

Uniting for Peace

2015 Summer Conference on
**“Surviving the 21st Century – Global Challenges,
Threats and Prospects for Peace”**

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Global Challenges Need Global Solutions

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Introduction

Germany's Nobel-winning author Gunter Grass said he feared humanity was "sleepwalking" into a world war, in the last interview he gave before his recent death.

"We have on the one side Ukraine, whose situation is not improving; in Israel and Palestine things are getting worse; the disaster the Americans left in Iraq, the atrocities of Islamic state and the problem of Syria," he told the Spanish newspaper El Pais in the interview in April 2015

"There is war everywhere; we run the risk of committing the same mistakes as before; so without realising it we can get into a world war as if we were sleepwalking," he added.

Militarisation of the World – Leading to Conflicts and Chaos

Our world today is much more conflictual, complex and in chaos than anytime in history. What is so dangerous is the sheer number of simultaneous crises over the last decade. A global disorder in which international laws and human rights are empty words. In which extremists prosper and impose terror on entire populations. What does not help is the continuing increase in military spending which has risen to \$1.8 trillion which directly or indirectly feeds these conflicts all around the world.

This leads to what is undoubtedly one of the world's largest problems: the insatiable appetite of US military expansion, the militarisation of Europe with NATO leading towards a new cold war and military aggression. US Neocons in alliance with NATO backed by media reporting about the Ukraine conflict are constantly pushing for war with Russia. It is a disaster waiting to happen if tensions between Russia and the West are not resolved soon as Russia and also China are spending huge amounts to modernise their military hardware. It is time to ask the pertinent question that the recent US/NATO wars have brought enough grief. Wars in the 21st Century is a symptom of our failure to attend its fundamental causes intelligently.

We live in an interconnected world. Our fundamental interests and values are at stake. The values for which past generations have fought so tirelessly which are: peace, democracy and human rights.

As far Eastern Europe is concerned, a destabilised and isolated Russia is in no one's interest. Russia is central, not just to a stable and prosperous Eastern Europe, but also to some of the most pressing issues we face: Middle East Peace Process and completing the process towards a comprehensive agreement with Iran on the peaceful nature of its nuclear programme.

Take Libya: the prospect of a failed state at Europe's southern borders is a serious risk to continent's security and world at large. Actually, difficult to refer to a failed State as we can hardly see a 'State'. Extremists have filled the gap left by the lack of a functioning state. They spread fear and hatred along with terrible violence. Human traffickers exploit the misery of migrants, gambling with innocent lives for their personal gain. What is more, the conflict risks destabilising the entire region, from Maghreb to Sahel, to sub-Saharan Africa.

As our attention is attracted by new flares of conflict, we should not get used to what has happened in Syria for over four years, Iraq and Afghanistan for over 10 years. The situation today is more desperate than ever. Too many lives have been lost, centuries of culture, the treasures of our common civilization, our joint heritage – destroyed. A generation of displaced children is growing up in refugee camps without access to proper food and healthcare, let alone education.

Solutions and Actions

What is needed is to work with all actors in the Region to build a new regional framework to put and end to crisis and prevent terrorist groups to gain ground. Look at Yemen. Over there, Al Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula is trying to fill the vacuum that emerged in a state of increasing lawlessness. We now need to focus all efforts on international mediation. Unilateral solutions cannot work.

All these crises point in the same direction: regional powers need to agree on a new order for the Middle East, a peaceful and cooperative one. An order where issues are dealt with at the negotiating table, not via proxy wars and false narrative of 'religious clashes' that mask the reality.

In the region, as much as right here in Europe, security is not the only issue at stake when it comes to countering violent extremism. The terrorists seek to revive the stale narrative of a clash of civilisations, while muslims are the first victims of "jihadism" all over the world. The clash runs within civilisations, within Islam itself that is a religion of peace. The daily greeting 'Salamaleikum' says it all: 'May peace be with you'.

Reviving the Middle East Peace Process is vital. Peace in the "Holy Places" could lay out the most resounding message against the misuse of religious symbols, for the region and the whole world.

We need to build a new international consensus to resolve Middle East conflict: the European Union, the United States, Russia, UN, Arab partners in the region should play a key role in supporting a successful peace process: the Arab Peace Initiative provides a vision for a comprehensive settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict. Above all, both parties need to rebuild trust and refrain from actions that undermine it. Before it is too late for two States to live side by side in peace and security. Before it is too late for entire generations to get lost in hate and despair. In Israel as in

Palestine.

Today the vast majority of challenges the world face are common challenges. From security to climate, from poverty to energy. This makes cooperation even more crucial. So we need to strengthen our cooperation with regional partners such as ASEAN, the UNASUR countries, the League of Arab States and the African Union.

We need hard and soft power. We need conflict prevention and post crises management for common vision and working for peace. Not only governments, but also national parliaments, the academia, think tanks and NGOs – the foreign policy community at large.

Across the world, we are living in a dream state; crisis is the new normal. In the face of global catastrophe, the leading governments of the countries typically offer more business as usual, meaning more corporate power to fuel democracy, more capitalism to fight inequality, more war to fight for peace, and more pollution to fight climate change.

We cannot depend on the 1% of the world to lead us away from disaster – they caused our global crises in the first place, continue to profit from them, and cannot bring about solutions from the top-down. It has to be the people's movements leading the way from below, deconstructing capitalism and building a better world from the bottom-up.

Alternatives to Military Intervention

The UNESCO preamble is as relevant today as it was in 1945: “Since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defences of peace must be constructed”.

We call ourselves civilised. But a true civilisation does not need to possess weapons and to train millions of men and women in armed forces and send them to war. To counteract the evil of warmongering we need a global movement for a positive change to show we can live with our fellow human beings in peace, by taking steps to build a peaceful and secure world based on non-militarist approaches. A radical rethinking of political alternatives are needed to initiate an act of reconciliation which are:

- Need of political will and more effective leadership, efforts at a global scale for a world without war
- Accelerating humanitarian assistance for displaced people
- Immediate halt to air strikes and stopping the flow of arms to the regions of conflict,
- Prioritising diplomatic intervention under United Nations auspices,
- Insisting on a renewed peace process for Syria, Iraq, Middle East and Ukraine that includes all parties

- Moving away from secrecy, war propaganda, and the outmoded macho approach so often manifested in the defence, foreign affairs and national security sectors
- Helping create peaceful and just societies – changing the mindset from culture of guns to culture of peace
- Changing the current political-economic system which is a form of plutocracy or elite rule to diverging and inclusive form of democracy significantly influenced by the public will
- Stop the pursuit of profit without any ethical and moral compass

Conclusion

Peace starts in recognising and valuing the inherent humanity in each of us as the Archbishop Desmond Tutu famously said ‘My humanity is bound up with yours, for we can only be human together’. So, let us take the first step in recognising the world we live in is interdependent and interlinked. We all have to work together to solve the intractable problems we face not by rivalries but through co-operation.

Things do change. Europeans have made Europe peaceful for the first time in history. Apartheid era is gone. There was cold war, but then the Soviet Union dissolved. Recently we had reunification of Germany. What we need today is urgent change by extraordinary change makers, courageous peace leaders who do not give up against all odds to inspire global movement for a just and peaceful world. Our greatest strength as individuals is citizen power. Individuals, organisations and countries - let us cooperate on a global scale to take bold but doable, practical steps to change things around and sow the seeds for a more peaceful and prosperous world.

Global challenges can be tackled by global solutions by: challenging militarism, investing in peace and strengthening multilateralism.

Thanks for listening.

Bio – **Vijay Mehta** is a distinguished author and leading peace activist and a champion for Development and Human Rights. He is the chair of Uniting for Peace (www.unitingforpeace.org) and Founding Trustee of Fortune Forum Charity (www.fortuneforum.org).

Working since 1979, Uniting for Peace is a non-profit organisation devoted to creating and promoting a global culture of peace, nonviolence and poverty reduction. The flagship campaign of Uniting for Peace is called 4D for World Peace. It is a campaign to create global frameworks for taking actions on interconnecting global issues of disarming and demilitarising the world and the savings thus achieved to be deployed for development and democracy.

The charity Fortune Forum whose founder is Renu Mehta, daughter of Vijay Mehta, held summits (2005 and 2006) where Former US President Clinton, Former US Vice President Al Gore and Actor Michael Douglas were keynote speakers. The summits raised over a million pounds for charity and attracted a worldwide audience of 1.3 billion people (one fifth of humanity) including print and media coverage.

Vijay Mehta's books include The Economics of Killing (2012), The Fortune Forum Code: For a Sustainable Future (2006), Arms No More (2005) and The United Nations and its Future in the 21st Century (2005).

In 2014, Vijay Mehta's bio, "The Audacity of Dreams" appeared in the book Karma Kurry, published by Jaico Publishing House (India). It included 25 other inspiring change-makers' biographies. Nelson Mandela who wrote the foreword to the book, had this to say, "Ordinary people do extra ordinary things. These stories have that power to inspire people to rise and act, to make a difference." To read Vijay Mehta's full bio, please follow this link: <http://goo.gl/JcJGwr>

He has appeared in various TV programmes including BBC World, Press TV, Ajtak-24 hour Indian news channel, and Think Peace documentary, Canada, among others. The Sunday Times, Independent, Observer and Guardian newspapers, among other journals have written about him. His life is devoted to the service of peace, humanity and our planet.

Vijay Mehta is the recipient of the Global Indian Karmaveer (Action hero) Puraskaar (Award) by iCONGO (International Confederation of NGO's). He is now a noble-laureate 2012 – 2013 of the iCONGO team of advisors and mentors (www.icongo.in). It is an award for outstanding luminaries working for peace and social justice.

He has been appointed a fellow of the New Westminster College, Province of British Columbia, Canada in 2013.

Vijay Mehta's new book "**The Economics of Killing: How the West Fuels Wars and Poverty in the Developing World**" is published by Pluto Press (UK) / Palgrave Macmillan (USA) / Amazon (Worldwide). For reviews and endorsements of the book, please visit: www.theeconomicsofkilling.org

"Vijay....a long standing activist for peace, development, human rights and environment"
The Sunday Times Magazine, London 1st February, 2009

"Vijay Mehta lends intellectual credibility to the project and wrote 'The Fortune Forum Code for a Sustainable Future', a sort of manifesto that will underpin the group's future activities."
The Independent, London 26 September 2006

"Thank you for all you do Vijay - both the Organisation and yourself are inspiration and give us all hope that both yourself and Uniting for Peace can bring a world without war. Indeed it is possible, even in our own time."
Mairead Corrigan Maguire, Nobel Peace Laureate (1976)

Vijay Mehta is among the 1,300 Notable Peacemakers Throughout History
http://peace.maripo.com/p_peacemakers.htm

He is among the 98 Peace Philanthropists around the world.
http://peace.maripo.com/p_philanthropy_bios.htm