



BRAHMA KUMARIS WORLD SPIRITUAL UNIVERSITY

Human Security and Dignity: Fulfilling the United Nations Promise

Statement for the

United Nations 56th Annual DPI/NGO Conference

September 8 – 10, 2003, United Nations Headquarters, New York, USA

Human rights are the foundation of human existence ... Human rights are universal, indivisible and interdependent. Human rights are what make us human. They are the principles by which we create the sacred home for human dignity. It is the universality of human rights that gives them their strength. It endows them with the power to cross any border, climb any wall, defy any force."

Kofi Annan

(UN Secretary-General, 1997)

The Charter of the United Nations defines the purposes of the organization as well as the methods to attain those purposes. The first purpose of the United Nations is to maintain "international peace and security." The preamble of the UN Charter "reaffirms faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person, in the equal rights of man and woman and of nations large and small."

On the basis of this faith in human rights, the UN Charter came into existence after the Second World War with a view to sparing humanity from another holocaust. The UN promise was to bring back dignity to human existence following the atrocious experience of World War II.

Human security and dignity are closely linked. Dignity is considered as an invaluable treasure that each and every human being is endowed with, irrespective of the society he/she belongs to. Insults to human dignity, such as subhuman living conditions, arbitrary imprisonment or deportation, slavery, disgraceful working conditions, participation of children in war and sale of drugs, poison human society and have to be condemned. In many of these cases men, women and children are treated as mere tools for profit rather than as free and responsible persons.

Experience has taught us that, unless authorities take suitable action with regard to economic, political and social matters, inequalities between citizens tend to become more and more widespread and as a result human rights are baffled and the fulfillment of duties is compromised.

The struggle against destitution, though urgent and necessary, is not enough. It is a question, rather, of building a world where every human being, no matter what his/her race,

religion or nationality, can live a decent human life, free from servitude imposed on him/her by other individuals or by natural forces over which he/she has no control; a world where freedom is not an empty word and where the poor man Lazarus can sit down at the same table as the rich man. The citizen of the world needs the "feel good" factor of being in security for his/her normal development and progress in any society. Basically it is the role of the governing body of any nation to provide security to its inhabitants. They should be able to live free from any type of aggression -- terrorism, burglary, exploitation and subjugation.

Human security is related to freedom of expression. Restriction of the freedom of expression at any level due to state and other forms of intervention, leads to a feeling of insecurity in the average citizen. When individuals cannot express themselves freely their dignity is curtailed. They lose their self-esteem and develop a sense of inner frustration frequently expressed as riots. In régimes, where freedom of expression is restricted, there exists an atmosphere of suspicion and mistrust. This gives rise to fear and the dignity of the individual is trampled upon.

The problems of law and order arising from social ills in society -- poverty, unemployment, drug addiction, prostitution, genocide and child abuse -- are a major constraint in the development of many countries because they generate insecurity and are a bane to human dignity. In such cases, people undergo mental as well as physical harassment. Some measures taken by governments to address the problem have superficial results as the root cause is often ignored because of political, social or economic considerations.

Amongst all the species of this world, human beings alone have the highest level of consciousness that gives them a sense of worth to themselves. This is dignity and it emanates from the soul and stimulates the inner energy so that the individual fulfils his/her role in society to the best of his/her ability.

The education that we impart to our children and youth should imperatively cater for their self worth and dignity. Many run away from home for a number of reasons - mainly personal problems, family conflict, abuse or problems at school. Agencies should work together to develop accessible, child focused services to young runaways who, to date, have been a highly vulnerable group. Recently there have been several cases of pedophilia at the hands of grown-ups who should have been caring for these children. Immediate preventive action should accordingly be taken, as all children deserve the opportunity to grow up in a safe and caring environment and need to be protected from harm and exploitation. This should help them to break down barriers such as fear, doubt, and confusion.

Otherwise, certain vulnerable groups develop, through accumulated past habits, a sense of inferiority complex which lowers their dignity. The classical example is the woman who is treated as second-class citizen in male dominated societies. The woman's dignity is trampled upon and she is deprived of her fundamental right of freedom of expression, choice etc.

With the ageing process, the elderly people become less active and thus depend on others in many respects. In the nuclear type of family, they are left on their own and such loneliness often leads to a loss of self worth and dignity. It is the duty of a caring society to cater for the welfare of its senior citizens who have contributed towards the progress and advancement of the society.

Other people who have lost their sense of dignity and self worth are the alcoholics, drug users, and detainees -- the categories of people that we would not like to be associated with. The rate of success obtained in the rehabilitation of such people is rather low. One of the reasons is that the rehabilitation program does not bear components that would enable these people to build up once more their dignity. In this context, the Mauritian example of the Lotus Center, a drug rehabilitation center for convicted detainees is worth mentioning. The programme was successful because it aimed at building up the dignity of the individual. Some of the participants have reintegrated into society on their release from jail with a positive outlook for their own benefit and that of the nation. In the field of education, special schools for slow learners have been set up under the project known as "Zones d'Education Prioritaires". They are meant particularly for the benefit of children coming from deprived areas with a view to increasing the literacy rate: this will eventually give a boost to their self-esteem.

Human beings, therefore, are to be seen as assets to the institutions they serve, and not as means to be exploited for narrowly defined goals. Whatever the progress in technology and economic life, there can be neither justice nor peace in the world, so long as people fail to realize how important is their dignity. This precept rests on one basic principle: individual human beings are the foundation, the cause and the end of every social institution. When we deal with one another, we may learn a lot by adopting this sense of awareness.

Article 2 of the Charter of the United Nations stipulates that the UN Organization is based on the principles of the Sovereign equality of all its members. More often than not, the noble concept of equality of human beings is mere lip service in the sense that so much discrimination based on the skin color, the social, cultural or religious differences happen on a daily basis. In spite of progress in communication nowadays, there are still many physical barriers amongst the citizens of the world. The various fanatics and zealots use modern tools in the field of Information and Communication Technology to brainwash their group to react on the basis of religious or cultural emotions.

Terrorism, or the fear of it, is a state that many people live in nowadays. Often ordinary citizens become terrorists when their fundamental rights are being trampled upon or denied. When anyone superimposes their will on another for their own interest, this gives rise to revolts that may ultimately turn into terrorism. This, paradoxically, is a means whereby the so-called terrorists try to protect these same fundamental human rights, which they feel, are not being respected. The result is that the average citizen, who very often has little say in public policy, has to bear the brunt of terrorist attacks with serious consequences on his welfare and dignity.

It is felt that the spiritual dimension, which is encompassed in the tenet in the Preamble of the UN Charter: "To reaffirm the dignity and worth of the human person" should aim to . . .

- Raise awareness of the existence of higher-order values as spiritual qualities inherent within the individual regardless of political, economic, social, cultural, religious or ethnic background.
- Create a safe environment for individuals to explore and express these spiritual values individually and collectively.<
- Offer specific self-development and self- management methods and techniques which can be used to revive and strengthen spiritual values within the individual
- Increase awareness of the value of self-development, undertaken by each person individually and people collectively, as a contribution to a better world.

The promise of human security and dignity to be fulfilled by the United Nations, requires each member state to individually and collectively ensure that the fundamental human rights are respected and that all member states, irrespective of size, recognize one another's sovereign right to co-exist peacefully. It is clear that many member states have not paid heed to the lofty principles enshrined in the Human Rights Declaration. The mindset prevailing at the time of the establishment of the United Nations was to ensure mutual recognition of the sovereignty of the individual states. In today's fast becoming borderless world, the concept of national sovereignty is losing ground and we are moving towards a global family.

The vision of the United Nations is to reunite humanity and to consider an individual, irrespective of his/her physical origin, as a leaf of the tree of humanity. After fifty years of its existence, the United Nations should perforce encourage the spiritual dimension in its endeavor to consolidate peace on Planet Earth. The quotation of the great French thinker, André Malraux is relevant in this context -- "The 21st Century will be spiritual or it will not be at all". Our choices are made in response to the values that define our identity in this "global village" of ours; it is therefore imperative that we create in us the identity of the "global being". We cannot establish a vision of the object (the village) without first establishing the being/nature of the subject (ourselves). Our challenge is to decide whether we want to be a partisan in a fragmented world or an individual in this global village with the characteristics of a world identity, and thereby find the peaceful and self-fulfilling path to move towards that identity.

(This statement is authored by Deepak Bhookhun, a senior professional with a disciplinary service background and significant management experience gained from the administration of penal establishments of different security levels to take over eventually the command of the Mauritius Prison Service up to September 1999 as Commissioner of Prisons. He is presently the Security Advisor to the Prime Minister of Mauritius. Deepak Bhookhun is a member of the Brahma Kumaris World Spiritual University.)

Brahma Kumaris World Spiritual University

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