

Tolerance – a moral necessity

IMAGINE THERE are some countries where vicious and violent hate crimes based on a person's race or religion are the norm. Imagine a life filled with constant war; where government leaders launch unprovoked attacks on neighbouring territories. The scary part is this is the reality for some of our global neighbours.

The concept of tolerance is so critical to the foundation of a peaceful world that the United Nations declared a year of tolerance in 1995 and on November 16 of that same year, the Declaration of the Principles of Tolerance was commemorated. The world now observes that date as the International Day of Tolerance. As with all international days, it is good to have one occasion to remind us just how important tolerance is.

On this day, we visualise and work towards a society where people are respectful of each other's differences and live and work in peace and unity. A world in which the human rights of everyone are upheld and there is equality of opportunity for all. This world is the one envisioned by the great men of our time like Mahatma Gandhi, Martin Luther King, Nelson Mandela and, more recently, Barack Obama – a world where tolerance is embedded in the culture of all societies.

Tolerance implies a respect for the differences and diversity of all peoples and their opinions and beliefs which may differ from our own – it is about treating each other with compassion and goodwill.

It is the foundation upon which the principles of human rights are built and ensures the freedom for people every-



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where to be able to live the way they choose. Tolerance makes it possible for people to co-exist peacefully.

Tolerance is one of the watchwords which was declared when our country became independent in 1962, with the exhortation to the children of the nation to ensure that every creed and race find an equal place.

How tolerant are we as a society? As individuals? The aim of any multicultural society is to have tolerance, respect and acceptance of all its members; where diversity is its strength and tolerance for its many beliefs, cultures and backgrounds can lead to a bountiful and productive land.

It is an ongoing journey.

Education has a key role to play in preparing ourselves and future generations

to address the problems of intolerance we experience and to ensure that young people acquire the social and civic skills needed for active and meaningful participation in society. Education for tolerance should aim at countering influences that lead to fear and exclusion of others and should help young people develop capacities for independent judgment, critical thinking and ethical reasoning.

Discrimination is a direct result of intolerance. The Equal Opportunity Act 2008 prohibits discrimination based on sex, race, ethnicity, origin, religion, marital status, or disability in employment, education, accommodation and provision of goods and services. Laws are necessary but not sufficient for counteracting intolerance. Having an attitude of tolerance towards other groups is a feature of an egalitarian society. Tolerance is not only an attitude but also an essential element for peacebuilding, unity and the economic progress of a society.

In order to live in harmony in this era of globalisation it is the responsibility of every person to develop individual awareness of the ways intolerance shows up – bigotry, insults, racial jokes. How do I show up in my behaviours? Am I a tolerant person, or do I reject those who are different from me?

When confronted with an escalation of intolerance in our communities, we should not wait for governments or institutions to act. We can and should speak up, confront a problem, stand in solidarity with a victim of intolerance and discredit hate speech. We are all part of the solution. Tolerance is a moral necessity if people are to live in peace and create a model nation for ourselves.