

Fostering Global Consciousness in Times of Crisis

Keynote Speech by HM Queen Rania Al Abdullah of Jordan

It is a pleasure to be in Turkey once more. Our two nations are bound, not only by friendship, but by a long history of cooperation and shared beliefs. Like Jordan, Turkey has felt the shockwaves of turmoil within our region. And, like us, you remained steadfast in your commitment to the millions of refugees you have welcomed inside your borders. For centuries, this land has served as an intellectual hub, where trade routes, populations, and ideas intersect. Today, I am delighted to contribute to that tradition and take part in this forum. Our worldviews may be different, but, rooted deep in the core of our humanity, we share the same overarching aspirations for the world: Peace, justice, and security for all. The realization of these ideals is a constant, unyielding struggle, one that no nation can wage on its own. But it must remain our common mission, because, when we falter, the innocent are often the first to pay the price. Like Alan Kurdi. It has been three years since his lifeless body was recovered on a beach near Bodrum. He, along with his brother and mother, lost their lives in an effort to escape the brutality of the Syrian conflict. In death, he quickly became a symbol of the struggles of more than 5 and a half million Syrian refugees. For a brief moment, this snapshot of senseless loss seemed poised to serve as a turning point in the global refugee crisis. It forced the world to confront the true cost of war, and the terrifying outcome of global inaction. But the political and humanitarian will it generated was short-lived. Almost as suddenly as it had appeared, concern for the refugee crisis once again receded, a casualty of the ebb and flow of human compassion. More than



10,000 people have since drowned attempting to make the same perilous trip across the Mediterranean. Instead of serving as a call to action, their deaths have been tuned out and treated as background noise. In decades past, experts warned that the 24-hour news cycle would desensitize us to images of horror. Today, such concerns seem almost quaint. Footage of human misery is now inescapable, streaming constantly through our screens and flooding our social media feeds. We have grown accustomed to news of the displaced dying at sea, to images of bloodied children pulled from rubble, to gutted homes and entire neighborhoods reduced to debris. Every day, we are bombarded with evidence of suffering. Until images that once felt painfully familiar, gradually stop being painful. The names and faces blur, and the mosaic of misery is distorted into static. One of the key facets of human nature is the universal impulse to help those in need. On the individual level, this reflex to lend a helping hand is very effective. But, in the face of mass atrocities, too often, we fail to move decisively. Our hearts break when we hear the story of a mother forced to bury her child, a family targeted for their religious beliefs, or a village being purposely burned to the ground. Yet, much of the world remains unfazed by genocide in Myanmar, where more than 25,000 Muslim Rohingya have been brutally murdered, and more than 900,000 driven from their homes. Psychologists describe this phenomenon as psychic numbing – we recognize a single person's suffering as a tragedy, but, as the number of those affected piles up, that tragedy begins to lose its emotional grip. This is partly a protective measure, a way to insulate ourselves from others' pain. But perhaps the greatest obstacle to action is the sense of helplessness. Many resign themselves to the idea that there is nothing they can do. They tell themselves that any efforts to improve our world would be offered in vain. History, however, tells a much different, and more hopeful, story. The headlines may lead us to believe that the world is gradually becoming less secure – but the trend-lines suggest otherwise: we have already made incredible headway in turning the world into a safer, more inclusive home.

Before the industrial revolution, war accounted for about 15% of all human deaths. By the 1900s, that figure had fallen to 5%. Today, it stands at 1%. Heart disease is now the world's leading cause of death – whereas violence doesn't even crack the top 10. Meanwhile, quality of life is improving. Since 1990, nearly 1.1 billion people have escaped extreme poverty. More people have access to clean water, electricity, and medical care than ever before. And we are better educated, achieving an unprecedented global literacy rate of over 85%. We refused to accept the status quo, and so, we succeeded in changing it. Time and again, we have proven that progress is possible. Humankind has already made exceptional strides, and the momentum is on our side. So why stop here? After all, there are many challenges we have yet to overcome: 1 in 5 children around the world are out of school, including more than 15 million in the Middle East alone. Last year, 10,000 youth worldwide were killed or maimed in armed conflicts. And, each day, 44,000 people are displaced from their homes. The task before us may seem intimidating – until we remember that we are capable of incredible things. And we have come too far to quit now while we're ahead. Ask the journalists in the refugee camps, the first responders to natural disasters, or the aid workers helping thousands get back on their feet. They will tell you that images of desperation are one part of our planet's narrative. But they don't tell the whole story. Determination. Strength. Community. Joy. Even in the darkest of places, the best of humanity continues to shine through. Among the heartache, there is so much life left to cherish. Now is no time to disengage. Instead of despairing for all that we have lost, we must fight for the innocence we have left to protect. Mourn the dead, then redouble our efforts toward the living. It was Martin Luther King Jr. who said, "We must accept finite disappointment, but never lose infinite hope." Our challenge today – and every day – is to confront the harshest realities of our world without losing sight of our ideals, and to remain steadfast in our refusal to accept the unacceptable. Thank you.