

Opinion: 2016 has been terrible, but there is hope for more peaceful future

Published on: December 14, 2016 | Last Updated: December 14, 2016 6:00 AM MST



A newly displaced Iraqi woman who fled from the city of Mosul, Iraq's last major Islamic State (IS) group stronghold, kisses a child's hand as she is reunited with her relatives who came two years ago to the refugee camp in the Khazer area (some 40 kilometres east of Arbil) following their arrival on Oct. 26, 2016. The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) Stephane Dujarric told reporters that almost 9,000 people were internally displaced as a result of the Mosul military operation in Iraq. BULENT KILIC / AFP/Getty Images

It's hard to think of a year in recent times when the world was in such disarray and people felt so fearful about the future. Christmas is supposed to rejuvenate us and revive our hope for peace, but Christmas 2016 seems to have an uphill climb.

Is it possible to hope for a peaceful world when mass shootings and acts of terrorism dominate the media, when refugees stream out of war zones and de-stabilize world politics, when 21st century cyberwarfare is underway, when global warming is producing extreme weather patterns and crop failures, when governments refuse to empower the United Nations to enforce peace? My answer is yes.

The false narrative of our times that the world is spinning out of control needs to be countered by a recognition that virtually every index by which we measure world progress is accelerating upwards. Commerce, technology, science, agriculture, renewable energy, medicine, communications, transportation, environmental protection, women's rights, international law are all leaping forward.

The violence we see abroad and at home is no longer considered normal, it is an aberration. Actually, human life has never been treated with such value or children so protected thanks to a new understanding of the inherent human rights of each person. In my own lifetime, life expectancy, measured globally, has doubled as the result of the miracles of modern medicine. The global gross domestic product has spiked and extreme poverty drastically reduced. More people than ever before have enough to eat. Fewer mothers are dying in childbirth. The education of girls is transforming societies.

The world is capable of providing adequate food, health and education for all, thus building an equitable and peaceful society. We ought to celebrate this framework for a culture of peace because such an elevation of humanity

has far greater consequences for the world than the acts of violence still occurring.

World peace requires four strong pillars: economic and social development, arms control and disarmament, environmental protection and advancement of human rights. In all four areas, the world is making progress.

First, a dramatic expression of this is the [Sustainable Development Goals](#), a vast United Nations program containing 17 goals with 169 targets covering a broad range of sustainable development issues. These include ending poverty and hunger, improving health and education, making cities more sustainable, combating climate change and protecting oceans and forests.

The goals will cost billions of dollars to implement, a sum that can only be obtained through a partnership between the U.N. agencies, governments and major corporations. The audacity of mounting such an ambitious campaign to make tangible by 2030 the major components of social justice is breathtaking.

Second, a new [Arms Trade Treaty](#) is checking the flow of guns across borders. The [Landmines Treaty](#) is saving children's lives in previous war-torn areas. Comprehensive negotiations to prohibit nuclear weapons will be started for the first time in 2017.

Third, at the [2015 Paris climate conference](#), 195 countries adopted the first universal, legally binding global climate deal. The agreement sets out a global action plan to move the world forward to avoid dangerous climate change by limiting global warming to well below 2 C.

Fourth, this month, the U.N. adopted a Declaration on the Right to Peace, promoting the right of every person to be protected from violence. While not enforceable, it sets a high standard for governments to strengthen

tolerance, dialogue, co-operation and solidarity in the quest for common security. This new declaration should be seen in the same light as the 1948 Universal Declaration on Human Rights, which opened the door to great advances in human rights.

In none of the four areas is enough being done to build a secure peace. But we must not blind ourselves to the creativity underway. This progress shows that an equitable world is possible. That surely is enough to revive our hopes in this Christmas season.

*Former senator [Douglas Roche](#)'s forthcoming book is *Hope Not Fear: Building Peace in a Fractured World*.*