

Is 'sustainable peace' achievable?

AT an event in New York last Friday to commemorate the International Day of Peace tomorrow, UN secretary-general Ban Ki-moon and UN messengers of peace Leonardo DiCaprio, Stevie Wonder, Michael Douglas and other stars pleaded for peace and the survival of the planet which is said to be "closer to conflict than we may like to think".

Wars and violent conflicts not only kill millions of people, they also destroy economies and the environment. They are responsible today for creating the world's 21.3 million refugees, a terrible indictment on humanity which has failed miserably to look after its own species.

Peace is a state of tranquillity, civility, calm and harmony and the freedom from war, violence and conflict in a society, country, region or the world. There has not been much written on the subject and the basis of "sustainable peace".

Sustainable peace is a prolonged and durable state of peace which can only be achieved by the application of the following seven principles:

- ▶ **Practice** and promotion of justice, fairness, moderation, liberalism and respect for other cultures, heritage, beliefs and non-intrusive ideologies.
- ▶ **Addressing** fairly the geo-political interests of the players involved.
- ▶ **Opposition** to all forms of extremism and discrimination.
- ▶ **Support** for self-determination and non-interference in the internal affairs of all countries.
- ▶ **Acceptance** that all humans are equal inhabitants of our small planet who have the right to harness its natural resources in an equitable and sustainable manner

▶ **Recognition** that humans from all corners of the world and of all ethnicities have much more in common than their differences.

▶ **Acknowledgement** that humans need each other to survive, conserve and protect our natural resources and we need an inclusive approach based on universal principles and rules to collaborate, co-operate and work together to share in the fruits of social, economic and technological development and progress for all.

It is difficult to have sustainable peace in any country if the country is in a region fraught with conflicts.

Achieving sustainable peace, especially in some regions of the world such as the Middle East, Korean Peninsula, Jammu and Kashmir and South China Sea, seems to be rather elusive. If one were to analyse any regional conflict, it is not hard to conclude that some of the above principles were missing.

The Nordic region (Denmark, Sweden, Norway, Iceland, Finland and Greenland) is perhaps the only region in the world which can be considered to be enjoying sustainable peace. You would find the seven principles thriving there.

The irony of our world is that to achieve sustainable peace, often non-peaceful means, such as waging a war of resistance or independence or against aggression, may be necessary. It is a case of taking one step back to move two steps forward.

It should be recognised that peace is the most important type of all charities. In a war-like situation, sponsoring and donating funds for poverty, education or housing may be meaningless. This is not to say that normal charities are wrong, in fact, any charitable act must be supported and commended.

It should also be recognised that promoting peace is practically non-existent in the corporate or private sector. It is assumed that such a role should be undertaken by the government, politicians and NGOs. Yet, business has a vested interest in peace as no business, except the arms producers, can survive or prosper in a war or armed conflict.

Therefore, peace philanthropy should be accorded greater urgency and priority.

There are many ways to promote sustainable peace for the public - via museums, galleries, sports, festivals, theatres, tourism, conferences, rallies, films, music, plays, joining peace NGOs and writing articles.

The promotion of the "culture of peace" has to be interesting and engaging, especially with the younger generations. If they find the content boring, dull or too academic, they will not be interested to learn about the evils of wars or the virtues of sustainable peace.

Children should be taught from young about the culture and principles of sustainable peace.

For peace to be effective and impactful, it also has to be global as far as possible, as most conflicts in this world have one or more super or regional powers involved.

It was the globalisation of the anti-war movement that forced the US government to end the Vietnam War (1955-1975).

Otherwise, Vietnam would have been bombed into oblivion. Much can be learnt from the peace movement against this terrible war which killed more than 1.3 million people. Popular anti-war music by legends such as John Lennon, played a major role here. So too, were demonstrations.

The Iraq War (2003-2011), its brutality and the global opposition to it, had similar characteristics.

Some of the biggest threats to world peace today are the IS "caliphate" and North Korea. Both are led by ideological lunatics and cold-blooded murderers, which may require a ruthless non-peaceful and resolute approach to achieve sustainable peace.

For years, I have written about the serious threat of IS. I have stressed that to eliminate the IS social cancer, besides the intelligence and co-ordinated military approach, is to use education and psychological warfare to win back the hearts and minds of disenchanted pro-IS Muslim youths.

An idea is to use pilotless aircraft or drones to drop well-written and "shock and awe" leaflets in the local languages in the areas controlled by IS in Syria, Iraq and Libya (and other regions of the world) about the evils, hypocrisy and anti-Islamic nature about the IS in simple words and images. The same approach and messages but via the internet and social media can also be used, to those targeted by the IS for its recruitment and financial support.

Some superpowers and several regimes are also responsible for stirring conflicts and wars and for inciting the culture of terrorism. Their leaders should be exposed and held to account by their own people.

More leaders and regimes, which are flouting UN rules against wars, should be referred to the International Criminal Court for war crimes and any judgments should be enforced resolutely.

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Beyond the Wall:
A new mindset

BY K.K. TAN