

How Can We Obey the Law Against War?

Whenever I saw images of people affected by wars when I was younger, I became sad and thankful. Sad, because it was painful to see other people go through such suffering. Thankful, that my home country was peaceful. The wars seemed so distant and I thought such calamities would never reach my home country or affect me. I now realize how naive I must have been.

Until recently, I had never heard of the Kellogg-Briand pact. Although it is a significant part of humanities history, not many people know about it. An agreement signed by several states in 1928 (after World War I) that renounced the use of war as an instrument of national policy, promoted diplomacy and peaceful settlement of disputes between signatory states. Overtime, the Kellogg-Briand pact has been signed by over sixty-four nations. Although the pact was unsuccessful in preventing the re-militarization that eventually led to World War II, its intentions were incorporated into the United Nations Charter in the 1940s.¹ Yet, these anti-war expressions have achieved little in preventing wars. Thus, we need to promote knowledge about the pact and the need to obey it.

In today's globally connected world, wars in one country have ripple effect on others. An example is the European migrant crisis resulting from huge number of migrants and refugees crossing into Europe partly due to wars in Africa, Western and Southern Asia. This has placed huge pressure on European countries and a huge divide amongst various countries on how to resettle migrants.

I believe the first step towards obeying the law against war is by acknowledging wars as *a shared threat and collective responsibility* for all. This common responsibility can best be understood through the principles of *Ubuntu*. A humanist philosophical ideology of South African people which means "collective personhood/ solidarity". Its meaning is captured by the Nguni proverb "umuntu ngu-muntu ngabantu" (I am because we are).² This means all countries and citizens should be actively involved in promoting peace and averting wars.

According to the United Nations Secretary - General Antonio Guterres, a surge in conflicts today, requires a surge in diplomacy for peace. Also, aggressive behavior is believed to be innate in humans. Considering that women and children suffer disproportionately from wars often carried out by young people, it is important for these parties to be actively involved and given the opportunity to contribute in peace building i.e. through nonviolence, grassroots initiatives and social mobilization. An example is the efforts of the Nigerian-led grassroots #BringBackOurGirls campaign, which began in response to the abduction of Chibok girls by the Boko Haram sect on the 14th of April, 2014. Three years on, the campaign with local and international support has continued to advocate for the safe return of the girls.

¹Totally History. "Kellogg-Briand Pact." Accessed <http://totallyhistory.com/kellogg-briand-pact/>

² University for Peace (2011). "Peace, Conflict, and Development in Africa: A Reader." Edited by Erin McCandless and Tony Karbo. Accessed http://www.upeace.org/pdf%5CREADER_webpages.pdf

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It took the entire history of humankind for the population to reach 1 billion around 1810.³ Just 120 years later, this doubled to 2 billion people (1930); then 4 billion in 1975 (45 years).⁴ Presently, the number of people in the world is approximately 7.3 billion. It is projected to reach 9.7 billion by 2050 and exceed 11 billion in 2100.

As world population increases rapidly, the demand for resources also rises. Access, the desire to own and control these finite resources oftentimes results in conflicts.

In Thomas Malthus' renowned work (1798), *An essay on the Principle of Population*, the scholar argued that human population if left unchecked will outgrow its available resources thereby leading to many problems. According to Malthus, human population grows at a geometric rate (doubling with each cycle) whereas food supply increases at an arithmetic rate (uniform increment). This imbalance leads to over population and a future with very little resources for survival.

Malthus emphasized the importance of balancing population growth and the limited resources. By addressing population size and growth of nations through access to sexual and reproductive healthcare, family planning services and education, we are able to lower the rate of population growth and reduce pressure on resources. Thus, reducing conflicts and the likelihood of wars.

Wars rarely accomplish the ends for which they begin in the first place. And when they do, it takes several years for psychological/physical wounds to heal. Obeying the law against war is a challenging task, but not an impossible one. By acknowledging that the fight against war is a collective responsibility, ensuring the social inclusion of women and youths in peace building and tackling the issue of population size and growth rate, a world where wars cease to exist can be achieved.

³ Carolyn K. "The Population Explosion: Causes and Consequences." Accessed <http://teachersinstitute.yale.edu/curriculum/units/1998/7/98.07.02.x.html>

⁴ Ibid.