

Connecting across faiths and cultures to end conflict, division and poverty -

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Never has such a global dialogue been so critical. Never has this global leadership working for its success been so strong and so inspirational. And never have the global opportunities that might flow from this – an end to conflict, division, misunderstanding and poverty – been so profound and so necessary.

For if we believe that our future peace and security lies together rather than apart, lies in understanding - not isolation, lies in the differences that we acknowledge and enrich us - not the differences that divide us, then we must speak to people's values and speak to their beliefs.

More than two-thirds of our fellow citizens are followers of the major faiths so we can be in no doubt about the power of faith to shape our world. And while it is not for politicians to lead that bringing together of faith - that can ultimately only be done by the leaders of faith communities themselves - we cannot successfully lead nations without it.

History tells us that the greatest of social movements have been built on the strongest of ethical foundations. Two hundred years ago, was it not men and women of faith and religious conviction who successfully campaigned for the abolition of the slave trade? They said that we could not be one world until slavery was ended.

Fifty years ago, was it not men and women of conscience and religious faith who inspired the civil rights movement here in this country by saying that we could not be one world until every single citizen, whatever their colour, their race or background, enjoyed equal rights?

And is it not men and women of conscience and religious conviction who say today, as we said here at this General Assembly only a few weeks ago, that we cannot be one world when 30,000 children die unnecessarily every day from diseases we know how to cure and that we must together respond to this poverty emergency by redoubling our efforts to meet the Millennium Development Goals?

This is the power of faith: to force the greatest possible coalition for the common good. Not one which seeks to impose uniformity of doctrine or culture, but one that is enriched by diversity, united by shared values, and empowered by a common commitment to make our world a better place.

Too often throughout history people have seen the foreigner as at best a stranger, and sometimes at worst an enemy. And too often, cultures and faiths appear to change at national borders as dramatically as fashion and language.

But today we know we are not, and never can be, moral strangers to each other. Because we find that through each of our heritages, our traditions and faiths, runs a single powerful moral sense. A sense that we all share the pain of others. A sense that we believe in something bigger than ourselves.

When Christians say do to others what you would have them do to you. When Judaism says love your neighbour as yourself. When Muslims say no one of you is a believer until he desires for his brother that which he desires for himself. When Buddhists say hurt not others in ways that you yourself would find hurtful. When Sikhs say treat others as you would be treated yourself. When Hindus say the sum of duty is do not unto others which would cause pain if done to you.

Now call this the best angels of our nature, call it the light in man, call it the moral sense. Call it, as Adam Smith – the philosopher – did, the moral sentiment. Call it conscience or fostering compassion.

Call it the global ethic, the irrevocable unconditional norm for all areas of life for families, communities, races, nations and religions. Most of us accept that what you do not wish done to yourself you do not do to others. It is the same sacred ideal at the ethical heart of all true religions: our duty to others, our concern for the outsider. The sense that each of us is our brother and sisters' keeper.

And so to those who say that religion, and especially that the misunderstanding and intolerance that has often existed between religions, is responsible for many of the problems we face today - I say we will address these problems if we act upon that moral sense that is shared at the heart of all the great faiths of the world.

Now we have a unique opportunity in this new global age, in what is an interdependent world, to act upon that interdependence and make a partnership by working together for the common good. And what is new in this global age is our enhanced ability to communicate with each other, to speak to each other across continents. It wasn't so long ago that we used to say if only people could communicate across borders, if only people could hear what their opponents have to say, if only they could speak with each other and find that they have so much in common then the world would be different.

But today most of these barriers, these old barriers to communication, are being removed. We can now communicate with each other across frontiers almost instantaneously through the internet, through texting and through emailing. There are hundreds of thousands of social networks crossing the world. There are millions of people who may not inhabit the same street, but now inhabit the same internet site. And it is in the encounter of listening and being listened to that we discover that the beliefs we have in common are so much greater than what has in the past driven us apart. We discover what Britain's Chief Rabbi, Jonathan Sacks, calls the dignity of difference. People, he said, all made in the divine image find that they are possessed of a dignity and sanctity that transcends our differences.

And we must act upon our interdependence. Recently in Abuja in Nigeria I visited a run down and dilapidated school where children either were sitting on the floor without a desk, or were sitting three to the desk that had been built for one. Their parents told me that a few miles away a far better school, a far better equipped school, offered free education. But the great facilities and teachers came at a high price because they were funded by an extremist group, poisoning the children's minds and attracting them to a life of terrorism.

I believe it falls upon us to ensure the right to a decent education, free of extremism, for every child in the world. And think of it, if the achievement of this generation could be that every child was able to go to school, to gain an education, to recognise what they had in common with other children. I believe we can do this, coming together, by spending \$10 billion dollar a year - \$100 for each child.

But let us agree that the first thing we should do is that we do everything to fight extremism wherever it exists, so that people understand the central tenets of their faith and the rich associations these faiths enjoy with each other. We in Britain will continue to step up our campaign, working with other countries, to separate decent minded young people from the pressures of divisive and extremist advocates of terrorism.

Secondly, the values of different faiths are already expressed in joint projects and common service. We in Britain have Muslim Aid, collaborating with the United Methodist Committee in America, to respond to the needs of disaster victims in Asia. British Muslims working with American Christians to support Asian neighbours of all faith traditions gives us a glimpse of the potential of faith across our world. /> As we celebrate the 60th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, we should also seek shared values through a shared commitment to human rights and fundamental freedom.

And I have one other proposal about how shared values can bring us together. Forty years ago the United States created the Peace Corps for young people from America to help the world. And round the world many countries, including Britain, have their own voluntary service overseas organisations. But in this new global age should we not celebrate the shared moral sense that is common to all cultures, all religions and all faiths, by bringing young people together in a global corps?

Perhaps a global environmental corps. And a global community service corps, and a global peace corps, a global medical aid corps. Bringing young people of all nationalities and faiths together with each other in a global effort that will show the strength that comes from the world's young people acting together?

And let me say, thirdly, that we should repeat the importance that everyone who has spoken here attaches to peace in the Middle East. The creation of a Palestinian state, side by side with an Israeli state that has its security guaranteed. We in Britain, with other countries, will continue to work for that objective that I believe can be achieved by goodwill in the Middle East.

Now at this unique point in our history, when the world is facing the first financial crisis and the first resources crisis of the global age, that ability to come together and build shared solutions has never been more important. Let me send out the strongest message that the road to economic ruin in the past has been following the path of protectionism.

The way forward is not countries working in isolation from or against each other, but countries cooperating together. I believe that as world leaders gather in Washington this weekend we must and we will see enhanced cooperation by governments to deal with economic problems that are now hitting every continent in the world.

But I also believe that what matters is the clear statement that is coming from this conference in New York, that far more than the cooperation of governments, the cooperation of people, whatever their faith, in each continent of the world will determine whether we can build a truly global society.

I believe that through our continuing dialogue, we can come to recognise our common ground. The common ground on which we stand, whatever our faith positions. A common commitment to peace, to freedom, to prosperity, to tolerance and respect. And if we can mobilise a global movement around these shared goals, then the achievements can be momentous.

We can become the first generation to abolish illiteracy and give every child the chance of education together. We can become the first generation to solve climate change together. We can become the first generation - and we need to be that, to eradicate tuberculosis, polio, diphtheria, malaria and HIV-Aids from the face of the earth.

We can become the first generation to consign extreme poverty to the history books for all time. We can become the first generation to do so by demonstrating by our actions what this conference has been all about today. That the greatest of social changes are built from the strongest of ethical foundations.