

KEYNOTE speech by Javeed Mirza on October 1, 2022, on the topic “Inclusive Education” to the IYC (International Youth Conference) at Cambridge Public Library in Cambridge, MA

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Dear friends

It gives me great pleasure to address the IYC. It is an honor to address this gathering of bright global youth. The Youth can play a prominent role in bringing change as they are the main stakeholders in future living. Educated and imbued youth should lead. The Older generation, especially the Leaders, the Politicians, the Bureaucrats, and the Corporations that follow profit-at-all-cost policy, have had their day. It is clearly seen that their performance was a disaster. The effects of the failure can be seen all around in the myriads of tensions, conflicts, and wars around us... it can be seen in the polluted water,

global warming, erratic weather patterns etc. The world today is like an upcoming tornado that is unpredictable. The Leaders must be told to back-off and new institutions established to usher in a transition to a comity of nations that seek Peaceful co-existence, seek the welfare of its people, oppose all forces that seek to dominate, that divide people by creating ill-will and by the building of animosity.

“Inclusive Education” plays a great part in fostering this climate wherein, globally, citizens are not excluded based on their absence of wealth, or lack of qualifications, or on the basis of ethnicity or race or gender. All underrepresented and unrepresented segments like the Minorities, the Lower castes, the Tribals and those with special needs must be Included in learning. They must all be given an Opportunity. Inclusive Education is when Education recognizes people of all races, of all religions, of all nations, of all sexes, of all classes, to be equal human beings deserving equal right to good quality education. It recognizes the differences as a gift of Nature. It has crafted a quilt of components that are multicolor and multitextured and are of varied sizes; it has threaded them together, so they complement each other in a beautiful way. The diversity is what enables existence and survival. One needs to appreciate and build on it by accepting this Diversity and making Inclusiveness as a principle in life.

The UN has stipulated a number of Sustenance Development Goals essential to good living and for Peace and Progress.

SDG Goal #4 seeks to ENSURE INCLUSIVE AND EQUITABLE QUALITY EDUCATION AND PROMOTE LIFELONG LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES FOR ALL. This one goal has three important components. It combines Accessing of Education for all members of society with Inclusion of all and links this to the creation of opportunities and empowerment. It seeks to make discrimination unacceptable... whether on the basis of sex, color, poverty, special needs etc. The recently concluded TES (Transformative Education Summit) from Sep 16 to 19th 2022 at the UN Headquarters in New York, has highlighted its importance.

Last week we spoke on a very important challenge that confronts the growth of Education. It is the issue of Access to Education.... the various means required to access Education. Along with ensuring that Education is accessible to one and all, we spoke of building Quality in Education. I spoke on how at our organization called the New Equitable and Innovative Educational Association (NEIEA) we have developed a paradigm of Learning called the NEIEA paradigm to scale as well as build Quality in education. Inclusive Education is that which seeks to overcome the historical, psychological, and physical barriers that have long been constructed demarcating human beings with classifications like caste, class, gender, ethnicity, religiosity etc. It seeks to, instead, build bridges between these outmoded concepts of demarcation.

The Pros of Inclusive Education

- Inclusive Education means tangible learning opportunities and gains for groups that have hitherto been deprived and excluded like Native people, Tribal, Lower castes,

Girls, Minorities, children with disabilities etc. It means putting all these marginalized groups on the same table with those who are availing the opportunities.

- Inclusive Education values Diversity and adheres to the notion that Diversity adds value and produces positive results.
- Diversity adds nutrients to Education. It removes resentment. It adds flavor. It makes it fun as students with diverse abilities, diverse ethnic and cultural background intermingle, socialize, play, and learn together.
- It advocates an Inclusive curriculum by adding themes and contributions from marginalized groups.
- It avoids the simplistic good and bad narratives and permits broad shades of thinking as the mental landscape gets stretched
- It allows adapting the curriculum to the learning styles of children with special education needs. This way, it creates the ground for more and better understanding of all participants and nurtures respect and love within the groups that comprise the gathering.
- It perpetuates the concepts of civic participation, employment, and community life.

Some of the measures required to advance Inclusive education are:

- 1) Hold governments accountable for implementing anti-discrimination legislation, legal mandates for inclusion, and adopt policies to remove barriers
- 2) Ensure that educators have the training, flexibility, and resources to teach students with diverse needs and learning styles
- 3) Ensure that schools receive adequate and sustainable financial support so that all activities and services are fully inclusive
- 4) Empower parents to assert their children's right to education in inclusive settings
- 5) Enable the entire community—including mainstream and special educators, social workers, parents, and students—to work together and participate in the design, delivery, and monitoring of education, thereby reframing inclusive education as a shared responsibility.

On an International level, UNICEF supports government efforts to foster and monitor inclusive education systems. Its work includes:

- a) Advocacy
- b) Awareness-raising
- c) Capacity-building
- d) Implementation support.

What happens when we do not have Inclusive education?

Education that is being pursued today has erected many fences, some with thorns, around it. The Education that forbids girls from attending co-education based on

prudence. The Education that restricts itself to providing education for youth of its own ideology, whether it is the Madrasa catering to the Muslims or the Vidya Bharathi educational institutions catering to the Hindus, or the schools run by orthodox Jewish establishment for their own kind or by fundamentalist Christians for their congregation. They all cater to their own kind. They create schism and perpetuate division. Disparity increases. Prejudice becomes inbuilt. The first casualty is that children from these schools do NOT know about children of other faith, of other race, of other gender, of other class ... Once you do not know the person, it is easy to fall prey to all sorts of slander against them and this begets prejudice and leads to friction and animosity... it can lead to anger and war... The gateway to stop the negative consequences is by opening the doors and windows of Inclusion. of reaching out to all those segments that one does not know and extending one's hand. It is to build institutions that adopt Inclusivity as a principle and adopt policies that appreciate and celebrate it.

I would advise all those sitting here to observe whenever you sit in a meeting or in a class, to observe as to who is around you. Are females present? Are people of different races here, people of different religions here? Are people of lower economic earnings represented here? Make it a point of ensuring that all meetings have such representation. This will lead to enriched thought. You will derive better solutions.

Avoidance of Mainstream thought. Be creative.

When we speak of Inclusive education, do not exclude, and shut out streams of thought that are new and extreme and are not mainstream. Mainstream thought is controlled by the corporations that manipulate public opinion. They are part of the problem. Their projected perceptions drive the mainstream narrative. Most of it is superficial, lacking serious analysis, and is meant to serve the interests that hire them. It has not improved things. Get away from mainstream. Think creative. Be bold. Address issues from the grassroots level. Fight the monopolists who monopolize thought and control the institutions. Nurture creativity and derive your own thoughts that are based on Welfare of people and not the welfare of the corporation or the rich. It is your future and that of generations who come after you. Leave them a better legacy.

Inclusivity is NOT enough to forestall division and destruction. There will always be antagonistic forces in society due to the existence of competing economic interests, competing national interests, competing class interests, competing business and corporate interests... All these competing interests are tuned to outdo their competitors and they resort to all means to outbid and outdo the other... this includes furthering the existing divide by planned means of sowing discord (availing historical injustices or concocting injustices). This is an everyday event happening all over the world. The war in Ukraine is an example of how countries are resorting to war in place of negotiating. Such points of conflict exist in many places around the world like the tussle over China between USA and China, the constantly erupting fight in Palestine, the Refugee exodus etc. These hot issues can erupt into major conflagrations any time.

The issue of ideology is important in the conflict. There are ideologies that propagate the domination of a race... like the Aryan race; ideologies that live in the glory

of the past and want to reestablish the past; ideologies that support the notion that some are more privileged over others; that some are the chosen over others; that some are divinely gifted, and others are not, and the latter need to serve the former. These are redundant ideologies and will die away as the world progresses. The redundant colonial ideology that said the colonist is superior and the native is inferior is gone and in its place is democracy....it progressed from being an exclusive right of the landed gentry, to that of all people ... today we are upholding this and emphasizing the Inclusion of all those that have hitherto been deprived. Progressive steps like this are the result of conscious learning, it is conceding to what is considered as innate Human Rights of all citizenries.

Capitalism is No answer. It has led us to this impasse. It divides the world into the South and North... one living off the other. It creates the 1% vs 99% dichotomy wherein the top 1% control wealth and resources. The Welfare state, practiced in some countries in the world, has given more rights and opportunities to its citizens and is better. The real answer is missing. It is you the youth that are faced with the glaring differences and challenges. You need to devise the answer that will bring Peace and happiness, decrease Inequality, and ensure that every human being is treated fairly and equally. That the resources of the Earth are not squandered by corporations in favor of a tiny minority.

Humane values. How does one live with the contradictions all around? By fostering humane values. This should be the Youth mantra. When working in a place, see that your work affects those that are most vulnerable. This is your way of upholding Inclusiveness. It is easy to be mechanical and ignore the rights of those who are not in a position to demand or to be docile to supervisors or company policies that do not support the weak. Do not adopt such a posture. Become a whistleblower whenever you see injustice and the exclusion of the rights of the dispossessed. Value life of all and reach out to those who need help. This is your means of giving and enriching your life.

The **conclusion** that we draw from this are 1) The World is brimming with discontent and there are signs of tension all around. Building Peace is an imperative. It is your inalienable Right to live Peacefully and happily. 2) Inclusive Education that is qualitative and provides opportunities, will create the social and economic ecology for better living, happiness, and progress. 3) Identify forces of destruction. Build strength against them by uniting with forces that oppose them... forge ties through Inclusion. Peace demands hard work. It is a prelude to better living, happiness, and progress.

Thank you

Javeed Mirza, President, New Equitable and Innovative Educational Association (NEIEA)

Javeed.mirza@neiea.org

www.neiea.org