United in Hope-United for Humanity: Permutations in Peacebuilding

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My Inspiration

During the peak phase of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, many parts of the world came to a standstill and there was a lot of doom and gloom circulating due to the economic, social, health and psychological challenges that people were facing. Intertwined with this and exacerbating the situation, were the multiple periods of lockdowns that societies had to endure in different parts of the world. In fact, in March 2020 the Economist led with a headline with a picture of the world titled "Closed."

During this period of uncertainty, I began to research how leaders can inspire hope and galvanize action that can lead to positive changes. According to Hugo Slim of the Oxford Institute for Ethics, Law and Armed Conflict, people can draw "hope" from events in the past and events that may materialize in the future, i.e. hope by looking back and hope by looking forward. In this vein, the theme of "hope" has been used by many politicians to galvanize their base by envisaging and re-imagining a brighter future for their constituents, one that improves on the conditions provided under the current and previous administrations or leaders. For example, in his successful 2008 presidential campaign, Barack Obama, the 44th President of the U.S., expounded on many subjects that were part of his bestselling book *The Audacity of Hope: Thoughts on Reclaiming the American Dream* (2006). At the same time, many politicians and scholars alike have used the phrase "Hope is not a Strategy", emphasizing the need not just for hope, but also for strategic thinking, which can have transformative power when properly planned and executed (Weigand & Underwood, 2023).



Photo credit: The Economist, 21 March 2020

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The crucial role of hope in peacebuilding and peace leadership

Hope is the foundation upon which peacebuilding efforts are built. It fosters collaboration and sustains the long-term commitment needed to achieve lasting peace. Hope plays a crucial role in peacebuilding for multiple reasons:



Motivation and Resilience: Hope provides the motivation needed to pursue peace, even in the face of significant challenges. It helps individuals and communities remain resilient, fostering a belief that positive change is possible.

Building Trust: Hope encourages trust among conflicting parties. When people believe that peace is achievable, they are more likely to engage in dialogue and cooperation, which are essential for resolving conflicts.

Sustaining Efforts: Peacebuilding is a long-term process that requires sustained effort. Hope keeps the momentum going, ensuring that people continue to work towards peace even when progress is slow.

Creating a Vision for the Future: Hope allows communities to envision a better future. This shared vision can unite people, providing a common goal that transcends individual differences and conflicts.

Encouraging Participation: When people have hope, they are more likely to participate in peacebuilding activities. This participation is crucial for creating solutions that are inclusive and sustainable.

Direction of Travel: Hope ensures that there is a positive direction of travel when dealing with conflict, reconciliation, and peacebuilding.

The theme of hope intertwined with the modalities of peacebuilding plays a pivotal role in the areas of conflict transformation, reconstruction, and humanitarianism.



Photo credit: Kaleem Hussain

United in Hope-United in Humanity

Building on these lessons, I created the United in Hope-United for Humanity (UHUH) initiative, an event series in which speakers from diverse sectors (e.g., government, academia, health, NGOs, private-public sector, charity, voluntary sector) convene, share insights, and collaborate to instill hope and provide relief to those in need across multiple levels of society (during the COVID-19 crisis and beyond) and to build a more sustainable future for all. The initiative invites participants to break down the conventional barriers and ways of working that many organizations and institutions are accustomed to and adopt a joined-up approach that invites participants from a cross sector of society to come together using creative ingenuity to bring about transformative, positive outcomes for impacted populations and the organizations that are involved in the initiative.

The UHUH initiative kick-started with an event in 2021 focused on the importance of volunteering and voluntary organizations during the pandemic, conducted in partnership with the Warwick Business School (University of Warwick, UK). The event, which coincided with World Earth Day, highlighted the work that many groups and individuals continued to do to support environmental causes, even under the incredibly difficult circumstances faced throughout the pandemic, and how this volunteer work had instilled hope for humanity and the environment.

A subsequent event titled “Is our Planet Too Big to Fail?” focused on the role of the Financial Services sector in addressing the environmental-human challenges of the future and in achieving the UN Sustainable Development Goals (UNSDGs).

As people embarked on the road to recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic, the world was affected by another global crisis - the Russian invasion into Ukraine on 24 Feb 2022. The subsequent impact and ripple effect of this protracted conflict triggered a global cost-of-living crisis, as energy prices spiraled out of control and food supplies were affected in many parts of the world. A series of events were convened through the

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UHUH initiative titled "How Can We Build a More Sustainable World" and "Hope During a Cost-of-Living Crisis", in partnership with the Royal Society of Arts (UK) and a diverse range of leading academics, corporate stakeholders, and community organizations. These events brought together leading thinkers and industry experts from a diverse range of sectors to share their insights and experiences on how to address the challenges of climate change, the energy crisis, and the cost-of-living crisis and provide hope for individuals to navigate a pathway forward during these testing times.

Following unprecedented levels of humanitarian crisis across multiple conflict theatres around the world in recent years, ranging from wars to natural and human-made disasters, UHUH hosted an online workshop in February 2024. The event was convened by Guidance Consultancy in partnership with Euphrates Institute's Peace Practice Alliance program. During this interactive event, leading inter-faith practitioners, NGOs, humanitarian organizations, charities, peace advocates and social activists convened to highlight the humanitarian plight and challenges in providing relief in conflict zones and humanitarian hot spots around the world and to put forward practical recommendations and actions to address these concerns. The event was also interspersed with moments of reflection, thoughts, invocations of peace and a musical rendition in dedication and remembrance of those who are suffering or who have lost their lives in the conflicts and humanitarian hot spots around the world. A debrief and recording of the UHUH online event is available to read and watch.

Conclusion

The UHUH initiative, which is ongoing, has interfaced with multiple groups from a cross-section of society at individual, institutional, national, and international levels and plans to continue to convene timely events that instill hope in the values and virtues of our common, shared humanity and of peacebuilding.

In this article, I have attempted to demonstrate how the theme of "hope", as espoused through the UHUH initiative, is crucial to peacebuilding in practice, including the many permutations of peacebuilding efforts. Whilst hope may not in itself exclusively be a strategy, hope helps spark the light of certitude during situations of potential despair in individuals and organizations, which is of critical importance as it acts as a catalyst for practitioners of peace to proactively embark on the journey of development, growth, peace, reconciliation, and reconstruction which would be difficult to do if there was no element of hope at the inception stage.

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