

Culture & Care: A Joint Call for Change

**A Call to Rise Together -
Voices of Hope, Courage &
Justice**

By Izzeldin Abuelaish

Thank you for organizing this inspiring and promising gathering.

The theme before us, Culture and care, a joint call for change, **is not decorative language. It is urgent. It is necessary. It is moral.** Life is not only what happens to us. It is what we decide to do about it.

We meet today at a time when alarm bells are ringing all around us, a moment in history marked by profound turbulence. Our world is being devastated by conflict, fear, incitement, racism, discrimination, greed, war, climate change, and poverty, all while being stigmatized by inequality. We are about to enter the next frontier, a frontier, unlike any time in history with rising levels of violence, conflict, and hatred. The increasing uncertainty may lead to a divided, discorded and polarized world. And everything is normalized, politicized, militarized.

We are here to speak about a culture of care. A joint call for change. Not as a slogan. Not as a sentimental ideal. But as a radical act of rebuilding.

When violence becomes normalized, we stop asking why.

When hatred becomes political currency, we stop recognizing its cost.

When discrimination is embedded quietly in systems, we call it "policy."

When militarization dominates budgets, we call it "security."

When greed shapes economies, we call it "growth."

Today, I will share with you my story, as through learning from the experiences of others and gaining new perspective is how we can make meaningful changes in our daily life.

I am a Palestinian Canadian refugee who was born, raised, and lived in Jabalia refugee Camp in the Gaza Strip. The son of refugee parents who are survival of the Nakba in 1948 where they were expelled from their homeland.

I speak to you today as someone whose people have been portrayed too often through fear instead of truth. Let me tell you, our truth. We do not harbor a desire for revenge.

We are people of potential, of hopes, of dreams. We want to succeed. We want to build. We want to be free — just as others are free. Freedom must not stop at the borders of Palestine. It must not stop at any border.

My life was and continues to be a war. I faced many challenges but as life increased my aches, pain, and suffering, at the same time, life amplified my maturity, awareness, strength. A key part of my journey was that with each hardship and difficulty the world threw at me, I used my pain to grow and never let stop me from achieving my dreams. I found myself in a life as challenging as a raging and wild ocean. I realized that the suffering in this world is manmade. This is where hope can begin because it's manmade.

From my own experiences, the recipe for moving forward includes having the knowledge of exactly what you want, the plans to achieve your goals, and carrying on regardless of the challenges and the perceptions of others. I believe there is no greater challenge than the lack of personal responsibility. Taking personal responsibility transcends the circumstances and situation in which we find ourselves. We need to learn and practice to challenge ourselves and to work for a just human world. To defend humanity and to understand that human beings and freedom are the most holly things in the universe.

Even though we are now in the 21st century, it seems humankind has not learned the lesson. We still have nations, countries dominating, oppressing, and occupying

other nations and countries. We still have parties, factions, media, and groups who want to control how people think and how they live.

That is why we still have war and conflict around the globe. The world is endemic with violence, injustice, fear, and hatred – they cross barriers and borders so that no one is far from risk. This violence is filling every corner of our world in our homes and streets.

The questions we need to ask are:

- How much of the suffering do we know about in our world?
- How much of war do we know and see through the media?
- Is it the soldier who is killed or wounded, or is it an innocent child, daughter, mother or elderly individual?

What is War? Is it what we see on a screen — a soldier falling, a building collapsing, War is not headlines, or statistics. War is our children and grandchildren dying before their time—before they have had the chance to become who they were meant to be.

War is the daughter whose laughter is replaced by silence and parents who bury not only their children but their dreams.

It's the mother who waits for a knock on the door that never comes.

It's the old man who dies holding memories of a home that no longer exists.

The wife waiting for her beloved husband.

And those children will keep waiting for their heroic father.

It is bodies disfigured, minds wounded, spirits scarred for life.

War is millions of people separated forever from those they love.

War is genocide, torture, propaganda, dishonesty, and slavery of humanity.

War and injustice are not just to be documented but to be prevented.

I know who waged the war. And know who paid the price and who is affected by war."

Dwight Eisenhower: once said: "A nation that continues year after year to spend more money on military defense than on programs of social uplift is approaching spiritual death."

Our role is to humanize not to politicize, and our loyalty must never be tested, manipulated or misused.

What do we expect from parents who cannot even mourn properly — who cannot bury their dead with the rituals that give meaning to loss — because even grief has been denied to them.

Personally I witnessed the killing of my daughters, sisters, nieces, nephews, cousins, friends, neighbors and the genocide committed against my people. The killing does not heart the dead. It hurts the living and loving. And if the dead cannot speak it's the responsibility of the living to speak for them. The old woman will keep waiting for her martyred son.

It is our children and grandchildren who are dying before they are fully adults, and those who live the rest of their lives with battle wounds, whether physically and/or psychologically, completely altering their life's trajectory.

We hear and see just the numbers. But it is time to look at people as human beings, and not just statistics on the screen. People are people – we are equal, and we all bleed the same color.

War is not seen behind the screen or with glasses. War is not to be documented but to be prevented.

He said: "He who looks at the sea. Does not know the sea,
He who sits on the shore. Does not know the sea, Only he
who immerses himself dives, takes risk, and forgets the
sea in the sea."

No one knows suffering until they have suffered.
No one knows freedom until they have lost it.
No one knows loss until it happens.

For any human, being justice and freedom are essential,
crucial to our dignity and our capacity to feel human.

Culture and care now: I learned that every life matters —
equally. That pain has no nationality. That suffering has no
borders.

We must defend humanity and understand that human
beings and freedom are the most holy things in the universe.
I saw the hope in the newborn I delivered. And I saw the
life leave my daughters eyes - the killing of my daughters.
I succeeded in my life, but I will never forget where I came
from. Life taught me that nothing is impossible. The only
impossible thing is bringing my daughters back to life. By
sharing their story, today I keep them in your hearts, minds,
and souls.

I believe that no matter what role you have in this world, big
or small, young, or old – one's role is to humanize and not
to politicize. Our loyalty must never be tested or biased.

The true crisis of our world is not the absence of laws or the lack of rules, but the collapse of trust in them and the erosion of justice itself. Our world stands at a crossroads: either we restore faith in international law, or we normalize impunity. Justice cannot be selective, human rights cannot be conditional, and accountability cannot belong to the weak alone. If international law is to mean anything, it must apply equally, enforced transparently, and applied by one universal standard—for all, or fit will protect none.

A culture of care must be understood as a comprehensive framework for reorienting social, political, moral, ethical, human, environmental and economic systems. A culture of care fully realized in meaning and action offers a pathway to unmake systems of violence, fear, and division. It calls for integrating freedom, justice, dignity, equality, rights, and respect into the very architecture of our institutions.

A culture of care begins with a profound recognition: a human being becomes fully human through other human beings. Our identities, our moral capacities, and even our resilience are shaped in relationships. A true culture of care leaves no one behind — not the poor, not the displaced, not the sick, not the imprisoned, not the silenced, not the inconvenient. Not those who look like us. Not those who do not. No one.

Care, therefore, is not an accessory to social life; it is its foundation. It affirms that dignity is inherent, that freedom and justice are mutually sustaining, and that equality and rights are not privileges to be distributed selectively but obligations to be upheld universally.

In a world increasingly fractured, a culture of care restores the central truth that our flourishing is shared, and that no society can be peaceful if it abandons part of itself.

Care is action. Care is courage. Care is the decision to refuse indifference when indifference is easier. Care is the choice to stand up and speak out loudly. It demands that we resist normalization of harm. It requires that we reject politicization of humanity. It insists that security be grounded in well-being rather than dominance.



Wherever there is suffering, choose to see it. Wherever there is injustice, choose to challenge it. Wherever there is silence, choose to speak out.

Care: Not as a soft word. Not as charity. Not as sentiment. But as a force. A force capable of reshaping institutions, transforming systems, and redefining what it means to live together. A culture of care is not decoration. It is foundation.

We need a culture of care in its full meaning and in its full action. Not partial care. Not selective care.

A culture of care demands that action becomes our language. Those policies reflect compassion. That system reflects dignity. That budget reflects justice. Those laws reflect equality. That leadership reflects moral courage.

We must create a culture where speaking out is normal, not radical. Where advocating for justice is not a risk, but a responsibility. And Silence in the face of injustice is not neutrality.

Indifference is not wisdom. Complicity is not safety.

The culture of care. a culture of care where we leave no one behind. a culture of care where action is culture. Culture of care to speak out and not to be silent, indifferent or complicit. Not care for those who look like us, vote like us, or agree with us. Full care.

Care that refuses to rank human worth. Care that does not wait for tragedy to justify empathy. Care that is not silenced by politics. Care that is not weakened by borders.

A culture of care means we recognize that dignity is non-negotiable.

Freedom is not a favor. Justice is not optional. Equality is not aspirational — it is essential. Rights are not symbolic — they are protective. Respect is not transactional — it is foundational.

A culture of care asks difficult questions and refuses to look away from the answers:

- » Why is violence funded more than education?
- » Why is fear amplified more than solidarity?
- » Why are some lives defended loudly, and others quietly ignored?
- » Why is equality debated instead of guaranteed?

Care heals trauma before it becomes violence. A culture of care is the strongest defense a society can build. Because when people feel seen, respected, and protected — hatred struggles to take root.

When dignity is upheld, humiliation cannot be weaponized.

When justice is consistent, resentment does not accumulate.

When equality is practiced, division loses its fuel.

Our call for change should be: Let us normalize care. Let us politicize dignity in the best sense — making it central to governance. Let us institutionalize equality. Let us measure success not only in growth — but in well-being.

If we can manufacture weapons, we can manufacture opportunity.

If we can coordinate war, we can coordinate solidarity.

If we can mobilize fear, we can mobilize compassion. This is not idealism. This is responsibility.

We have known pandemics of fear. Pandemics of violence.

Let these be contagious.

Let courage spread faster than hatred.

Let solidarity spread faster than division.

Let responsibility spread faster than blame.

What can be done to make a difference in this world?

Not to continue turning a closed eye or deaf ear. Martin Luther King said: "Our lives begin to end the day we become silent about things that matter. In the end we will remember not the words of our enemies, but the silence of our friends."



Life is what we make it,
always has been, and
always will be.

If the dead, weak and victims cannot cry or speak out, it's then the moral, ethical, duty and responsibility of the living and loving to act and speak for them.

The death does not hurt the dead, the death hurts the living. Death is no longer terrifying. Life is more terrifying.

I believe whole-heartedly that we have the knowledge, talent, and strength to make the world a better place, but we need the good will to take action. By sharing our humanity and realizing that there are no passengers on this spaceship called Earth, we are all a part of the same crew.

We are not powerless observers of history. We are authors of it.

Let this conference not be a moment of discussion, but a turning point of commitment.

Let us leave Leuven not only inspired, but accountable.

Let us refuse to leave anyone behind.

Let us build a culture where care is strength.

Where action is culture.

Where courage is normal.

Where justice is expected.

Where dignity is protected.

Where equality is lived.

Where freedom is shared.

And let this culture be so strong, so persistent, so contagious — that it becomes the new normal.

I Shall Not Hate: The great Lebanese poet Khalil Jubran once said: Tenderness and kindness are not signs of weakness and despair, but manifestations of strength and resolution.

The antidote to hatred and revenge is to learn from our children so that there is one road to humanity, peace, and success. And I have found that this road is paved through education.

I succeeded in my life, but I will never forget where I came from. Life taught me that nothing is impossible. The only impossible thing is bringing my daughters back to life. Today I keep them in your hearts, minds, and souls.

When I practiced medicine in Israel:

Through my training and practice as a physician, I have learned the difficult truths behind what life and death mean when a person dies? I learned to value all life immensely and to realize that others have needs and sufferings that I want to alleviate through my work as a physician.

DFL: Tragedy cannot be the end of our lives; we cannot allow it to control and defeat us.

The strongest members in any society are the women. Women are the authors of the survival story of our world. They are the ones behind our existence and success.

In a time and in a world of despair and loss of hope it is the women who have maintained hope. Women are the balance of our discordant world. Women give life, women nurture life. Women are the reason the world has made it this far and women are the only hope this world has, to rise up and reach its greatness.

Education provides the opportunity to create a world of justice and hope, while eradicating injustice and removing the mental and physical barriers within each of us and between us. Education allows us to create healthy and peaceful relationships to socialize with others and humanize the concept of equality.

Women, women's education, role, and inclusion are vital and instrumental to fix the imbalance and discordant world.

Education is about creating a world of justice and hope and eradicating injustice. Education which has socializing, humanizing equalizing, and harmonizing human healthy and peaceful relations. Education which builds a new generation who believes that advancing human civilization is a joint active project and that the most holy things in the universe are humans and freedom

Through education we can teach each new generation to believe that advancing human civilization is a joint, collaborative project, and the most pure and holy things in the universe are humans and freedom.

All humans are capable of achieving, not just imagining. Instead of saying behind a successful man there is a successful woman. We must change the narrative to that these two individuals stand in parallel: beside a successful man, stands a successful woman. There is no peace without women and no peace without the respect of all human rights

Today the world's situation and human well-being raise urgent questions about justice. I believe in the values of righteousness, equality, and justice. Health care, disease and illness are not and cannot be confined to geographical boundaries and populations.

A culture of care begins with each of us — in our language, in our leadership, in our institutions, in our refusal to look away.

We are not powerless observers of history. We are authors of it.

I am optimistic and hopeful for our future because I know that on the day when we all come together, each and every individual, for the collective good it will advance our communities and societies so the world will benefit as a whole.

It's my solid belief that safeguarding the dignity, safety, and wellbeing of human beings in any conflict exceeds any other consideration.

Building close ties between people is one of the most effective ways of preventing conflict over the long term. These ties should be built on equality, respect, and freedom. It is to these people – the hundreds of thousands of men, women and children who crave a normal, peaceful, and economically stable life – that the international community must devote greater attention.

It is they who collectively represent the best chance for peace and yet are ironically compelled to bear the brunt of its perennial absence.

One cannot do everything but each of us can do something. It's the people themselves, not politics and politicians, who will have to come together and push their leaders to resolve this. Don't wait for others, don't be among the audience.



I am only one; but still, I am one.
I cannot do everything, but still, I
can do something. I will not refuse
to do something I can do."

Let all of us come together to make the world we want for us and our future generation, safe, secure, healthy, and most importantly, a free one!

I came here because I believe in you. Have faith, confidence, have hope, and act. Hope is the remedy. Tomorrow is hopeful and you must try with all you know and without fear of all you do not know. the century of humanity Let us act and make 21st century the century of new pandemic of humanity, peace and freedom in our world.

A pandemic of care. For everyone Everywhere.

A pandemic of rights — protected not only in law, but in practice.

A pandemic of equality — lived in classrooms, workplaces, streets, and homes.

Do let us, honor our shared interest in a brighter future, a future of dignity and hope that brings new opportunities for all our people.

Let this not just another conference, but a turning point of commitment and accountability.

Let us refuse to leave anyone behind. Let these be contagious. Let courage spread faster than hatred. Let us build a culture where care is strength.

Where action is culture. Where courage is normal. Where justice is expected. Where dignity is protected. Where equality is lived. Where freedom is shared.

And let this culture be so strong, so persistent, so contagious — that it becomes the new normal. I came here because I believe in you.

Go forward with confidence with faith, hope and act. A pandemic of care. For everyone. Everywhere.

Thank you.