Inspiring Businesses for Peace and Sustainability: Through the Way as of Ubuntu and Inner Peace

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Introduction

Dear Friends,

In my talk today, I will be examining obstacles to business, peace and sustainability. I will also be exploring concepts of entrepreneurship and corporate social responsibility (CSR) leading to building an equitable world by inspiring businesses through Ubuntu and inner peace. Inspiring businesses for peace and sustainability is taking the growth and profit motive of a business to the next level of becoming a integral part of society and realising its social responsibility. Business should not just concentrate on the number of consumers for its products but also realise the fact that only peaceful atmosphere can guarantee growth and profit.

The Venerable Dhammapitaka in his book Buddhist Solutions for the Twenty-First Century, 1986 remarks "Truly, we have developed all kinds of things in the name of civilization, including business, science and technology, but we have paid too little attention to the development of ourselves."

Such is the human outpouring of sadness and despair at the conflicts which beset the world, both in terms of war and the nature of exploitation through selfish desire for pleasure and acquisition. Such is the degradation of the human condition and that of the planet that unless fundamental and radical social change takes place, we may already be looking at the accelerated decline of the human race.

Business, Greed and Living in an Unequal World

While maximising the profit is the prime motive of a business, it should not forego its responsibility to help make a better society. It needs to be mindful of the fact that wealth creation and social responsibility is the end purpose of a business.

Thinking of greed in business, one is reminded of report and a quotation, Oxfam has just published a report in January 2017 that 8 people own same wealth as half the world – 3.6 billion people who make the poorest half of the humanity. Another one is Gandhi's famous and often repeated quotation, "There is enough on earth for everybody's need but not enough for everybody's greed"

Is there a way we can have growth without exploitation in the world today as it increases poverty and inequality. The underlying question is, should business operate on the basis of insatiable greed for growth and profit or should it be working for the sustainable growth for everyone leading to peace and harmony in our world.

Obstacles to Sustainable Peace

Dear friends, now let me examine three broad areas of obstacles to sustainable peace: Culture of Violence, Militarism and Military Spending. These are the outer manifestations of imbalance of inner peace and disturbances of mind.

Violence begets more violence, as it thrives on hatred than on love, it creates bitterness in the survivors and brutality in the destroyers. As UNESCO Declaration of Culture of Peace say, "Since wars began in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that defences of peace must be constructed."

Human life has an outer material expression and an inner spiritual constellation. Both are sides of the same coin. To understand culture of violence and war as being driven by politics, economics and science is only half the story. They come from projecting outside of us the conflict that is inside as an individual or collectively as a community or nation. **Hence the need for developing non-aggression culture, based on forgiveness which is instrumental in effectively reducing aggressive behaviour/violence and enhancing good relationship, social harmony and peace.** As the poet Alexander Pope said, "To err is human, to forgive is divine"

Violence, whether it is at home or bullying or war abroad, leads to more violence. So the answer is to find alternative solutions which reduce violence. This is true of us individuals how we deal with each other and for a country how it relates to the rest of the world. Mere disarmament or reduction of weapons and militarism is not enough. **We must end violence in thought, word and action as well.**

The culture of militarism is the root cause of wars and a hindrance to peace. How can a society be called civilised if it has an international arms/killing industry which leads to wars, violence, barbarism, to counterproductive military budgets destroying social, economic, political and cultural fabric and values. Today countries are more and more resorting to war instead of dialogue and diplomacy to solve disputes. One is baffled by the fact that here we are in the 21st Century and we are still killing each other with new and sophisticated weapons. **What we**

need is urgent necessity to adopt nonviolent ways for building peace, restoring human rights and dignity, ethics, rule of law and democracy.

In 2015, worlds governments spent over 1,750 billion dollars on the military sector which is about 2.5% of the world's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) while 2.6 billion people live on $2 a day and 925 million people go to bed hungry every night. The UN Secretary General Ban ki Moon observed, "The world is over armed and peace is underfunded."

I believe this money must instead be spent on peace and sustainability, which can go a long way not only for positive peace but also to understand and address multiple and complex challenges the world faces today which are – disarmament, conflict prevention, addressing security concerns and poverty reduction programmes.

The Concept of Entrepreneurship, Peacebuilding and Creation of a Sustainable World

Businesses offer a bottom up model of social economic development, particularly the elevation of the poverty through economic development, specifically sustainable peace. The United Nations have identified that through contribution of sustainable development, conflicts can be contained. It can also improve local security, and yield more dividend for the community. It can also strengthen and solidify peace in order to avoid a relapse into conflicts. So entrepreneurship, access to well paid to jobs, having food security and healthy environment is conducive to a peaceful society.

What small and medium size and large companies do is an example of social enterprise. They create jobs and inclusive market opportunities providing people with business plan innovation.

There is a way in which the interest of business and society can be served at the base of the economic pyramid, for which the key concepts include:

The goals of poverty reduction and economic profit begin to align to the degree that these ventures empower the poor, either by improving their quality of life, providing them with productivity tools and services, or by creating jobs.

The productive capacity of the poor can be leveraged in creating products and services.

To succeed in low-income markets, businesses must strengthen their bottom-up market intelligence; utilize local leaders and community agents to bring people together; and educate investors that bringing BOP (bottom of the pyramid) initiatives to scale and sustainability may happen more slowly than the time frames dictated by traditional corporate targets.

Businesses must strike a delicate balance, keeping in mind both their legal obligations to return profits to their investors as well as their social responsibilities. Businesses cannot afford to treat their social license callously.

Concept of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)

Corporate social responsibility (CSR) is a business approach that contributes to sustainable development by delivering economic, social and environmental benefits for all stakeholders. CSR is a concept with many definitions and practices.

Corporate social responsibility (CSR) refers to business practices involving initiatives that benefit society. A business's CSR can encompass a wide variety of tactics, from giving away a portion of a company's proceeds to charity, to implementing "greener" business operations.
There are a few broad categories of social responsibility that many of today's businesses are practicing:

1. Environmental efforts: One primary focus of corporate social responsibility is the environment. Businesses regardless of size have a large carbon footprint. Any steps they can take to reduce those footprints are considered both good for the company and society as a whole.
2. Philanthropy: Businesses also practice social responsibility by donating to national and local charities. Businesses have a lot of resources that can benefit charities and local community programs.
3. Ethical labour practices: By treating employees fairly and ethically, companies can also demonstrate their corporate social responsibility. This is especially true of businesses that operate in international locations with labour laws that differ from those in the United States.
4. Volunteering: Attending volunteer events says a lot about a company's sincerity. By doing good deeds without expecting anything in return, companies are able to express their concern for specific issues and support for certain organisations.

Why CSR matters

Liz Maw, CEO of nonprofit organization Net Impact, noted that CSR is becoming more mainstream as forward-thinking companies embed sustainability into the core of their business operations to create shared value for business and society

Building an Equitable World with Ubuntu and Inner Peace

One of the paths we can follow is the ancient African word Ubuntu, beautifully explained by Archbishop Desmond Tutu "Ubuntu – is the essence of human being. It speaks about the fact that you can't exist as human being in isolation. It speaks about our interconnectedness. You cannot be human all by yourself and when you have this quality – Ubuntu – you are known for your generosity."

"We think of ourselves as just individuals, separated from one another, whereas you are connected and what you do affects the whole world. When you do well, it spreads out; it is for the whole of the humanity"

Conclusion and Way Forward

Oxfam has said the following on launching its report:

The overall goal of the business is not that it should benefit the richest and not the rest of society – especially the poorest who suffer. We need to change the design of our economies and principles of economics which have taken us to this extreme, unjust point. Our economy must stop excessively rewarding those at the top and start working for all people. Accountable and visionary governance, businesses that work in the interest of workers and producers which includes a valued environment, women's rights and a strong system of fair taxation, are central to this more human economy.

Business by becoming part of civil society should work continuously on peace and sustainability which are essential elements to build the culture of peace to challenge our current culture of violence, militarism and fear. Our overarching goal should be to cultivate a shared awareness of our common humanity for resolving the global challenges confronting us today.

The message is simple: Peace is an investment in our humanity's progress for a better future. The way to peace is to overcome evil with good, falsehood with truth and hatred with love. The bottom line is we should have increasing desire to be of service to others with greater compassion.

If businesses practices the great ideas of Inner Peace and Ubuntu, then sustainable peace cannot be far away and the world will be a much better place to live in. The overarching goal of business should be providing service to people in a way in which its aim of profit and growth are fulfilled in a manner which can also lead to peace and sustainability.

Quotations

"Founded on the principles of private initiative, entrepreneurship and self-employment, underpinned by the values of democracy, equality and solidarity, the co-operative movement can help pave the way to a more just and inclusive economic order"
-- Kofi Annan

"What business entrepreneurs are to the economy, social entrepreneurs are to social change. They are the driven, creative individuals who question the status quo, exploit new opportunities, refuse to give up, and remake the world for the better."
-- David Bornstein

"Entrepreneurs have a mind-set that sees the possibilities rather than the problems created by change."
-- J Gregory Dees

"Change starts when someone sees the next step."
-- William Drayton

"Social entrepreneurs are not content just to give a fish or teach how to fish. They will not rest until they have revolutionized the fishing   industry."
-- Bill Drayton

"the entrepreneur always searches for change, responds to it, and exploits it as an opportunity."
-- Peter F. Drucker

Not everyone can be Gandhi, but each of us has the power to make sure our own lives count – and it's those millions of lives that will ultimately build a better world.
-- Jeffrey Skoll

The developed world has a vast, under-utilized asset that is not being leveraged to its best advantage: idealistic people who want to make the world a better place. For most of a century, idealistic people have been encouraged to use anger, protest, lobbying, and legal action in order to make the world a better place. While most certainly some of these behaviors and activities were necessary, we have reached the point at which the social benefit of such behaviors is decreasing. We have reached the point at which creation, rather

than attack, ought to be the first obligation of reformers. The social entrepreneurship movement is the first tip of this iceberg. We want to create a world in which all idealists realize that the creation of new enterprises is the most powerful way to make positive change in the world. If all the energy that is currently invested in zero-sum political conflict was gradually transferred to the committed creation of sustainable enterprises, the cumulative impact on behalf of the good would be extraordinary.
-- Michael Strong

"At its essence, sustainability means ensuring prosperity and environmental protection without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs. A sustainable world is one where people can escape poverty and enjoy decent work without harming the earth's essential ecosystems and resources; where people can stay healthy and get the food and water they need; where everyone can access clean energy that doesn't contribute to climate change; where women and girls are afforded equal rights and equal opportunities." – Ban ki Moon

"Be a global citizen. Act with passion and compassion. Help us make this world safer and more sustainable today and for the generations that will follow us. That is our moral responsibility." – Ban ki Moon

Notes:

1. Vijay Mehta, Inner Peace to Global Peace, European Youth Centre, Budapest, April 2016
2. Oxfam Report, 8 People Own Same Wealth as Half the World (3.6 billion people), January 2017
3. Vijay Mehta, The Economics of Killing: How the West Fuels War and Poverty in the Developing World, Pluto Press, London, 2012
4. Vijay Mehta, Peace Beyond Borders: How the EU Brought Peace to Europe and How Exporting It Would End Conflicts Around the World, New Internationalist, London, 2016
5. William Duncan, Entrepreneurship and Peacebuilding, Peace and Justice Centre Newsletter, February 2015
6. Vijay Mehta, The Role of Global Institutions in Tackling Poverty, Magdalen College, Oxford, April 2008