Peace, creating a shared future

The idea of possessing land has been and is still necessary for human beings to feel secure. However, if two different nations of different cultures and beliefs live on the same land, the security of one nation is definitely at the expense of the other nation's security. This intrinsic human need for a land is at the core of the Palestinian and Israeli conflict: two different nations which fight for the same land.
We are two teenage girls who come from these two conflicted nations (Palestine and Israel) and live in the conflict every day. We first met in a different place, here in Italy, in an international college which means that we are college mates and we see each other every day and share many classes together. In the beginning, we were very aware of the existence of one another. Before getting to know each other, we had this fear of confronting and contradicting one another in daily conversations. Each one of us was afraid that the other would have certain aggressive emotions and beliefs as it is exactly like back home among the two people. However, every time we met, the conflict was the last thing we would talk about. We saw each other as two teenagers who share many interests and want to enjoy the free time we have after college. We both love arts, we went to many college field trips together in Italy, and this is how we bonded.

People noticed our close friendship as it is not very familiar among other Palestinians and Israeli teenagers. Many school mates expressed their happiness to us when they saw us together. It felt wonderful to hear that our friendship gave inspiration and hope to many of them.
In September 2018, we were invited to take part in the youth inspiring change conference in Trieste which was organised by students from our college. We accepted this invitation with an open heart. However, we feared that this time we would contradict each other as we will be explicitly addressing the conflict to people who are unfamiliar with it. In fact, as we expected, while preparing for our presentation, we had two different versions of the same story. There was a lot of contradiction when showing the oppressor and the oppressed and therefore the tension increased that we doubted about the success of this presentation. Fortunately, we soon realised that mentioning many historical facts does not lead us anywhere in the search for peace. The education in each of these countries would have one perspective about the conflict, the perspective that supports one side. This is also when we realised how powerful education is and how it contributes to keeping the tension and the conflict. By saying that, we do not mean that we should forget history, history is never forgotten and should never be forgotten. However, we felt we needed to approach peace by mentioning our feelings and needs as teenagers. We decided to focus on what can be done rather than to focus solely on what happened. For an hour, in the peace presentation we made in the conference, we wished to give people an opportunity to look at the conflict from a different perspective, one that does not encourage people to choose sides but rather understand that to achieve peace, we must think of all people, not only about a single nation.

History and what it includes is often the main controversy in every discussion. Whether it is the question of who the land belongs to, who fought in what war or who is right or wrong, history is at the centre. Back home, history and its components are the first line of defence

for those who condemn peace. Arguments such as ‘but they did that’ or ‘they don’t want peace’ are repeated like a broken record, excusing people from truly caring, from sacrificing for the sake of a better future, thus passing the responsibility for change to the other side. Many hang on to their past and present suffering and thus perpetuate fear of the other. Fear paralyses, it puts people in a state of fight or flight. It is the most dangerous emotion, used by politicians to maintain the hegemony and justify war, make each side stick to their own beliefs, to their own perspective of what is true and what happened. However, for us, the scariest thing, the most fear-inducing reality, is not the other side, but the prospect of war. When publicly discussing the Israeli –Palestinian conflict, both of us faced criticism. We were called over-idealistic, unrealistic and ignorant- both of our own past and of the other side. However, the fight for peace is not driven by our lack of knowledge but rather by its existence. How can one say it is more realistic to sustain a state of conflict? Or to suggest it is more realistic that one nation will control the land and the other will disappear? Every war and death serve as a painful reminder that the continuation of this conflict will not protect us but harm us. So we use fear as a driving force. It reminds us of what will happen if we don't aspire for peace, but rather accept the reality as it is. Acceptance of reality is worse than fear because it implies indifference. In Israel and Palestine, many young people, being born into the conflict know it as their only reality, replacing fear with detachment. In many ways, this is more dangerous than fearing the other side. When you fear, you feel, however when you are indifferent you suppress your emotions, you forget to care. Fear prevents peace today; however, apathy will prevent peace in the future.

Our optimism, our genuine hope for a better future, as far-fetched as it may appear, is not a manifestation of childishness but rather of faith. We aspire to have peace because we understand the intrinsic human need for security, for a sense of belonging to a place. However, unlike many, this understanding does not lead us to hang on to our position, to our narrow perspective of the world. It leads us to the acknowledgment that our nation’s aspiration for a homeland is not more or less legitimate than that of the other side. Yes, we might be young and over-optimistic, but in a world led by a never-ending search for division and characterizations of who is the other, a voice calling for a different perspective is much needed. Therefore, we would like to ask you for one thing- a moment of consideration. A moment in which each and every one of you will put aside the reasons, and there are many, to why peace does not exist and imagine a reality which is not dictated by war, but by shared creation of a better future; a future for Palestine and Israel- together.

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