freedom anywhere, and many of us will have to pass through the valley of the shadow of death again and again before we reach the mountaintop of our desires.”

