

Statement upon Laureate Announcement by Waris Dirie

Nov. 14, 2018

What peace means to me

I'm from Somalia, a country where the longest and bloodiest civil wars of our time is going on since 1991.

Somalia, it is a country plagued by drought and famine.

Somalia, a country with one of the highest birth rates and one of the highest child and mother mortality rates in the world.

Somalia, a country where only one out of three citizens have learned how to read and write.

Somalia, a country where women neither are thanked nor respected, and where 98% of women have suffered, and are still suffering, under the inhuman torture of Female Genital Mutilation (FGM).

Many years ago I left Somalia because I did not want to be married as a 13-year-old girl to a man who could have been my grandfather.

I had to leave my beloved mother, my family and the desert, from which I have learned so much.

It was a goodbye forever.

I could not and did not want to live in a society where women do not have any rights.

I did not want to live in a society where it was okay to beat up women, to rape them, to sell them and to send a woman away once you have enough of her.

I left my home being absolutely determined that one day I will fight against all this injustice and that I will fight for the rights of girls and women.

In England, where my journey took me for a few years, I taught myself how to read and write. As a girl, I have never had the chance to visit school in Somalia.

To become financially independent, I worked during the day as a cleaning lady and studied in the nights.

One day in London, by coincidence, I was discovered as a model by Terence Donovan, the Buckingham Palace photographer, in a fast food restaurant, while I was scrubbing the floor. The dream of so many girls came true for me. Soon my face graced the covers of big fashion-magazines and women's magazines. The worldwide most famous fashion, jewelry and cosmetic brands booked me for their campaigns.

I was jetting around the world, saw the most beautiful places, experienced wealth and glamour, lived in New York and London, and even acted in a James Bond movie.

But I never forgot about my roots and my humanitarian mission.

I have seen and experienced inconceivable violence.

As a child, I almost died after the cruel torture of female genital mutilation (FGM).

I asked myself why people engage each other in such cruel ways.

It cannot be the will of a good God, that we humiliate each other, kill and torture each other.

We are the ones making this world a living hell for others, and even for ourselves.

And I have asked myself – why?

Do we love each other too little?

Do we love ourselves too little?

Do we respect each other too little?

Do we respect ourselves too little?

Are those the reasons why all this cruel and evil is happening?

When and where do we learn love and respect?

First with our mothers. Mothers have a big responsibility. Because all their love and care,

which we receive as children, shape us forever.

Mothers and, of course, fathers teach us how to respect ourselves and above all to respect others and Mother Earth.

And here, in parenting, it is where peace begins in ourselves and hence the peaceful coexistence with others.

If we, as parents, neglect our children, do not love them and forget to teach them respect, we put peace at risk.

After that, it is the job of our education system to teach peace, to not only demand respect from our students, but also to treat them with love and respect.

When our global community reaches this goal, a very big step towards peace is done.

I know that it is possible and I know we can do it together.

For me, John Lennon's composition "Imagine" is the greatest peace-song ever written.

“Imagine all the people living life in peace!

You may say I am a dreamer but I am not the only one.

I hope one day you will join us and the world will live as one ” is sung by one of the greatest artists and peace activists of all times and I have taken this words to heart.

Dear John, no you are not alone, many people share your dream.

All they want is world peace - peace between us and nations and peoples and religions.

Peace in our homes and in our hearts.

In remembrance of you, great John Lennon, and all those people, dreaming every day of a world in peace, like you did, contributing to this mission, I accept with lots of love and respect the Sunhak Peace Prize 2019.

Love and Peace to the world!