Unesco SERIES

Is peace just a fantasy?

Students mull over the causes of conflict

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John Lennon wished the world "would live as one" in his song Imagine in 1971. The lyrics were inspired by Lennon's hopes for a more peaceful world.

However, it seems that for the past 37 years, Lennon's lyrics "imagine all the people living life in peace" are still just imagination. He was a dreamer, "but he's not the only one ..."

Noting that "ignorance, lack of justice, discrimination, inequality, intolerance and exclusion provide fertile ground for violence, aggression and conflict", Mr Koichiro Matsuura, director-general of Unesco emphasized Unesco's role as the lead agency of the 2001-2010 International Decade for a Culture of Peace and Non-Violence for the Children of the World campaign.

He said: "Unesco's commitment to peace, dialogue and universal values is thus needed more than ever. So is the necessity to reaffirm the essential role of those values in bringing about a world of greater tolerance and of mutual understanding, respect and support in the observance of human rights."

More than 200 students recently gathered at a youth forum at Chulalongkorn University to raise awareness of the International Day of Peace, which falls annually on Sept 21.

The students discussed the role of human rights in achieving peace. This year’s event coincided with the United Nations campaign to celebrate the sixtieth anniversary of the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

The forum was organised by the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and Pacific, in partnership with the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights and the Faculty of Political Science, Chulalongkorn University.

At the forum, 12 students talked with the Bangkok Post about "peace" and how it can be achieved.

Salisa Napathorn, 17, Chulalongkorn University Demonstration School

"I can't really see how peace can be achieved worldwide. But as a tiny molecule in the society, at least we can start from ourselves. If we think of ourselves less and see others before ourselves, several problems can be avoided.

When people have to work together, there are chances of conflict and those conflicts usually come from only one cause, people not seeing things the same way. So, when problems arise, we need to look at them from different angles and try to understand and compromise."

Alhuda Chanitphattana, 21, Kasetsart
"What is peace? In the classroom, I learn about conflicts and its technical term, but not about peace. If the definition of peace is not clearly defined, how can people achieve it?"

Teerayut Teerasupaluck, 23, Thammasat University

"I once felt discriminated against when I was living in America as an exchange student. I found that because the people didn't know about other countries, they judged those who are different from themselves through stereotypes.

"Why do people look down on people who are different?

"The Thai education system also doesn't offer much opportunity for students to learn about other countries. So, when students have little knowledge, they tend not to care, and it makes them look as if they are ignorant."

Assarof Sasanakul, 21, Chulalongkorn University

"Some young people only live in their own small world, driving in a comfy car, shopping and going on trips, but they don't open to the real world of people living in poverty and discrimination. They don't exercise the power they have, which is the power that can lead to peace."

Nathan Penn Maxwell, 25, Webster University

"The basic rule for peace is that you should treat people the way you want to be treated. You should value a person equally. A lot of people feel like they're entitled to do certain things, but they should acknowledge that other people have the same fundamental needs. People with the same basic needs don't agree on how to fulfil those needs. Ideas of freedom have to grow out of the soul of those nations.

"Democracy can be utilised as a model to facilitate peace and freedom. However, it must be grown from the will of people. It cannot be imposed."

Thanasak Charernrat, 20, Kasetsart University

"We should learn and understand our culture as much as we can and then learn about others as well so that we know why people are doing what they do and why they don't [do other things]."

Chakrit Issmun, 20, Srinakharinwirot University

"Peace can start in education institutes. A university is a model of the bigger society where the rich, the poor, and different races and creeds live together. It's the place where we can learn to accept each other and individual differences. But at present, there's even a divide in universities. People from one faculty don't get along with those from another faculty. It would be a good start if we can make people in the same university love and compromise with one another."

Bhanubhatra Jittiang, 18, Chulalongkorn University

"Students need to join forces and platforms are needed to voice their opinions. The more activities and forums to participate in, the more ideas can be shared. The resolutions to certain issues of concerns must be drafted and submitted to any organisations involved."

Panjaworrawat Chatwattananan, 21, Srinakharinwirot University
"Conflicts come from people who don't know their duties and responsibilities. As students, we should concentrate on our studies, for example. When people are aware of their roles and act accordingly, and don't cross other people, there'll be less trouble and more order, which is the foundation of peace."

Parnchanok Prasongnijjakij, 18, Thammasat University

"Youth is a mechanism to move the nation. Although we don't have power, we do have rights and the freedom to express our wants. Raising awareness among young people is very necessary to get together, build networks and contribute to society."

Catina Ponticello, 23, Webster University

"When people are educated, they become more tolerant of cultural diversity and they don't see the diversity as [negative]. We should give rights to everyone to believe what they want to believe and respect everyone and every society as individuals. We wouldn't have conflicts if everyone looked at each other on the same level."

Rachtaphol Sabhavasu, 17, Chulalongkorn University Demonstration School

"Sport links people together and helps tighten relationships. It teaches people a lesson of friendship, to lose some, win some and to forgive. Then peace will follow."

"I was selected as one of two students to represent Thailand in the recent Olympic Youth Camp in Beijing, China. There the participants shared the same goal: 'One world, one dream.'"

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Bangkok Post

Learningpost

Unesco SERIES - Is peace just a fantasy?
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1163 words
7 October 2008
Bangkok Post
English
(c) 2008