

Name: Michael Kwan  
School: Sha Tin College  
Year: Form 5

Year Group: Senior Secondary  
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### Partnership for Peace, Dignity for All

Peace. Such a word is irrelevant, when we are born into chaos, devoid of security. Just imagine for some, their once prosperous country is now mere ashes, burning in the background from the face of reality. Civilisation has long been gone; every human being is solely preoccupied with their survival. Either that or the brief moment of grief for a lost or loved one. Days, fortnights and years have passed, yet the nightmare recurs in our society. Gloom and horror seem to be permanently moulded, etched on people's faces.

Life as a refugee is one that is known, but not spoken of. And yet, we had all known for a long time that this is not something we could escape, given there is no place to escape. People of all ages and conditions all in search of food. The silent holocaust once again consumes the entire country. Yet, this silence is relatively peaceful, in comparison to the periodic, conventional bombing. The silence is a place of shelter from reality, a place, where civilians can find their inner peace. But nothing is forever, and this peace is taken away from us. We shall never forget.

This is a true story witnessed by my own eyes.

Routinely, a group of civilians were scavenging the city in desperate search of any materials worth selling to earn an extra portion of rations. It was during their darkest days, when starving children suffering from malnutrition noticed a vehicle stealthily approaching them. The wall of distrust, having been laid down, instantly arose within them.

The children were trembling and whimpering at the sight of the strangers, and the elderly were slowly withdrawing from the unidentified threat, as adults were brandishing their weapons. The pair of insurgents hastily raised their hands and, with warm tones and smiles, greeted us. The group of civilians made no such movement, but stared distantly, coldly and with distrust at them. With no fear in their eyes, the strangers approached us with alarming friendliness. They offered us pleasant, appetising food, which, unlike the rations, were generous in amount.

Over time, our distrust of the insurgents grew into trust, and we even learnt to respect them. In time, we would, in turn, greet them, as they approached us. As we were pacified, we seemed oblivious to the civil war that still persisted in the world around us, and we decided to believe that peace had replaced the war.

That day, on the 31<sup>st</sup> of July 1954, the most petrifying scene came to my eyes. As usual, the insurgents supplied us with a rather generous amount of rations. As usual, we would accept their gifts with immense gratitude. That day, those rebels left in a hurry, hastily leaving, as if imminent danger loomed. Before we could comprehend why they had left so urgently, a shattering blast exploded from the rations. The sudden expansion of air knocked us airborne, and all those in close proximity of the bomb were obliterated with the blazing fires.

All chaos broke loose.

Although it was still day, darkness enveloped us. We were lost, with nowhere to go, and various mixed emotions blinded us. Those who were scorched the most were desperately trying to quench the flames, with those unaffected assisting them. Some were simply left to die. This was reality.

The toll of the terrorist attack did not solely strike at our physical health; a permanent psychological change had occurred deep within each of us. Rebellion against the government destroyed what was left of the city, but this process of accepting rebellion had a deep toll on each and every one of us. Soon, we forgot about the government and turned against each other.

Rations were reduced by one third, and the frail turned anaemic. The feeble civilians who couldn't fend for themselves had to beg for any source of nutrition they could muster. Human dignity seemed to have simply receded through time, and we turned from being civilised human beings to savage animals without dignity.

The abrupt news of foreign countries accepting refugees seemed all too surreal. From the day of the announcement, masses upon masses of civilians rushed towards the nearest harbours. Hordes of civilians raced amongst each other in order to secure their places on the boats, yet the stampede of fleeing refugees made such a trip impossible for many. The unity, once felt in our hearts to overthrow the corrupt government, withered, as we realised that we were fighting amongst each other in order to escape.

But why did we have to act in such a barbaric way, showing our ferocious and savage nature once again, living as if dignity had been taken from us? Where are the councils of the United Nations, when we need their assistance most? Where are the countries who claim to be benevolent and would accept anyone in dire need of assistance? Where are the people who once claimed to be working towards achieving world peace? Why have they concealed themselves from the media and the civilians' appeals for help?

However, even though life during the civil war was dangerous, surviving during the refugee process seemed impossibly perilous. During the civil war, although rations were severely limited in supply and could not satisfy our nutrient requirements, they were sufficient in keeping us alive. With no edible food or water supplies, our survival was a matter of life and death. Yet, none of us seemed to fear death; it was the fear of losing a loved one or the mental devastation our death would cause to our family.

We were in constant peril. Waves upon waves would slam against our frail boat, and occasionally screams for help would be heard. The boat rocked from side to side, and I was flung airborne into the sea. I screeched, as I desperately held onto the side of the boat, howling, as my fingers were slipping. "Hold on to my hand!" His eyes seemed ablaze with determination, and I instantaneously seized hold. As I felt my grip weakening, another wave launched our boat sideways. I was inevitably catapulted outwards, and saw nothing but the depths of the sea engulfing me.

When I awoke, daylight had broken again. I choked, as I struggled to stand up, and was warmly greeted. The reality of being flung into the ocean did not cause fear to overwhelm me, but, rather, I learnt to accept and conquer fear. Fear seemed to be the undesired natural evil, but it

was fear that kept us alive. Fear caused us to be cautious, and kept us working together to conquer our problems.

During times of hardships, the refugee ship became our new home. Our lives depended on it entirely, we worked tenaciously together to survive. Despite the horrifying conditions of life, flares of hope would periodically flash before our eyes. Deep in our hearts we knew that, if we continued battling the odds, we would arrive in a better future.

Finally, we arrived in the country, unknown to us then. Surprisingly, we were greeted with open arms by the citizens of the country. Instead of outraged faces of rejection, we saw compassionate faces. Instead of being rebuffed, we were accepted into the groups of people. Instead of having our possessions confiscated, we were granted food and water.

We are the fortunate ones, the few who had the chance to withdraw from the civil war to be able to successfully immigrate to a country and be accepted by the righteous amongst the nation.

We urge all nations capable of rescuing refugees to do so, such that civilisation can be perpetuated and human dignity preserved, and life can flourish within each and every country. This could only be done by partnerships among countries, all promoting peace and ending civil wars.