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A Letter Promoting the Teaching of PEACE

Dear Fellow Teachers,

Last January and February, terrorists killed more than 250 human beings in Quetta, Pakistan in two suicide attacks. These innocent people were simply targeted because of their personal beliefs as Shia Muslims. After these attacks in Pakistan and some other parts of the world, my conscience compelled me to revisit and think about the role and responsibilities of teachers for promoting peace and tolerance. On the very next day when I entered my classroom, I discussed the role and responsibilities to promote peace with my 10th grade students. You might be astonished by reading that the students were in a state of fear when speaking against terrorism. Some of them hesitated when giving their views against terrorism. The most surprising and astonishing fact for me was that when I asked my fellow teachers to discuss peace and terrorism in their own classes, some of them totally refused to do so and many others were feeling hesitation in this matter. The problem was that, in our Pakistani society, terrorism is a disputed topic to discuss with students.

I shared with fellow teachers my observations during my visit to the United States as a member of the Teaching Excellence and Achievement Program. During that program, I observed how US teachers openly discussed these topics with their middle and high school students. Some of my Pakistani fellow teachers supported my

point of view, especially the principal at my school who encouraged my efforts to create awareness in society and especially among students. I have observed that youngsters and teenage students are used in creating violence, terrorism and suicide attacks. So, I made an agreement with some of my fellow teachers to hold a conference between like-minded teachers to highlight and ensure the role and responsibilities of teachers for creating awareness for peace. We used the slogan **“Teach PEACE not the PIECES”** to refer to the meetings. My message to them was that when teaching to unity among people we can contribute to the peace process, and conversely when we teach to the “piece” we assist in destroying the peace process.

In the first session of the discussion, teachers agreed on the point that the current education system should be able and should focus on promoting understanding of multiculturalism, a philosophy of unity, and peace and tolerance to save our generation from terrorism. The participants pointed out that at the moment there are no formal actions taken to institutionalize peace in order to prevent conflicts, violence and extremism among groups, communities, societies or nations. I was of the opinion that education is the most powerful tool to inculcate the deeper value of peace, tolerance and harmony. It can also help us to understand and revisit the multi-dynamics of conflicts among different ethnic and religious groups. This natural

and unbiased understanding can lead us to meaningful resolutions of these problems and also help us prevent their existence in the future. One of our senior teachers, Mr. Qazi Kapoor Hussain, pointed out that promoting peace and creating tolerance through education is particularly neglected in our society. Our present generation as well as the future generation, both have the basic right to live in peace. According to him, teachers are the key in the global world to promote peace, tolerance and understanding of multiculturalism.

The second half of our discussion focused on the factors that can lead a person or a group to commit violence or kill others on religious, ethnic bases or upon their personal beliefs. A senior teacher, Mr. Abdul Hanan, was of the opinion that if a student leaves the school due to corporal punishment or is struck off (removed or canceled the registration and the name of student from school) due to any reason, it means that we are throwing that particular student in the hands of criminals and terrorists who then instill hate in these students and use them for their personal purposes. We can handle this situation by using two methods. The first method is for teachers to demonstrate peaceful behavior and attitude towards students. The second method is using a curriculum that needs to be conceived and designed in ways that may help the students to internalize the value of respect for peace, tolerance and cultural diversity. One of the teachers, Mr. Syed Khadim Hussain Shah, pointed out that, approaches towards the teaching of history and religion need to be revisited

to identify the messages that are being delivered to the young mind of learners and what the consequences of those messages can be for the future of these students.

At the end of the meeting the Principal, Mr Aamir Iqbal, concluded the discussion with the strong message that **“Every teacher is a PEACE teacher.”** If, as the result of teaching, society becomes more peaceful then there is an indication that teachers are taking their role as peace teachers seriously and properly fulfilling their responsibilities. If our society continues to be involved in violent acts, then it is partly the failure of our education system and our teachers. Education and teachers can create a global culture of peace and tolerance. Unfortunately, we place more emphasis on economics and technological progress and diminish the importance to respect culture, peace and tolerance. As a result, we have to face the horrifying incidents that have taken place in Quetta and 9/11.

With best regards,

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P.S. As I was writing the last sentence of the article “we have to face the incidents like Quetta and 9/11,” I turned my television on and there was a breaking news that ABBAS TOWN (Karachi/Pakistan) was targeted by terrorist with bomb blasts in which 48 innocent Shia Muslims were killed.

More than 200 are injured and their homes are destroyed. Keep in mind that the 250 people who were killed in Quetta were also from of the same community and were killed for the same reasons..... Please teach the **PEACE** not the **PIECES** otherwise we will have to continue to face incidents like 9/11, Quetta, and Abbas Town.

Interview

Following is an interview conducted by Mr. Abbas on the topic of peace. The teacher interviewed, Mr. Mohsin Moosa, works in an area of Pakistan where much violence is taking place.

Sajid: How do you see the terrorist attacks on the Shia Community in Quetta?

Mohsin: Well! The plight of Shia killing on religious and ethnic background is really very sad to hear. I strongly condemn this act of terrorism.

Sajid: What do you think who is behind these attacks?

Mohsin: There is no denying the fact the extremists and terrorists are behind these attacks by exploiting the youths of our country to achieve their personal, religious and ideological interests.

Sajid: Who are these youths who are being exploited by the terrorists?

Mohsin: These youths are the future generation of our country. They can be students and illiterate people of our country. They are mainly those who have been robbed of getting education and today they are living like parasites on our community.

Sajid: How can such brutal incidents are curbed in the future?

Mohsin: I believe education is the only panacea for curbing this menace from

our country. We need to educate every youth of our country for curbing such barbaric acts.

Sajid: What is the role of the teachers in this regard?

Mohsin: I think that the role of teachers is very important for curbing this menace. The teachers need to spread practical and constructive education in the schools. They need to educate the students' through tolerance, multicultural adaptation and peace.

Sajid: How do the youths become prey of the terrorists?

Mohsin: There are many causes behind this. There is paucity of education for all and sundry. There is poverty and lack of morality in our society, which is breeding such horrendous acts of terrorism. I think that, we the teachers, have to endeavor for educating the students by stipulating all the positives impacts of education.

Sajid: What is the role of schools in eliminating terrorism from our country?

Mohsin: School plays a very pivotal role in nourishing the students both physically and spiritually. The schools need to realize the need of efforts to fight against terrorism. They need to create walks, seminars and give mass awareness about terrorism.

Sajid: Can schools do that in our societies, where the terrorists become a big threat to the school community?

Mohsin: The government needs to make it compulsory for the teachers to teach the students about the terrorists and their negative impact on our lives. It is difficult for a single school to initiate such steps. This needs to taken seriously and collectively by all the school communities in Pakistan.

Sajid: How do you see the role of religion in bringing peace in Pakistan?

Mohsin: We have misunderstood the religion. We need to understand the true teaching of our religion Islam, which is the religion of peace but the terrorists are acting against our religion even though they claim to be religious. I think the students should be taught the true meaning of our religion.

Sajid: What is the role of parents in this regard?

Mohsin: The parents play an imperative role in this regard. They need to educate their children and take care of them so that they may not fall in the hands of terrorists. They have to fully understand their role and responsibility in educating their children.

Sajid: What is your school doing in this regard?

Mohsin: Well! My school has been imparting quality education of peace, tolerance, and brotherhood to the students of my community but I understand we need to do more to educate all those youths who are out of school through walks, seminars, and community gatherings.

Sajid: What have you done for peace after your visit to US?

Mohsin: I have always been against the terrorists. Following my program from US, I have been spreading my knowledge of love, peace, tolerance and morality in my community. I often discuss with my students about social, political problems faced by our country. And I am willing to continue my efforts in this regard and I will soon tell my other teacher fellows to teaching about brotherhood, patience, love, equality and justice. I hope this will help in

establishing a peaceful environment in our country.

Sajid: God bless you! Thank you.

Mohsin: You're very welcome.

Resources for teaching peace and tolerance**Books and Articles**

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- Miller, R., & Eisler, R. (2006). *Educating for a culture of peace*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
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Internet Resources

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- Cannon, S. G. (2011). *Teach for Peace! Peace education curricula & resources*.
<http://www.teachforpeace.org/ratios-nales-curricula/Peace-Education-Curricula-Resources>