

An article for the AWC World Summit on Human Rights

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When asked to write an article about what we can do to make the world a better place, the first challenge is to choose which of the world's problems to tackle. There is no lack of trouble in the world. Many natural disasters have been in the news recently and are painful to watch as they affect and often destroy the lives of millions. However, there is not a lot one can do to change or prevent natural disasters. These are powerful and often huge forces of nature. We can plan for them and respond when people are affected by them, but these disasters are unpredictable. So to write a meaningful article I have chosen another topic, the man-made disaster of war.

Wars are predictable. We watch them build up for years and live with the threat of war almost constantly in some part of the world. War used to start for simple reasons, countries needing resources from other countries and deciding to invade, or governments deciding to increase their country's strength by attacking their neighbours. Another more sinister threat we have faced in the last hundred years is war with ideological reasons. It seems as if people lose their minds to an idea or belief and go to war to defend and grow this idea or belief. We hear often in the media about extremists and are warned of the dangers of different groups of people classified by their belief or style of governance.

While this has been an effective motivator for wars, I believe now and always will believe that no war is fought over ideology or belief. Behind all these wars is the simple motivator of desire, for money or power. Countries or groups of people that struggle economically or lack power can very easily be persuaded into going to war with the promise of power and wealth if they win. Ideology or belief are often used to get the people to support and participate in the war, but in my opinion it is always for power and money. We could ask ourselves how much is enough? The countries starting the wars are often powerful to begin with. But it seems to be in our nature to always want more. War seems inevitable over time.

There is however, another side of the coin. Having lived most of my life in Africa, I have seen many people in poverty who do not desire war. People can be seen to go to great lengths to avoid conflict as they try to build communities and live their lives. There is a desire to live in peace, especially among people who have seen the horror of war. Countries suffering hyperinflation such as Zimbabwe even manage to hold

desperately on to a small sense of order.

We have the technology and the mobility in the world today to reach people everywhere and communicate across language and culture barriers. Poverty, extreme lack or hunger don't need to be reasons people go to war anymore. If we were able to get to a place in the world where everyone had the basics of life, such as food, clothing security and shelter, a great motivator for war would be silenced.

People living with these basics are much less likely to go to war for ideological reasons, or to support leaders who desire war. There is enough in the world too keep us entertained, learning and discovering without ever going to war, in my opinion at least. To do our best to let everyone enjoy these things without the degradation of poverty would surely make going to war a detestable notion in the minds of many more people.

The logistics of tackling poverty are formidable, but with the will, there is no doubt a way to fight it effectively. We as people need to understand that there are many alive who need help and are becoming angry and hopeless in their situations. We should care for them and organise to help them by persisting in serious efforts to end poverty. People freed from the bonds of poverty will also be more willing to listen to concerns about the environment. I don't expect anyone to care about the environment while they and their families are hungry and dirty.

In conclusion I believe the end of war and the end of poverty to be inseparable. The human race is diverse, physically and philosophically, yet our concerns and desires are the same. We should all be fighting a war all the time, a war on poverty.