Overcoming barriers of Building Culture of Peace

Adnan Badran

Keynote
Berlin, Nov. 8th, 2014

We celebrate today under the auspices of the institute of cultural Diplomacy (ICD), the 25th anniversary of the Fall of Berlin wall, which started to be built in 1961 during the cold war between East and West. Physical wall of bricks separating same people with the same language and the same heritage, traditions, value system and culture; separation of people because of different ideology system of governments. It symbolizes the tension between capitalism of free market economy, multi party-system, lead by the U.S in the West and, communism in a controlled market economy centralized in one-party system lead by USSR in the East.

Building the wall was to separate Berliners living under two-systems of states, one is open with higher wages and open employing opportunities, the other is state-controlled with fixed work, but equality for all. So mobility of the population was toward the West for freedom and better wages. To stop it, communist part of GDP backed by USSR thought that protecting their ideology could be solved simply by bricks and concrete separating Germans.

What is the significance of the Wall:

The wall symbolized the loss of human rights and freedom. Simply, you cannot alter the life of people by imprison their mobility by walls, closing the last gap of the Iron Curtain in splitting Europe into East & West. By building the wall, the iron curtain of East Europe was complete.

The wall over time served artists as the “largest Graffiti Canvas” to express their thoughts and opinions concerning human rights and freedom.

The legacy of the Wall:

The fall of the wall in Nov. 1989 marked the end of the cold war. Europe no longer is divided into East and West, truce between the nuclear super powers was created. Reunification of Germany lead to the expansion of European union to Eastern Europe and United Europe moved peacefully toward development, integration and interdependent economy which ended all wars among Europeans and settled all conflicts democratically and peacefully.

The fall of Berlin Wall should not be taken in a narrow physical terminology; it should be expressed into a greater concept of tearing down barriers blocking free people to unleash their

---

2 Former Prime Minister and Chancellor of University of Petra, Amman, Jordan.
potential into progress and have the free choice in electing their governance and their system of
government, by nature, human beings are free of choice of their system of governance, their
choice, to create and live-in. All have a voice, with no marginalization. A system includes the
excluded with no totalitarian or dictatorial power. The people, all the people have the right to
vote in a pluralistic society and are free to express themselves in a transparent multiparty political
way.

The fall of Berlin wall opened a new era in the world for the rights of the people, to decide for
themselves their way of life. Free to think and express themselves without fear, so as to release
the potential of the minds, of men and women to new horizons, free to worship, free to elect and
move and create. Equal rights and equal opportunities and participation, for all sharing and
caring, and building a secure and ethical sustainable stable system, based on justice, respect of
the law set by the people through democracy.

Tearing down walls across the world:

Tearing down the Berlin wall has opened the concept of tearing down similar but non-physical
walls contributing to xenophobic conflicts and terrors in the world.

The best hope of a nation lies in the proper education of its youth (Erasmus).

Building culture of peace- among citizens is possible through reforming education particularly
at early childhood to root out extremism from our curricula and pedagogy. Since wars and
conflicts are seeded in the minds of men, then culture and defences of peace could be planted and
grown through education. But what should we address in the new reforms of education:

By education, we mean the right form of education, (not dogmatic education) is the key of tearing
hatred, walls of terrors and horrors, replacing it with bridges of tolerance and understanding of
other cultures and respect and appreciate differences in race, religion, values, to promote social
justice, ethics and solidarity. We should identify barriers that render the integration of ethics
among people on this planet. Alleviating psychological and social barriers to ethical values is
away to let it flourish naturally. In addition to education, the media including the social
networks, have an important role to play in bringing a paradigm shift in perception for other
people’s ideologies and value system; a real change of attitudes toward other cultures and
civilization can become reality.

i. Overcoming barriers to gender:

We should zoom into the lack of equity existing around the world. Iceland holds the highest
percentage of female workers with 78% as Forbes study shows, greater equality between men
and women, has reduced poverty rates, boosted GDP and better governance”.

But when we look into the gender issue of the world, we see inequity and 50% of the
population who are women are still not fully participating in the space of equal opportunity,
for all. In Jordan, we are proud that women compose more than 50% of total enrollment in our higher institutions in Jordan which raised the literacy rate of the country to more than 95%. But still there is a social barrier in our region, when it comes to employment opportunities. In United Sates, it was estimated that one third of its wealth (GDP), is generated by women.

As a scientist, science is universal and diverse but is truly without borders, where people can meet and discuss common scientific issues in harmony; although they come from different background in term of nationality, gender, race, religion and culture. Scientists strive to be impartial and objective. Therefore, science could become a platform of bringing various cultures to engage in fruitful dialogue to minimize conflicts and reduce tension among cultures and various people.

ii. **Overcoming barriers to cultural engagement**

Culture shape people and their reflection, views, values, vision and fears, so it is important to understand culture of others, and emphasize and magnify commons and respect variance with others.

People from culturally and linguistically diverse background should be able to be engaged in the workforce to compete on merits for employment and become effective members of the teamwork. Marginalization via discrimination and racism of minorities would lead to conflicts and reduce the output of all individuals within the community. Engaging all members based on merits will yield a strong productive community with a strong sense of belonging to an environment inducive to progress. Cultural diversity should be looked on as richness to cross-cultural engagement which will bring skills and different backgrounds away of stereotype. Education here plays an important role.

iii. **Overcoming barriers to income diversity:**

In the world, the richest 1% control 43% of world’s wealth. So the gap is growing in term of wealth distribution. In addition, poverty and unemployment are growing in many countries. MDG’s of the UN were not met particularly in Asia and Africa. Therefore, empowerment of people particularly women should be undertaken through equality, equal opportunity and quality education for career path to close the gap in knowledge construction between those who know and those who know-not. Diversity and inclusion (gender, race, ethnicity and culture) will create the environment for releasing the potential of every individual to create and innovate, and contribute to building culture of peace.

iv. **Overcoming barriers to religion, sects and ethnicity:**

The bible speaks of removal of a wall by Christ that divided Jews and gentiles-people of various ethnicities "For HE HIMSELF is our peace. Who has made both ONE, and has broken down the middle wall of separation".
And to quote the Quran “We have honored the children of Adam and carried them to land and sea” verse 70 Al_Ista. and to quote the Hebron words of Rabbi Maganet citing the hallel “to get out of this narrowness, give thanks to the eternal who is good, for God’s love is for all humanity of the World”, and to quote Pope Francis: “May the God of peace rouse in every one. Violence cannot be overcome with violence. Violence is defeated with peace”.

And to quote Bahá’u’lláh: “The utterance of God is a lamp, whose light is these words: Ye are the fruits of one tree, and the leaves of one branch. Deal ye one with another with the utmost love and harmony, with friendliness and fellowship. ... So powerful is the light of unity that it can illuminate the whole earth.”

So religions meet on unity of mankind, fraternity, love and peace.

Globally, there are walls even among same ethnic groups as separation of South Sudan who are black Christians from North Sudan who are black Muslims. Khartoum failed to develop a secular state to keep different faiths to enjoy equal citizenship, where freedom of worships of all faith are respected. Also, remember how the Hutus massacred the Tutsis in Rwanda. Also, remember how whites ethnically cleansed other whites in Bosnia, and remember the “historical feuds” between Catholics and Protestants in Northern Ireland. But thanks to education, enlightenments, interdependence and democracy and equal opportunities for all, which made progress to fellowship and unity among members of diverse racial-backgrounds. Look now at the outcome of the referendum of the Scottish people who voted against separating their motherland Scotland from England. Full democracy which provide full participation of all people, no matter of their roots, with equal rights, worked against separation of a nation-state to smaller states.

v. Overcoming barriers to xenophobia in Middle East:

By contrast, in Middle East, we suffer, because of the absence of full democracy . Religions, sects, nationalistic and ethnic wars and terrorism are spread in the region.

We’ve heard with horror about Christians being asked to leave their homes in Mosul-Iraq, and about destruction of holly places and their symbols by the fanatic ISIS, who claim the Jehadist Islam. Although their ideology has nothing to do with Islam, a religion of tolerance, harmony and peace with others. ISIS, the so called Islamic State, want to create a state based on extremist religious state-Islamic as the Ku Klux Klan is Christian-adopting religious fanaticism to kill men, children, and enslave women in the name of God.

Those actions are appalling in a region, home of religions and ethnic diversity for centuries; we cannot allow this tragedy to unfold in Mesopotamia, the land of most ancient civilization. Turkmens’, Yazidis, Sunnis and Shias, Kurds and Arabs were uprooted from their homes in
fear for their lives. Horrors also unfolding on a daily basis in Syria, that one out of every three
Syrians became a refugee in his own country or abroad.

Religious leaders and followers must draw strength from ethical perceptions of their
civilization. They must avoid rigid statements from misinterpretations of religious beliefs.
They should draw inspiration from their ethical standards of justice, compassion and
imagination. Holy places in our sites and hearts should not develop into venues of separation
and hatred, they should develop into highways of dialogue, values of dignity and solidarity”

The words of Quran, the holy book of Islam is clear where it says “There shall be no
compulsion in religion” verse 256, Sura Al Baqarah

In Middle East, the conflict between Israelis and Palestinians should be resolved peacefully
through dialogue and cultural diplomacy. Jews and Arabs always lived in harmony with
mutual respect, through history. The political conflict has been exploited by extremists on
both sides to build hatred, and justify the murder of ordinary people.

Physical wall separating Israelis and Palestinians is not a solution. Building a culture of peace
based on justice, dignity and human rights will create brotherhood of the sons of Abraham.
“have we not all have one father”.

Threats of violence can cause the minds of ordinary people to atrophy. We should do
whatever we can to reach a peaceful solution to this conflict. Not giving the Palestinians their
rights to live peacefully and end the occupation of their homeland, become the core
of spreading extremism in the whole region.

In Summary:

We have to tear down walls of misunderstanding, loss of opportunity and discrimination
against, racial, ethnic, religious, sects which drain progress, development and human
resources. They distract people of multiplying the space of commons, instead, will enlarge the
space of differences which yield conflict. Resolving differences, or creating a diverse coalition
will build a culture of peace among citizens of the world. We should not isolate ourselves
from those who are different. We cannot allow divisions to harden. Involving all the people in
the decision process is a basic principle of democracy. The more we understand cultures of
others, the more we accept differences with respect. Dialogue is a matter of more than
peacemaking, but of living an authentically human life. In the words of James Banks about
the American dream as he says "our challenge as a new century begins. To establish an
authentic Unum that has a moral authority, and yet create moral, civic and just

\(^3\) Joint appeal of religious leaders: Violence in the name of religion, Amman, 2014.
communities where diverse racial, ethnic and cultural communities will participate and which they will have allegiance”

In Middle East, we should promote secular civil state building and governance encompassing all strata of people without racial discrimination, gender, religion, sect, nationality - roots, ethnicity or color. Arab spring started in Tunisia, and the Tunisians succeeded in drafting a secular constitution to build a democratic state of multiparty system with modern elections, based on justice and freedom. However, Arab spring failed in other countries of the region and lead in some countries to disaster.

The state is for all, with no marginalization. Our people should get out of the cave to the world of enlightenment. Reconnaissance out the medieval ideology is a must. Human rights, justice, equality and accommodation of cultural differences and dialogue will build non-oppressive diverse true democracy, sustainable for generations.

The four pillars of Jack Delors’ UNESCO commission on education for the 21st century: learning to be, to know, to do, and learning to live together, are the keys of tearing down walls of hatred and conflicts. Dialogue is behind the very idea of “learning to live together”. It must be at the heart of our efforts to tackle the challenges facing societies – From poverty to information technologies – so many of which require global commitments, concerted approach, and internationally – recognized norms and codes of conduct.

Education is therefore the pivot. It is an essential mean to promote dialogue, while helping to remove the roots of ignorance, prejudice, intolerance and conflict. Achieving constructive dialogue means, for example, improving educational skills, attitudes and pedagogy. Just think of the difference it would make if all school text-books were revised to reflect the contributions of all cultures and peoples, and to remove from them the expressions of prejudice and intolerance which fire incomprehension, mistrust, even hatred.

As Homosapiens, we make One-World, beautiful with enriching mosaic of diversity of cultures. We’ve got to learn living on it together peacefully and in harmony.