

**Nobel Peace Laureate Dr. Mohamed ElBaradei at the Australian International School in Singapore on Thursday, February 12, 2015:**

Good morning everybody, I have to say that it is a pleasure for me to be here with you. I thought the best way to proceed is if I make a short introduction and then I will be ready to answer your questions and to have a dialogue with you. I mean you're going through building your lives, you are obviously the future, and the question I think we all have on our minds is what sort of future you would like to have and what kind of world you would like to live in. I'll present to you a few of the ills that we are facing in the world today with the hope that - as you progress with your life - you can deal with them and create a better world than what we have today.

The first problem, the first issue I think we are all facing is extreme inequality. We are of course very privileged, all of us, to have the kind of life we have: food on the table, healthcare, education, freedom of expression and belief, in other words: human dignity. Every one of us is very proud to have his or her human dignity, which as it should be. Many people in the world are not fortunate to have this kind of life or even something close to what we have. We have almost half of the world's population (8 billion in fact) who live under two dollars a day, and you can imagine what you can do with two dollars. A lot of people are in an even worse situation: You have 900 million people who go to bed hungry every night, and that's almost a 6<sup>th</sup> of the world's population.

Is that because we don't have enough money? That's not the case. The world is full of money, we have a lot of money, we just spend it on the wrong things, and last year we spent 1.7 trillion US dollars on armaments while we need about 1% of this amount to feed the hungry. Are these the right priorities?

We have, as you have seen, lots of refugees as a result of all the wars, and we are not even feeding them. If you look recently the head of the UN refugee agency, UNHCR, has been almost begging everywhere to get around 8 billion dollars to provide shelter and food to refugees who are yearning to have a home anywhere, and yet he is not getting that money. That money is, as I said, a quarter percent of what we spend on armaments, so we have in my view a very difficult situation, and that again I should tell you is not just a question of conscience or ethics, it's becoming a question of survival, and again practically if you want to live in safe world you want to make sure that everybody is entitled to at least a life, because we have seen and continue to see: when people are angry, when people are humiliated, when people are oppressed it can become a source of extremism. And there is another thing I should say that not everybody is lucky enough to have democratic institutions and freedom to express his or her views, like we do. One third of the world's nations still lives under authoritarian or dictatorial systems. So when you get this poverty with repression or oppression what do you get? You get in many cases people that are angry or losing hope, and then you see the kind of extremism that we are facing today, and it is increasing. You see stuff like ISIL, which I am sure you've heard about, and Al-Qaeda and all the other renegade groups. Are we safe anywhere right now, in this interconnected world? Of course not, as we have seen

recently in Paris and as you can see everywhere because you cannot quarantine a part of the world, because they are angry and they think they are unfairly treated, not treated as human beings, and so they do not act in many ways as human beings. You can see sometimes environments that produce people like Mother Theresa, Martin Luther King or Gandhi, and also other environments that produce suicide bombers. It depends on the environment, on how you are treated: If you are treated like a human being, then you act like a human being, and if you are not treated like a human being, you don't, and you can't be expected to do so. So these are issues if you are investing in fixing this problem of inequity, then you are not just doing good for your conscience, you are doing good for our society as a whole.

Another problem of course is the tendency that we continue to settle our problems through war, and this has been a perennial problem throughout recorded history. If you want to remember now what was the cause for a war that happened a hundred or two hundred years ago, then most of us wouldn't remember, and in many cases the states that were fighting these wars do not even exist anymore. We still think that this is the way to settle our differences. Do we really settle our differences through killing each other, fighting, or would it be better to sit together, like we are sitting here today and discuss our problems and try to find solutions?

Again, I mentioned that we spend about 1.7 trillion dollars on weapons, armaments and a part of that is being spent on nuclear weapons. Is this the kind of security system that we would like to have? Do we have to

depend on nuclear weapons? Many of you of course know that the use of nuclear weapons would mean our self destruction. The weapons used in Hiroshima and Nagasaki, in Japan during the 2nd World War are child's play in comparison with the power of modern nuclear weapons. We thought after the end of the Cold War in 1990 that we are going to have a different global order, a different world and a more equitable security system, but unfortunately that did not happen. We still live in a world today with 16,000 nuclear warheads, and 2000 of them on so-called high status alert. That means they could be launched on very short notice, even if you get the report that there is a strike against you, this could maybe give you, President Obama or President Putin, half an hour or one hour to respond; and this could be a response to a computer error, it could be a false alarm, but we may wake up in the morning and discover that we or the world don't exist any longer. This is, to me, absolutely crazy. Despite all the good talk from politicians everywhere that we need to free the world of nuclear weapons, we are not really moving in that direction.

So these issues are very much linked. As I said, when you have inequity, this inequity I have to say is getting more and more obscene. Right now, if you look at the statistics and numbers it says that next year 1% of the world's population will own as much as all of us. That is a frightening statistic. One percent will own more than the rest of us by 2016. You have now another figure, which is even more awful. You have 80 people, you can put them in one bus, and they own as much as 3.5 billion. These are figures you should remember, because they don't show that we are on the right path because whatever you call it, equity,

social justice or fairness, if you don't have that, and you are on the losing end of it, then what do you do?

Put yourself into the situation of a person who is not able to send their kids to school, someone who is not able to send his wife to get medical treatment, who is dying, because he or she doesn't have enough money to afford medication. Last year for example, in Africa over 2 million died simply because they can't afford the medication, whether that is Malaria or HIV/Aids. The treatment is there, which is the worst thing, but they just can't afford it.

It is not an exaggeration to say that it is an unfair world, which is a bit of an understatement. It is also a dangerous world, because we depend on weapons that could lead us to sleepwalk into self-destruction and I continue to say that if you put oppression and poverty together, then you have the most lethal combination for violence and extremism. So when you look and read and study about all these extremist groups and the evil that we see in the world, it is not enough just to look at the symptoms, but it's very important to look at the causes.

Why do we have this problem, and why did we end up in this situation? I think it is simply a question of changing our mindset. In many ways we need to look at each other as being part of the same human family, which indeed we are. But right now what we see is "us versus them". So if you have a different faith, a different color, a different ethnicity, you are different. And that is what we continue to fight about.

If you look at Syria for example, in the last three years two hundred-thousand people died. Has anybody intervened or at least tried to stop the bloodshed or protect the innocent civilians? In the last decade in Congo five million people died in the civil war, and I bet not a single person here heard about it, because it doesn't get coverage in the media, and that's part of the problem we face. It depends on our attitude unfortunately. It depends on who is dying and where. If this person is one of us, a European or American, someone close to us, then we stand up and react strongly, but if someone is far away, well, we look at the television and say that it's awful before moving on ... and that has to change. That is the key, to change our mindset and to understand that we are all part of the human family, and in an international school you understand this of course very well. You come from different nationalities, different faiths and backgrounds, but you interact with each other, and you discover that you are all the same. You have the same hopes, the same aspirations, you want a future and a career, you want a family, and you would like to have the freedom to pursue whatever it is that you want to pursue.

That, I think, is the key to our salvation, to come to grips with the idea that what separates us is very superficial, and it doesn't really matter what kind of background we have, what kind of faith we believe in, as long as we understand that what we have in common is much more than what separates us, and try to understand that the only way to solve our differences is to sit together and negotiate and try to find a solution. In your family or in school you have to make compromises.

You don't get your way a hundred percent. You have to see things from the others point of view, and if you do that, then of course you find a solution. So these are some of the issues I would like to leave with you, that you have to think and act differently to create a better world, a world that is peaceful. We have to stop these wars that have been our trademark since recorded history, and we have to feel that there is some standard of social equity and that everybody should have at least a minimum of basic needs.

Human dignity is key. We talk about democracy, and to me democracy is dignity. Everybody should wake up in the morning and has all the rights he or she is entitled to, to speak his or her mind, to believe in whatever he or she wants to believe in, to have food on the table, to have education, to have medical care, to have equal opportunities, to have hope. These are the kind of values that you need to continue to work on and at the end of the day this is not a question of borders or which state you are living in, but it is a question of human empowerment. Each one of us, everywhere in the world, should be empowered.

I am sure and I have trust that you are a different kind of generation, with social networking, with the kind of knowledge and education that you have you already started to think differently and can, I assume, empathize with a lot of what I am saying. You are living that, particular in a place like here, you should expand this message beyond the walls of this international school and bring it to every part of society and whatever career you are going to pursue. You have a responsibility,

every one of you has. You cannot just say “What can I do?” because you can do a lot. You can help the person in need, a handicapped person, giving a couple of dollars to someone who needs help. You can speak your mind, to politicians and the leaders of your country about what you need to see, what kind of world you want to live in. So we should not, you should not say that you can’t do much, because this is all about individual responsibility, human empowerment.

I look at you, and I see the future. I see hope, and I see real change, and that is what we need, real change to the better, to get the best out of our human nature. I am sure that sometimes you go to concerts, listen to classical music or visit museums where you can see fantastic paintings, and witness how much creativity we have in us. We have unfortunately also an impulse towards violence, and we need obviously to control this impulse to create an environment of checks and balances and try to emphasize creativity, compassion and human solidarity.

Again, it is a pleasure for me to be here, and I am happy to answer any of your questions. Thank you.

Question:

I was wondering about your opinion on the military junta that came into power recently in your country?

Dr. ElBaradei:

I talk about human empowerment, which means that we have to have a system that is based on human solidarity, and any regime that is not based on social cohesion is not going in the right direction. What I want to see obviously in Egypt and everywhere in the world is a system of government where everybody is heard and represented, and that is one of the challenges we continue to face. We try to prevail on our own, but unless you include every part of society and provide them with a kind of equity, the system will not be sustainable. You need to have economic development, social justice, and at the end of the day when we talk about elections, we talk about democratic institutions, when we talk about the culture of democracy, this is not luxury, but a way to make sure that everybody's voice is heard, that everybody is included, and only an inclusive society can be viable and peaceful.

Question:

Do you think the seizure of power by the military in Egypt was necessary to stop the chaos?

Dr. ElBaradei:

This is again a quest for human dignity by a large chunk of people who are coming out of decades of repression, so what is happening is a work in progress. Whether people are right left or center, they have to be still able to settle their differences under a properly agreed constitution. I think what we see now is work in progress in this whole part of the world (the Middle East), and as we have learned, moving from an authoritarian system to democracy is not something you can achieve overnight. That is the lesson, and people have to understand that this is an incremental process.

As the former President of Singapore S.R. Nathan was telling me yesterday, you have to go through a grey area. Some countries are doing this more successful than others, but as you can see in the whole region where there are still civil wars going on, in Syria, in Libya and in Yemen, there is a process, and this starts with people standing up and saying that they need their human dignity. This process might take some time, and if you look at the history of Europe, the US or Asia you will see this. In Europe it took three hundred years for people to end basically the fight between the Emperor and the Pope, you had thirty

years of civil war, religious war and so on; but at the end these people discovered that there is no other way but to live together. They sacrificed millions of lives, lost in vain, before they realized that they better find a way to live together, and then they went through the religious reformation with Luther and Calvin, the age of reason – renaissance; so it is a very complex process until you reach the balance of how you can have a society that is at peace with itself, is able to live together and where everybody is having that kind of equity that he or she is entitled to. The focus should be on the creative part of human nature and not on the destructive side.

Question:

After the discovery of nuclear weapon facilities in Iran the US imposed quite a number of economic sanctions on the country. How sustainable do you think the current measures are at this point in time?

Dr. ElBaradei:

This is quite a complex issue to answer in about one minute, but I can mention a couple of things here. One, I do not believe in sanctions, because sanctions are frankly no policy. When you have no policy then you impose sanctions, and the same kind of thing you can see for example in Russia. I haven't seen any issue been resolved through sanctions. In fact sanctions result in hurting the innocent people. I have seen this in Iraq, where due to sanctions a lot of people died, because

they had not enough food or medication. In addition, the regimes in power are often able to enrich themselves during these times.

Luckily now the US and Iran and others are sitting together, and hopefully they will find a solution. This is also about security and especially regional security, and Iran has to show that they are fulfilling their obligation not to have nuclear weapons.

As I keep saying, there are 9 nuclear weapon states who have committed themselves 45 years ago to get rid of nuclear weapons. They haven't done any of that. They still have 16 thousand nuclear weapons. So now we have to ask ourselves the question: Is a system of security based on some-are-more-equal-than-others sustainable? That's a more fundamental question. Smaller countries see the big ones continue to rely on nuclear weapons, but the big ones tell them you can't touch nuclear weapons. Is that a system that is going to last? In my view it is not, because it is unfair. Anything in life which is unfair, which is not perceived to be fair, to be equal, is not going to last.

So let us hope they will resolve the Iranian issue, but let's again understand that for one state to rely on nuclear weapons means that this state is sending a message to everybody, that if you are squeezed, that if you are going through a conflict situation, you better get yourself nuclear weapons, because what comes unfortunately with nuclear weapons today is power, prestige and an insurance policy against attack. I refer to the example of Iraq and North Korea. Iraq was attacked and invaded, because they didn't have nuclear weapons, while

North Korea, where everybody knew that they have nuclear weapons, nobody could touch it. Is that the right message?

We need to think of a different kind of security by which we can defend ourselves, protect ourselves, but not by relying on nuclear weapons which could accidentally lead to a nuclear holocaust and life would cease to be. We have planet A, but we do not have a planet B. That is the reality. We are not doing as much as we can for our environment in terms of protecting it. We are not doing anything so far. There are signs of climate change everywhere, and yet we are applying the same kind of myopic national policies. You should do it first, why should I do it, you are responsible ... and nature is not going to wait for us while we bicker. We need to understand that most of our problems right now: climate change, terrorism, cyber attacks and epidemics, are all threats without borders, and not a single country is going to be able to resolve these threats alone. We need to understand, as a community of nations, that we need to work together based on cooperation and not confrontation.

Question:

I wonder, what do you think the future will bring for us if we don't change?

Dr. ElBaradei:

I think the future depends on you. If you continue the status quo then the future doesn't look very bright, I think. Much of this is common sense, at least in my mind. Are you comfortable going to school knowing that many children are not getting any education? Are you comfortable that you have healthcare knowing that millions and millions of people don't have that and die prematurely? Are you comfortable when you see some of the symptoms that we see now in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, for example the war in Europe, in the Ukraine? Who would have imagined that we would use this kind of force in Europe in the 21<sup>st</sup> century? When you have something like ISIL which is controlling a chunk of land as large as Switzerland? So we see very ominous symptoms and in many ways this is a wake-up call. And because you are the young generation, you will have to find a solution for that. Politicians unfortunately do not think in the long term, and all these issues I just mentioned are not to be solved in the short term. So you need to start thinking from now on what kind of life you want to have, what kind of environment you want to live in and what kind of world you want to share with your fellow humans.

Question:

To what extent is religion responsible for the situation we have today in the Middle East?

Dr. ElBaradei:

I think that what we see in the middle east today is an expression of anger, lack of good governance, sense of humiliation, oppression and whether people carry the banner or mantel of religion or ideology, ultra nationalism, color or race; this is something we have seen throughout history, that people wear different mantels to express their frustrations and to have as a rallying post. I don't think any religion, whether it's Buddhism, Islam or any other condones violence and the kind of bloodshed we see in the Middle East. We need to counter the people who use religion for this purpose, we need to understand that religion has been used over the years as a pretext.

We continue to define what we mean by our human dignity. In 1960 Rosa Parks in the US was not able to ride in the front of a bus, and that's just 50 years ago. Until 1954 in the US schools were segregated with schools for blacks and schools for whites, and it was the same constitution and the same Supreme Court who said separate but equal is not constitutional, because it doesn't provide protection. What I am saying here is that we continue to discover what it means to be equal, and we continue to discover what kind of rights we are entitled to as human beings. When I was a student in the US in the 60s women's rights were the issue, because women were treated in a completely unequal way until the 1960s, and feminism was born.

Nowadays we see a lot of goals from different groups, gay people for example and what rights they should have is an issue. Should they have

equal rights, and all this to me is part of the human journey, there is no end to how we try to define ourselves and what kind of world we would like to have, and that is part of the excitement of being part of the human species, because we always continue to learn. We continue to learn about our world and ourselves, and the more we learn, the more we continue to redefine our values and our world.

Now we understand that everybody should have absolute freedom of belief or lack of belief, and that is something relatively new. There have been witch hunts not too long ago, if you'd expressed different beliefs. So we should be modest and acknowledge that we do not know or have an ultimate truth, as the truth keeps changing all the time, and because truths are relative in many ways, it is through education and knowledge that we improve and continue to be better human beings. Better in the sense that we become more peaceful and compassionate and that is the way we should go, but it is up to you to pick up the torch and move on, and hopefully you will move in the right direction which does not always have to be linear. I spoke before about the Middle East and Egypt, and we understand that an uprising or change is not always linear, but it rather goes around in circles until it moves forward. This is reality, and we have to accept, that but we should always have the confidence to believe that we can change the world. When Barack Obama says "Yes, we can", it is very true. Yes, we can, if we have empowered and endowed people with the tool that allows them to change, and that tool is education and knowledge, that is the key to progress and to a world that is more humane and secure.

Question:

What can we do as students to promote equity in Singapore?

Dr. ElBaradei:

I do not know what kind of equity you have in Singapore, but I know you have to speak up. If you see any sort of inequity, then you have to speak up, be it economic inequity, political or social inequity, you need to speak up. Nobody will come to you and say, I give you this right or that right, but you have to fight for it. If you feel or if anyone feels discriminated against in any way, or you feel a sense of inequity, then you have to speak up, and you have to continue to fight for what you think is your entitlement. That is the only way.

Question:

I am sorry, but this is a bit unrelated. I would like to know what your reasons were behind your resignation as Vice President after only a month.

Dr. ElBaradei:

Because, as I mentioned earlier, I fully believe that we have to settle our differences in a peaceful way, that we have to have an inclusive society, and I agreed to join or to serve basically to avoid what could have been a civil war, but then things did not go in a way that I think they should go, and violence turned Egypt into a more polarized society. I obviously could not stay one day in such an environment, because it's contrary to all my beliefs.

Question:

Who was your biggest inspiration when you were growing up?

Dr. ElBaradei:

I get asked this question all the time, and I don't think there is only one person. My father, in a way, was an inspiration, my university professor was an inspiration, my first boss in my first job was an inspiration. You get inspired all the time and get inspiration from very ordinary people, people who put their heart and soul in doing their job or helping their families, and you get inspiration every day as you go along. You see the good part of human nature.

It is not that you look at one person and say this is my role model, but you keep your eyes open to see what good lessons you can learn every day. You can see this in a colleague of yours who is helping others or someone who is dedicated to help the poor, you can see a lot of beautiful role models all the time, and the key is to be a sponge and learn, absorb and store this, because it is something that you can use when you live your life.

Question:

I wonder if you believe that a situation like the Cuba missile crisis could ever happen again?

Dr. ElBaradei:

I hope it will not happen again, because that's when we came close to a nuclear war, a nuclear holocaust. A couple of months ago I was giving a McNamara Memorial Lecture on War & Peace at the University of Harvard in the US, and as you know Robert McNamara was the Secretary of Defense during the Cuban missile crisis, and that experience turned him into one of the most ardent supporters of nuclear disarmament. He spent the rest of his life advocating nuclear disarmament. I quoted him in fact in my lecture, when I said that "human fallibility and nuclear weapons will lead to the destruction of

nations”.

That is something I keep in mind all the time, and you can see that many people who have been involved in the Cold War and the development of nuclear weapons, people like Henry Kissinger or William Perry, a former Secretary of Defense, they are all now very strong advocates of nuclear disarmament. William Perry said recently we managed to avoid a nuclear holocaust by good luck more than by good management. When you hear that kind of stuff coming from a person in charge of a nuclear arsenal, then this gives you a lot to think about, and it certainly strengthens your conviction that we need to move in a different direction.

Question:

A few months ago I traveled to Berlin and one of my tour guides grew up on the side of the wall that was under communist rule, and he said that his mother was always provided with a job, and they always had food, and housing was provided as well and free daycare for the kids was provided so that his mother was able to keep working. Do you think that there are aspects of communism that in theory do work?

Dr. ElBaradei:

I think we need both. I don't think there is a trade off between freedom and economic rights or basic needs. You cannot trade, that I will give you food, healthcare and education, but I will tell you what to do and you have no right to speak or to decide your future. We need both freedom and economic rights. In fact the communist system did not work in many ways, at least not in the Soviet Union and for me it is a dying system. In practice it goes, I guess, against human nature. People want to be free and feel a kind of flexibility and do not want to be told what to do. Also, it had an impact on productivity. In the Soviet Union they used to joke that if they pretend to pay us, then we pretend to work. It was really a sham in many ways, as we discovered afterwards. There were no great economic developments, a lot of money went into the wrong priorities, a lot of money was spent on weapons and armaments, but not on social welfare. Let me tell you an anecdote about East Germany at that time. They had a horrible intelligence agency there called STASI who was like the "big brother", and after the end of the communist regime in East Germany they opened the files of the STASI for the people to come and have a look. So a woman went there and had a look at her files, and she discovered that her husband had reported on her for 6 years. That is the situation you can get in this kind of environment and political atmosphere, that you cannot even trust your own family. Any system that squashes freedom is a system that is doomed to fail.

Question:

You talk a lot about how we can keep peace and make sure that countries use peace talks and treaties to resolve issues rather than rely on nuclear weapons, but to what extent can you justify violence to defend your own people, if you are faced with extremist groups like ISIL, for example?

Dr. ElBaradei:

Sure, unfortunately you have to use force. If you are dealing with a group like ISIL this is needed as self-defense, or other similar groups like the Shining Path in Peru or the Red Brigade in Italy. In recent history there were many of these groups, and you have to use force to respond to them and end them, but this is a short term solution, because you are dealing with a symptom. The long term solution is to try to understand what happened that lead to the creation and development of these groups, and why are they attractive and able to recruit people. That obviously leads to the question why we don't have equity, fairness, and why we have poverty, oppression and all these kind of issues.

Question:

In your opinion, what factors are responsible for the increase in terrorist activities and internal conflicts that can be seen specifically over the span of the last 7 years, which have been observed and documented by the Institute for Economics and Peace in the Global Peace Index of 2014?

Dr. ElBaradei:

I think the combination of poverty and oppression, leads to an explosion, it is like a pressure cooker where at a certain point the vapor needs to come out or it explodes, and I think, unfortunately just like the domino effect in the Middle East, you have many issues in many countries. You have the Syrian civil war, Libya is disintegrating, Iraq is fighting a sectarian war, the Palestinians and the Israelis are at each other's throats and you have oppression in many of these places, and you have poverty so people lose hope. People are ready to accept sacrifice for one generation, if they think that the next generation will have a better life, but if they lose hope, then they will go crazy and more people are losing hope, because they do not see that things are getting any better, in fact, everything is getting worse, and that is why you see ISIL becoming so strong. It is crazy, but maybe it gives them some identity and meaning.

Question:

In Australia there is a reoccurring debate about Australia doesn't want to get involved in the storage and production and possible use of nuclear energy, and I would like to know what your opinion is on this?

Dr. ElBaradei:

I can only give you a general answer on this, as I do not have any data or statistics about the needs and usages of energy in Australia. Generally this depends on what kind of energy mix you would like to have, how many conventional energy sources are available, now oil and gas is dirt-cheap for example, so it doesn't make sense to go for nuclear energy as it is much more expensive. Renewable energy is making a lot of progress, like solar energy which I suppose is used a lot in Australia. It is not an easy question as it also depends on the records of nuclear energy safety. The technology is developing and is becoming more and more safe, so whether to decide to go for nuclear now, later or not at all; these are all considerations a government has to make, and different governments have made different conclusions. Germany and France are living side by side, and Germany has decided to move away from nuclear energy after the nuclear accident in Fukushima, while France is relying on nuclear for 78% of its electricity supply. People and governments are accepting nuclear energy and its risks differently, so this is very much country specific.

Question:

Do you think that people are inherently born with the ability to treat each other as equal with compassion to care or perhaps that we are born selfishly and have to develop this capacity?

Dr. ElBaradei:

What do you think?

Student:

Interesting question.

I think that we are born with both sides of the spectrum, and then we decide which we tend to more.

Dr. ElBaradei:

I don't really know and do not understand the human psychology and whether we are born with a lot of goodness or evil. I guess how we act under certain circumstances also depends on the environment. We have seen cases for example when people were left stranded in the desert without food and they ended up turning into cannibals, eating

each other, which under normal circumstances you would not even entertain the idea. If you put people under stress or torture, they act quite differently. The environment tries to get the best out of you or the worst, and this is one of the reasons I keep talking about poverty and equity. Then you also need some checks and balances to keep the crazy ones in check, which you always will have, people who act contrary to common sense and shared values. This raises the question whether a lot of our human traits and qualities are nature or nurture, which is very difficult to answer. Are we born this way, or did we learn it along the way?