Should Humanitarian Aid be Given to the Gaza Region? Yes or No?

The Inaugural Row4Life Global Diversity Initiative (R-GDI Meeting was held from 2-2:30 PM on Sunday December 3rd, 2023. It consisted of civil discourse from student leaders representing seven universities from across the world. The general procedures used for this forum roughly followed the protocols used in the U.S. Senate as outlined below.

- Each person was allotted 3 minutes to introduce themselves and to state their position. If a person did not want to identify themselves by name, then that was fine. However, they had to provide the name of their school

- After everybody had stated their position, the moderator (Kyle) stated his position. As agreed, I took a position opposite to everybody else since we always want to view each situation from all perspectives. This would not have been necessary if the group had provided mixed positions.

- After everybody stated their position, everybody was allowed 1-2 minutes to comment on another person's or persons' position.

- The moderator was in charge of keeping time. Kyle gave 30 second warnings as time was about to expire.

- Future meetings will likely extend the initial period from 3 minutes to 4 minutes.

- Future meetings will likely have dozens or hundreds of attendees. Hence, only some people will be able to state their position. This will be somewhat random, but controlled by whomever is moderating the session.

- It is important to note that the moderator can always turn off a person's microphone if that person, for whatever reason, became non-constructive.

- This meeting was very short. Final exams were in process for several attendees. However, having a short meeting was deemed better than having no meeting at all.

The following schools were represented; All are R-GDI partners with excerption of #7, which is in the process of becoming a partner.

1. University of Lynchburg

2. Humboldt University in Berlin (Berlin)

3. University of New Delhi (India)

4. University of Illinois Urbana Champagne (Illinois)

5. United States Naval Academy (Maryland)

6. Norfolk State University (Virginia)

7. Green Bay Community College (New Hampshire) (Student leader was not able to attend due to prior commitment but is being kept in loop to attend future meetings)

Each of the students attending are leaders on their respective campuses and seek to change the world for the better. However, each student also wanted to gain additional perspectives on this issue concerning the war between Israel and Hamas and to see perspectives and context from another party's position. This is the goal of R-GDI and all attendees were of this mindset.

The particular issue that was being discussed was: ***Should humanitarian aid be given to the Gaza region?*** The following summarizes the main points made by the students. Names and schools have been redacted since this type of identification does not serve the purpose of R-GDI. Of course, the attendees can easily self-identify who is who.

1. Hamas is essentially overwhelming and synonymous with Gaza, and as such one has to limit the flow of supplies to only humanitarian aid such as food and medical supplies. The recent donation of 20,000 gallons of fuel to Gaza should not have been given as it can be used by Hamas to fuel tanks and other weapons. Humanitarian aid should be just that, humanitarian, so as to save as many lives as possible without prolonging the conflict.

2. The current conflict between Israel and Hamas is the culmination of a decades long conflict between the two sides and every time a two-state solution is suggested it does not work. A new solution is needed; I do not know what that is, but we need to look at this as young leaders from a different angle because previous leaders have used the same method time and again with the same results which is more deaths and violence. As for humanitarian aid, it should be given, but regulated so that it does not fall into the hands of Hamas and is only used for innocents. A great way to do this would be to work with the PLO, who are the recognized state of Gaza/Palestinian people, so as to prevent it from falling into the hands of Hamas.

3. We are all talking about Hamas and Israel, and these conversations need to be had, but keep in mind that none of us are Israeli or Palestinian or Israeli so we are looking at it from an outsider's perspective. We must also work with local connection among the Palestinian population. We should emphasize the need to work with local population. That is what we must do when giving aid to the Palestinian people so that it is being used to help innocent Palestinians and not Hamas.

4. The US has had a long history of these types of wars with Korea, Vietnam, and Afghanistan where one cannot tell the difference between an enemy and friend because

the two are so enmeshed together among the population. This is the same case with Hamas where the population is essentially Hamas because of the two being so entwined together. In addition, the reason the two are so enmeshed is because of their extreme ideology as while many of the Palestinians do not share this ideology, the principles are nonetheless the same which makes it easy for Hamas to gain the loyalty of the local populous. Israel must find ways to limit this extreme ideology so as to turn the loyalty of the population to Israel if they want to win this war because if they don't then it will just be Israel's version of Vietnam: a perpetual war with no clear victor, enemy, or ally. To that end, aid to Gaza should be extremely limited to only the bare necessities so there can be no way of it falling into the hands of Hamas. Currently, there is far too much aid being given such as the fuel which can easily be used for military purposes.

After each student made this three-minute opening statement there was about ten minutes of unmoderated conversation where students could respond to statements made by each other. Highlights included:

- How do we go about changing ideology among the populous?
- Need for youth advocacy as once the youth learn that they are not each other's enemies their ideology will be less extreme. Programs such as R-GDI can broaden their perspectives
- ***Keep in mind that we are outsiders in this war and that these are actual people so as to be sensitive to that (This is Key Take-Away From Today's Meeting).*** In addition, more focus needs to be given to local governance so as to ensure that all aid is going through the right channels in Gaza

- Private individuals need to be more active in giving aid since they do not have to go through the same bureaucratic processes as NGO's and governments, making aid more effectively and efficiently distributed while avoiding any aid from being misdirected for military use.

At the meeting's conclusion, everyone was very pleased and enjoyed it. Everyone thought their perspectives had been broadened and that a future meeting should occur again with more participants. Moderator suggested that other students tell friends about this program so as to participate and that they can be moderators next time with a topic they suggest so that a diversity of topics and perspectives are discussed and given.

Next Steps:

1. Recruit staff members for R-GDI from student body of UL so as to help manage the organization and get the word out from SGA, Bonner Leaders, and other service-oriented organizations.
2. Have another meeting later in December with additional participants. Attempt to invite hundreds since we know that not everybody can attend… but just try and we will have enough attendees to warrant a nice discussion.
3. Have more meetings with speakers (politicians, nonprofit leaders etc.) to give more perspectives. Do this after we know that hundreds or thousands will show up, since we have to make sure that an invited VIP is not embarrassed by having low attendance.
4. Next Meeting is tentatively scheduled for 12-20.

5. Future meetings will be 1 hour… with maximum of ten attendees allowed to speak/engage. However, everybody can listen and everybody can provide comments, by text, to the moderator.