

Winners of
Young People's Peace Essay
Competition 2021

**Published on behalf of
United Nations Association Coventry Branch**

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ISBN

9781871281712 (ebook)

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Foreword

The International Young People's Peace Essay Competition 2021 attracted almost 50 entries from 29 different countries.

There were two categories of authors, depending on their age on 31 October 2020:

- Authors aged 16 or less
- Authors aged 17-25

The judges, who came from the Coventry University and the University of Warwick were inspired by the ideas expressed in the essays. They felt it heartening and bodes well for our future that young people across the world are thinking about peace, and that they are passionate working towards peace. It was very difficult to choose winners.

All the essay authors are future leaders and we hope they will all achieve peaceful futures for themselves, their communities and for our shared world.

Each winner received a certificate and a cash prize donated by Coventry Peace Festival.

The competition is run by the United Nations Association Coventry Branch (UNACov.uk). In 2022 we will be running the competition again and aim to attract even more entries. To find out how to enter and watch a video of the 2021 winners talking about their essays visit <https://youngpeoplespeaceessay.org>



Under 17 Category Winners

1st Prize in Under 17 Category

Peace is free

By Suraiya Khatun Nupur from Bangladesh aged 15.

Close your eyes. Take a deep breath. Feel only peace, peace and peace. Oh, wait. There's a problem. It's not possible to make all people of the world meditate together everyday to regain peace. Time passes and truth becomes lie. But tears of children and cries of mothers can never lie. Today we're talking about "building" peace though there's nothing to build here. Peace stays within us since our birth. The bird of peace was free in our childhood. As we grow up, some monsters lock the bird in a cage. From then, the bird is flapping its wings in our hearts still today.

We are so serious about black-white, men-women. Black and white are just two colours, men and women are just two gender, isn't it? When we were inside our mother's womb, it was black. When we sleep, we see black all around, but it's the most peaceful moment. And as we walk on street at night where there's no street lamp, we mix with black. Black-white, men-women aren't opposite words, but complementary.

Peace comes when we feed 1000 hungry people instead of buying thousand dollar shoes. We learn many things. But we never learnt how to laugh, how to cry, how to love. Hatred, war and revenge are learnt, because these things are fake. As we become adult, we become obsessed with I, me, my, mine. Our world becomes these four words. When we forget these four words, we find peace. We find peace when we help others, even when we see tiny stars and

rainbow. Fortunately God doesn't take money from our pockets for seeing a rainbow. It's free.

We think that 'King' peace stays on its holy chair and there are long stairs. And we have to take necessary 'steps' to get to the king. Not surprisingly, there are no stairs, so how can we take 'steps'? We have to just listen to our hearts. We release doves as a symbol of peace, like- take those doves, sell us peace. We're sending doves and missiles in the sky at the same time, aren't we?

Time machine!! Scientists will make a time machine and snatch peace away from Jurassic age of dinosaurs. Time machine is not invented yet, maybe it will be invented after 1000 years. Come on! I will be a ghost then, do something fast!

Peace is everywhere, locked inside cages. We just can't see it as we've evolved as "peace blind" people. Some people are even allergic to peace. The solution is super easy - open the cage of your heart where peace bird is waiting. Instead of releasing some doves in the sky, let's be the doves. We need money to manage a war, to buy guns, but peace is free. Let us remember : "Peace can become a lens through which you see the world. Be it. Live it. Radiate it out"— Wayne Dyer.

Isn't it easy to pick up a rose instead of a gun?

2nd Prize in Under 17 Category

What is world peace?

by Prim Singhasuvich Wanaprappa from Thailand aged 16.

What is world peace? My definition of world peace is a safe space. It is a safe space, where ever one can let your guard down and be free. I am sure that every single person would like to have a safe space for them to count on, rely on when you are at your worst.

As mother Teresa say, “if you want to have world peace, go to your house and love your family”

World peace can start from little precious things. Spending time with your family, loving them with all of your hearts. These things create a safe space in your family, where everyone feels belonged and is trusted. The tranquility that was created has a profound effect on other people. The selflessness, attitude towards other people makes them less self-oriented and continues to spread the peace to other people around them.

To achieve the state of world peace, we have to set aside our differences and become as one, us young people. Unity is the key. All of us are human. Regardless of our sex, race, or age, all we want is a peaceful future.

Nowadays, many conflicts are happening in our world. People suffer from depression to statelessness. Global temperature is rising every day. If we do not do anything and live with false hope we will encounter the catastrophe that is yet to come.

Violence is always not the answer. Looking back, when there is a conflict, using violence always results in a tragedy. The police are supposed to bring us peace but bring us terror and more fear than ever before.

We as young people have to speak up for ourselves. Demand the world that we are supposed to have, not the one that is left by the prior generation which is tormented and filled with hatred.

We can not wait for the life that the prior generation has drawn for us. It is not real. It is imaginary that we have to take action and demand to change the peaceful world that we are supposed to have. We are the future generation that will bring peace to this world with our hands.

It is our world and we are living in it. There is no planet B. So stand up, speak up, demand our rights. Start with yourself, have peace, and share it when and wherever you go. Small actions can lead to huge changes.

3rd Prize in Under 17 Category

Hatred, Prejudice and its Influence on Peace

by Abhipsha Dash from India aged 15.

It is difficult for a fifteen-year-old to establish the definition of peace. It must be hard for anyone to do so, since there has never been a concrete scope of time when there existed absolutely no conflict between anyone or any two communities in the history of mankind. I wonder, is peace simply the absence of war and strife? From what I have extrapolated, the lack of physical dispute between two parties can only be credited to the lack of mental hostility and ill will, and the presence of mutual understanding and respect.

Prejudice is often planted by society into young minds and instilled into their daily lives, so deviously, that one may not even realize it. Yes, there might be other major reasons like greed, arrogance, revenge etcetera, for men to tarnish peace; but hatred, is the prime agent of warfare, so intricately woven into civilization that it merely cannot be eliminated. Ignorance and the lack of awareness further exacerbates the problem. An example being, people of my own community, family even, and their relations with particular religions, classes and factions of society. During several conversations, I recognized the bigotry embedded in them, which when pointed out, was justified by historical conflicts and actions of distinct individuals. This, is what is called 'implicit bias'. They cannot be completely blamed for their outlook, since it's pre-reflective and is

heavily influenced by the media and other aspects of society.

Another discrete case would be of my neighboring country, Myanmar, where the decades long ethnic and religious tension between Buddhists and the Rohingya Muslims has been worsened by social media, to name specifically, Facebook. Since the beginning of mass internet use in Myanmar, inflammatory posts against Rohingya have regularly appeared and the platform is being used as a propaganda tool. The lack of fact checking and the unmanageable spread of misinformation has amplified hostility and aggression amongst the masses. It is disheartening to see such atrocities committed upon civilians due to ignorance, hatred and our inability to perceive the faults in the society we live in. To quote Nelson Mandela, "People must learn to hate, and if they can be taught to hate, they can be taught to love, for love comes more naturally to the human heart than its opposite"

I could continue on about countless other examples like this, but that won't help. Our goal isn't a utopian society, because accomplishing perfection is impossible. However, a society that satisfies and pleases an individual without comprising the happiness of another is not something that is absolutely unattainable. Educating people, no matter their age is a great way to start. I believe the Dalai Lama perfectly encapsulates my view, "Peace does not mean an absence of conflicts; differences will always be there. Peace means solving these differences through peaceful means; through dialogue, education, knowledge; and through humane ways."

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<https://www.bbc.com/news/blogs-trending-45449938>

'Long Walk to Freedom' by Nelson Mandela

17-25 Category

1st Prize in 17-25 Category

Climate Change Is a Threat To Peace And What Young People Can Do About It.

Lindah Lindsey from Uganda aged 19.

Former Secretary-General, Ban Ki-moon once said, “Peace is a way of being, of interacting with others, of living on this planet. It must be nurtured through the dignity, rights, and capacities of every man and woman.” The world has been grappling with climate change as it has proved to be a threat. Climate change refers to the average long-term changes over the entire earth. Due to climate change, sea levels are rising and oceans are becoming warmer. Longer, more intense droughts threaten crops, wildlife, and freshwater supplies. According to NASA, glaciers are retreating almost everywhere around the world including in the Alps, Himalayas, Andes, Rockies, Alaska, and Africa. From polar bears in the Arctic to marine turtles off the coast of Africa, our planet’s diversity of life is at risk from the changing climate.

<https://www.worldwildlife.org/threats/effects-of-climate-change>

Changes in temperature cause changes in rainfall. This results in more severe and frequent storms. They cause flooding and landslides, destroying homes and communities. Water is becoming scarce in more regions. Droughts can stir destructive sand and dust storms that can move billions of tons of sand across continents.

Deserts are expanding, reducing land for growing food. Many people now face the threat of not having enough water regularly.<https://brainly.ph/question/20808490>

The impacts of climate change on different sectors of society are interrelated. We have been robbing the planet. It's only a question of how harsh or definitive the penalty will be. Nature bats last (David Introcaso,2018). Drought can harm food production and human health. Flooding can lead to disease spread and damages to ecosystems and infrastructure. Human health issues can increase mortality, impact food availability and limit worker productivity. Climate change both reduces the amount of food that is available and makes it less nutritious. Studies have shown that increased carbon dioxide in the atmosphere can leech plants of zinc, iron, and protein and these are nutrients that humans need to survive. Malnutrition is linked to a variety of illnesses including heart disease, cancer, and diabetes. It can also increase the risk of stunting or impaired growth, in children, which can harm cognitive function (Amy McKeever, 2021).

The impacts of climate change are mainly caused by human activities which shows that we contribute the most towards climate change. The massive use of fossil fuels is a major factor of climate change, as burning coal, oil and gas produces carbon dioxide, a major greenhouse gas in the atmosphere as well as nitrous oxide leading to global warming. Poor waste management methods like landfills and incineration emit greenhouse and toxic gases that are released into the atmosphere, soil, and waterways, contributing to the increase of the greenhouse effect. The exploitation of forests also contributes heavily to climate

change. Trees help regulate the climate by absorbing carbon dioxide from the atmosphere. When they are cut down, this positive effect is lost and the carbon stored in the trees is released into the atmosphere.

The animal industry contributes to global warming since animals alone release lots of methane and they also require plenty of lands, some of which comes from cleared forests, hence no trees to purify the air. Metals and minerals are the raw materials used in the construction, transportation, and manufacturing of goods. From extraction to delivery, this market accounts for about 5% of all greenhouse gas emissions. Generally, overconsumption is responsible for the overexploitation of natural resources which contributes to climate change.

What can one young person do on their own to slow and reverse climate change? Implementing just a few of the following could make a difference. The single biggest way is by speaking up and voicing concerns via social media or directly to the public. With this, a message is spread which sensitizes and educates everyone about climate change. We can also leave fossil fuels in the ground and use renewable and clean energy alternatives like solar, wind, wave, and geothermal. By switching to sustainable transport such as electric vehicles and minimizing plane travel, will not only help stop climate change but also reduce air pollution. To reduce the carbon dioxide emissions from buildings caused by heating, air conditioning, hot water, or lighting, it is necessary both to build new and sustainable low energy buildings and to renovate the existing constructions.

Furthermore, our diets need to get climate-smart. You don't have to completely go vegetarian. Adopting a diet of "mostly plants" would not only simply be a doctor's recommendation to their patients, but also one of the most profound paths toward a sustainable planet with a stable climate. Encouraging better use of natural resources, stopping massive deforestation as well as making agriculture greener and more efficient should also be a priority. Adopting responsible consumption habits is crucial, be it regarding food, clothing, cosmetics, or cleaning products. Reduce how much we consume. Our transport, fashion, food, and other lifestyle choices all have different impacts on the climate. This is often done by design, fashion, and technology companies. Recycling too is an absolute necessity for dealing with waste.

Lastly, as young people, we can pressure governments and corporations to change their policies and business practices to reduce the effects of climate change. As Leonardo DiCaprio said, "This is not a partisan debate; it is a human one. Clean air and water, and a liveable climate are inalienable human rights. And solving this crisis is not a question of politics. It is our moral obligation."

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2nd Prize in 17-25 Category

Paving the Pathway for Peace: Empowering the Youth as Peacemakers

by Ria Chakraborty from India aged 20.

May the wings of peace conquer the stormiest of skies.

The word youth conjures a multitude of kaleidoscopic connotations, which, often, owing to the imagery invoked by popular culture, are streaked with the aura of indecisive recklessness or a benign sense of naivety. However, the demographic is hardly a one-dimensional monolith; it possesses colossal diversity in the terms of its traits, penchants, desires, skills and abilities. Located amidst the liminal space between the perceptibly established categories of childhood and the adulthood, the young citizens of the world wield the strength to mould the contours of our future as they are symbolic of the concoction of an array of socio-cultural factors, and they bring a range of indispensable capabilities and assets to the table: a fresh, newfound perspective on the contemporary issues that the world has to tackle, their way of interacting with and utilising new-age technology and their ingenious and inventive propositions.

In the ever-shifting realm of the world, an overall milieu of peace is a prerequisite in order for people to pursue their ambitions and actualise their collective potentials and in this dynamic arena, the actions undertaken by the youth hold immense significance; hence rather than 'othering'

the youth, they must be included within the discourses of peace-building and their proactive participation in the endeavours that seek to promote the construction of a cohesive and harmonious society must be encouraged. The United Nations Security Council Resolution 2250 (UNSCR 2250), adopted by the UN Security Council in 2015, is a step in the right direction as it was the first resolution to deal with youth, peace and security and, it notably acknowledged the agency that the youth possesses to bring about peace, stability and prosperity.

The challenges that hamper the youth's ability to act as the harbingers of peace ought to be identified, assessed and obliterated at the very rudimentary level. From the perspective of policy-formulation on a broader scale, the youth should be viewed as an element that bears responsibility and agency rather than perceiving the entire demographic as a reckless, passive and homogenous entity.

Sociologist Johan Galtung has identified numerous types of violence: the direct, the structural (perpetuated by disparities in the socio-economic societal realms) and the cultural spheres. Thus, within the context of the aforementioned realms, the youth needs to be cognisant of the developments and conflicts that occur and the niche organisations in these spheres must attempt to build platforms at the substratal levels of the society that allow the younger citizens to engage with the community in a meaningful manner.

In order to ensure that the youth is equipped with the skills to navigate through the intricacies of the global

realm, measures should be undertaken to impart education, because the inequities between various social groups have subsequently deprived the children of learning opportunities. Education is indispensable and imperative in order for the youth to decipher the world around them and to take well-informed decisions and consequently, emerge as a trailblazer for the future. Keeping in perspective the fact that the discriminatory processes of admission or scarce psychosocial and educational resources can become the grounds of violent contentions, efforts should be undertaken to facilitate the universality of quality education to mitigate the socio-economic barriers that impede the children from striving forward in life to a certain extent; this endeavour, in turn, could also potentially deter direct, structural conflicts.

The widespread notion that the lack of formal skills, practical experience and knowledge amongst the youth renders them inefficacious in the realm of peace-building hinders the ability of the young citizens to venture into the arcane socio-political domains where majority of the decision-making procedures occur. Skill-building and capacity-enhancing initiatives need to be undertaken and efforts must be made to craft a platform wherein the youth can articulate its viewpoint and can take on a role of leadership. In order to implement this recommendation, a thorough demystification of the dimension of governance and policy-formulation needs to occur because the younger citizens have conventionally been under-represented in political structures across local, national and international forums.

In order to address the underrepresentation of the youth, international agencies must collaborate with the local governing bodies to communicate with the young people residing in those territories and the global forums must take the youth's geopolitical context into account for forming specific programmes or peace-building missions that would be aimed at resolving conflicts at the grassroots level. A youth panel must be devised in the international peace-building committees to facilitate the involvement of young people in decision-forming exercises at the global stage wherein they will also interact with their international counterparts, work alongside a slew of stakeholders, embark on the voyage of leadership and delve into engagements with the world-community. A sustainable practice of youth-inclusion and a consistent mechanism must be formed to institutionalise the young people's participation in peace-building so that the process cascades unhindered and endows the youth with a comforting sense of security, stability and the assurance that their voices would not waft into abysmal void of ignorance, unheard.

To resolve cultural and context-specific issues, the youth can revel in the rainbow-tinted crevices of their imagination and take up creative projects such as Niambie, a youth-led radio programme that seeks to enhance the Tanzanian youth's peaceful political engagement by combining imperative socio-political matters with catchy, memorable tunes which encourage the youth to partake in the democratic processes; various studies have showcased a discernible link between effective learning and the utilisation of music and hence, this model can also be

embraced to endorse peace-education and to popularise it amongst young people.

By vanquishing inequities and prejudices, youth-inclusion in peacemaking could become a glistening cornerstone on the pathway to an aureate future.

May the enlightened, equipped and empowered youth be our torchbearers.

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3rd Prize in 17-25 Category

Young people leading peace

by Rhea Ebanks-Simpson from the UK aged 22.

In June 2020, outrage over racism and police brutality erupted worldwide; suddenly, the Black Lives Matter movement and the fight for racial equity were propelled to the forefront of the youth's attention. At this time, the youth worldwide recognised that the dominant culture favoured those existing in privileged positions. The disadvantages that subjugated groups face globally became apparent for many. The echoes of the civil rights movements of old fell on young ears as the youth bore witness to disparities in housing, access to education and health during a new wave of social justice struggles. To quote the late Martin Luther King Jr., "True peace is not merely the absence of tension; it is the presence of justice." In turn, 2020 inspired a new generation to fight against systems that support injustice, from protecting the lives of refugees to fighting for climate justice. A sleeping giant was awoken as a new generation began its demand for peace.

In the days following the 2020 protests, young people have been extremely passionate and determined in their efforts. Youths worldwide have endlessly galvanised support through text messages, social media, and video chats. They organise protests, leading hundreds as they march through the metropole. In the rain and beating sun, energised youths of a diverse cohort have been representatives of demonstrations demanding peace in Palestine, climate

action, and social justice. 2020 may have been the first time many had fought for peace, but do not be mistaken; 2021 certainly shows that it would not be the last. New concerns emerge on the 2021 horizon yet to be tackled; news reports document wealth inequality and a precarious position for women in Afghanistan. In turn, the youth have taken to social media to spread the news of injustice and organise student-led protests. This new age of activism finds a platform on social media, where the youth disseminate resources to educate others about the fight for equity and peace. They share petitions, create email templates to pressure those in power, and document cases of injustice. Thanks to my generation, activism has adopted a transformative and localised manner in which everyone can do their part.

The rich history of the Civil rights Movement rests at the heart of these fights, which youth leaders also fuelled. The 1960 Greensboro sit-ins that sparked the landmark decision to integrate mixed-race schools demonstrated the strength of youth leadership (Rim, 2020). Clearly, student-led movements accelerated our most celebrated moments of peace. Like their forebearers, the youth of 2021 are incentivised by genuine peace to developing. The youth's own experiences with social injustice and conflict have primarily shaped their demands, as seen by the student-led protests in 2021 demanding climate justice in response to an overwhelming, bubbling urgency to act. Youths are rightfully paying attention to politics, encouraging them to be a part of the change. One student activist in London expressed that demands for peace are "being led by someone young for the first time" (Murray

and Mohdin, 2020). Fundamentally, demanding social justice has become a core tenet of today's youth's collective identity, marking the current climate as an era-defining chapter that will determine how the world looks and operates in the near future.

At the heart of this chapter is the need to promote community; many youths cite community as their main incentive for demanding peace (Ibid, 2020) by giving a voice to those subjugated without speaking for them. The youth are encouraged by a vision of basic needs being met worldwide, refusing to overlook the Millennium Development Goals. As one student activist told Elle (2020), "I want to be a soldier of the people," fighting for everyone across the broader international community as an agent for change. Fundamentally, the youth refuse to be disenfranchised by the habitual "othering" that often occurs during peace resolution discussions. Instead, they are situating themselves as positive actors in the peacebuilding process and social justice more generally.

While youths are typically ignored in discourses surrounding peace, they choose to insert themselves into these discussions with little room to overlook their presence. Take Malala Yousafzai and Greta Thunberg: youth peacebuilders that refuse to be cast as anything other than experts due to their lived experiences. Youths are now ignoring the opinion that they are the protagonists for radical demands. Instead, they are rational leaders in peacebuilding and refuse to be both infantilised and perceived as vulnerable actors.

In order to continue this work and maintain the peacebuilding momentum, the youth must recognise there is still work to do. They need to build funds and fund-raise for activism to break the financial barriers that ordinarily prohibit them from participating in peacebuilding processes. The fundraisers could include opportunities to showcase students' ideas of anti-oppressive peacebuilding. Similarly, the youth must organise inclusive community-led training sessions for other young activists to disseminate knowledge that helps to establish peace in post-conflict settings. These sessions could generate informal critical dialogue and help to educate others by enhancing their skills. Therefore, remembering Nelson Mandela's (2011) argument that "The challenge for each one of you is to take up these ideals of tolerance and respect for others and put them to practical use in your schools, your communities and throughout your lives." These devices would contribute to the youth being seen as leaders for now rather than leaders of the future.

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Many thanks.