

Vinyl 2010 Essay Competition Submission

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Summary:

The lack of unity in our society is the root cause of today's food and energy crisis. Worldwide structures are based on blind competition and self-interest which is universally harmful in the long run. Being selfish is a natural state of being but people have to realize that mutual benefit is the most selfish goal. We waste valuable potential by fighting each other – it is now time to come together and join the efforts. Society is susceptible to change and if we eliminate our narrow-minded attitude, we can fight the sore problems of today.

Essay:

The question could be rephrased to: how can we create a society that would be able to improve its well-being? This puts emphasis on the society - the root cause of today's food and energy crisis. The lack of unity in our world has significantly contributed to the creation of many problems, among them the rise of food prices and shortages of energy resources. It is crucial to talk how we, the people of this world, can come together, or otherwise we will continue creating ever more problems.

Any definition of society implies a certain amount of unity or shared feelings. Even in the most narrow sense it could be characterized as the condition of being related to each other. But what relationships do we maintain? From family members distancing from each other to nations declaring disastrous wars, we are nothing close to harmonious co-existence. Being selfish is a natural state of being but we have not yet realized that the most selfish thing to do is to care about the mutual benefit.

Our world functions under complex structures and arrangements but until this day most institutions follow the ideas based on blind competition. Like the UN which is considered to be the main organization in the world with a goal to sustain universal peace and prosperity. Its structure is criticized for an obvious reason – it corresponds to the power relations from the previous century. Unfortunately, it is still about power struggles between countries, not about an all-in-one determination to change the world. For example, discussions to update the list of permanent members in the Security Council lead to no viable results because Argentina opposes Brazil's accession, China competes with Japan, India with Pakistan, Nigeria rivals South Africa. It is ironic because countries aim only for direct power while in fact supporting a neighbour in the same region could be helpful for both. The problem with our society is that we fall for this completely short-sighted attitude which is not advantageous for anyone in the long run.

One could argue that despite political and economic struggles, there is unified action for developmental projects around the world. In the context of food and energy crisis, this is an especially important field that can prevent suffering and losses of lives. But developmental work as well reveals divisions of our society - many actions fail because

they are based on a Western perspective. Projects are designed according to the ideas that the donor agencies see right, and it does not always correspond to the needs of people in the developmental world. In many cases donor organizations focus on particular aspects in the big picture and interpret the situation in a way that fits their plan of actions. Another unsatisfying indicator – the richest countries of the world have promised to budget much more money than they did in practice. Helping the poor should not be seen as an altruistic action - our interest should be the overall well-being. As long as we have different standards for people in different countries, we will continue depleting the resources of the world and we will increase the amount of unhappy people on this planet.

Changing our attitude towards other regions, countries, communities and individuals would lead to positive outcomes because currently we loose too much energy and potential in our daily struggles with each other. Looking at the problem of food and energy crisis, we have to see it as a result of many factors added together: climate, habits, political realities, economic restrictions, and the list could go on. But it can be boiled down to the behaviour of the people. Our planet is small, everything is inter-related: if you harm the nature in one part of the world, the consequences will be felt in another, same with people - misery in one place will threaten the people in another. What we do today, influences us tomorrow and every action turn back at us – it is a complicated chain reaction and the side-effects reappear in one or another form.

The ideas of mutual benefit and reciprocity barge into the unquestionable notions of free society and equality. But the cornerstone symbols must not be threatened and we should never impose obligations or force people and institutions to behave differently. Even if we can neither be truly free, nor completely equal, we should be tirelessly aiming for the fulfilment of these ideals. Most importantly, we have the freedom to consider each other as equal, we have the opportunity to improve our world. Noticeably, talking about change is not just a popular slogan material. If you look back at the development of our world, you see that society is susceptible to change. Throughout time, all different aspects – environment, behaviours, technologies, laws and beliefs or infrastructure – have experienced significant transformations. We can be hopeful that yet more changes are under way and it is only up to us what shape and direction they take.

But how do we fill our lives with care and respect towards everything and everyone else in the world? Most likely there is no clear beginning or end, as there are no clear indicators or measures. My suggestion: we start by thinking about it, we go on talking about it, we continue acting about it and we spread the ideas of unity and understanding further and further. The underlying message is that helping others is helping yourself. We might be on the right track: new world leaders are bringing up the notions of a global will, new societal organizations are spreading awareness, our world is assuming an image of one unit with an overarching mechanism. Our planet itself is sending us warnings – natural disasters make us realize that we are here all together. Each of us is very important and necessary in order to cure the society - if we come together as one, we will be strong enough to face the problems of today.