

Reply to UN, World Bank Report
“Pathways to Peace: Inclusive Approaches to Preventing Violent Conflict”
([Executive Summary](#))

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At A Critical Crossroads: What Is Wisdom, and Is It In Our “Tool Boxes”?

I learned about the “Pathways to Peace” report from reading a tweet (on the Twitter platform) by World Bank Group President Jim Yong Kim:

[Jim Yong Kim](#) Verified account @JimYongKim Mar 1

“Preventing violent conflict is one of the most pressing development challenges of our time. Our new [#Pathways4Peace](#) report with [@UN](#) highlights new approaches that can save millions of lives and put countries on a path to peace and prosperity. <http://wrlld.bg/qsJb30iGXkj>”

I have looked through the [Executive Summary](#) of the report “Pathways to Peace: Inclusive Approaches to Preventing Violent Conflict”. I agree that there is an urgent need to accelerate peacebuilding efforts; I agree that much more emphasis needs to be on preventing violent conflicts; I agree that “women’s meaningful participation in all aspects of peace and security is critical to effectiveness” (p. v, Executive Summary); I agree it is critical to maximize citizen participation [“The peace processes that work are those that are founded on a broad spectrum of initiatives in which citizens play a full role.” (Andy Carl)]; and I agree that “today, the consequences of failing to act together are alarmingly evident, and the call for urgent action has perhaps never been clearer” (p. xiii, Executive Summary).

However, I wonder about the foundations on which you are basing your preventative peacebuilding efforts.

I have read the following in the Executive Summary of your “Pathways to Peace” report...

Regarding the greatest risks of violence--

1) “Some of the greatest risks of violence today stem from the mobilization of perceptions of exclusion and injustice, rooted in inequalities across groups.... When an aggrieved group assigns blame to others or to the state for its perceived economic, political, or social exclusion, then emotions, collective memories, frustration over unmet expectations, and a narrative that rouses a group to violence can all play a role in mobilization to violence.” (p. viii, Executive Summary)

2) “Similarly, cross-country studies find evidence that high levels of gender inequality and gender-based violence in a society are associated with increased vulnerability to civil war and interstate war and the use of more severe forms of violence in conflict.” (p. ix, Executive Summary)

3) “Competition for power is an age-old source of conflict.” (p. ix, Executive Summary)

4) “Resources such as land, water, and extractives are traditional sources of friction.” (p. ix, Executive Summary)

5) “The effects of climate change, population growth, and urbanization are intensifying these risks.” (p. ix, Executive Summary)

6) “...greater coordination and resource pooling among development, diplomatic, and security efforts... are being profoundly challenged by the emergence of nonstate actors, ideologies at odds with international humanitarian law, and the increased sponsorship of proxy warfare. (p. x-xi, Executive Summary)

7) “Deep changes are needed in the way national, regional, and international actors operate and cooperate so that risks of violent conflict are identified and addressed before they translate into crisis. However, few incentives now exist for this coordination, collaboration, and cooperation.” (p. xi, Executive Summary)

And regarding the pathways to peace, I read--

1) “Drawing on the pathways framework, the study describes the experience of national actors in three key areas: shaping the incentives of actors for peace, reforming institutions to foster inclusion, and addressing structural factors that feed into grievances.” (p. ix, Executive Summary)

2) “Prevention is about creating incentives for actors to choose actions that resolve conflict without violence.” (p. vii, Executive Summary)

3) “Improving the sharing of resources and benefits derived from them as well as strengthening local conflict resolution mechanisms are important areas of focus.” (p. ix, Executive Summary)

4) “...an inclusive approach to prevention puts an understanding of grievances and agency at the center of national and international engagement. It recognizes the importance of understanding people and their communities: their trust in institutions, confidence in the future, perceptions of risk, and experience of exclusion and injustice.” (p. xi, Executive Summary)

5) “... countries that have found pathways to sustainable peace have eventually tackled the messy and contested process of institutional reform.” (p. x, Executive Summary)

6) “The best way to prevent societies from descending into crisis, including but not limited to conflict, is to ensure that they are resilient through investment in inclusive and sustainable development. For all countries, addressing inequalities and exclusion, making institutions more inclusive, and ensuring that development strategies are risk-informed are central to preventing the fraying of the social fabric that could erupt into crisis.” (p. iv, Executive Summary)

7) “The state bears the primary responsibility for preventing conflict and shaping a country’s pathway toward sustainable development and peace.” (p. xi, Executive Summary)

8) “This study seeks to improve the way in which domestic development processes interact with security, diplomatic, justice, and human rights efforts to prevent conflicts from becoming violent.” (p. iv, Executive Summary).

9) “(The report) ‘Pathways for Peace’ presents national and international actors (with) an agenda for action to ensure that attention, efforts, and resources are focused on prevention.” (p. xiii, Executive Summary)

I hope you will excuse me, but since I agree “the call for urgent action has perhaps never been clearer”, I feel compelled to respectfully submit that there seems to be fundamental shortcomings in the very foundations upon which your report is built. What I mean is--and especially after 5,000 years of human history--it seems like we need a deeper understanding of human nature to inform our actions at this critical time. I believe human morality is not a constant--and thus it is not something which is the same throughout the centuries of human existence. In other words, I believe human morality is something which can become degraded or raised up, depending on the leanings of human aspirations. What kind of people are we? Cultures of violence, greed, corruption, and overindulgence are very pervasive in our societies; and such pervasive negatives, and the associated cynicism about human nature, could cripple our best efforts--especially if there are serious “blind spots” associated with our efforts to limit global warming. What kind of people do we want to become?

I ask you to carefully consider: how do people learn to--

- 1) sacrifice personal desires for the greater good of the whole
- 2) find contentment and quality of life while consuming less material goods and ecological services
- 3) prefer peacebuilding which supports and actualizes mutually beneficial understandings, forgiveness, and reconciliation—*and which abstains from violent conflict resolution*—as a way of bringing cycles of violence to an end
- 4) use resources carefully, so that there is surplus available for emergency assistance

5) support community life and cultural traditions which “... bring to the fore how many good people there are, how many ways there are to do good, and how much happiness comes to those who extend help, as well as to those who receive it”.

This writer believes there is such a thing as wisdom which has accumulated over the many centuries of human experience, and which has been confirmed again and again as essential to individual well-being and social harmony by the saints, sages, spiritual leaders, and sincere practitioners of all religious, spiritual, and moral traditions. Are we applying such treasured wisdom in ways equal to the challenges ahead?

“When we attempt to build peace without being embodiments of peace ourselves, we inflict violence without even knowing we are doing so. That might be why we professionals have not been very successful in our peacebuilding efforts....” (Hizkias Assefa)

“Those who want to change society must understand the inner dimensions of change. It is this sense of personal transformation that religion can provide.” (Sulak Sivaraksa)

Human nature takes on various forms--in religious, spiritual, and moral groups and traditions, and in other facets of our complex modern societies. However, “... the basic truths of religion are not affected or tarnished by the evil that men practice or the competitive propaganda they indulge in.” (Sri Sathya Sai Baba)

At this critical time, I believe we cannot afford to exclude from our “tool boxes” the time-tested sources which have helped people learn wisdom and compassion over many centuries. And yet--this is the very treasured wisdom which is now marginalized in our fast-paced modern world... in the most complex cultural landscapes ever created.

We are at a critical crossroads in the history of life on Planet Earth. I believe what we most urgently need to do is to learn how to cultivate the time-tested sources which have helped people learn wisdom and compassion over many centuries so that those sources yield the treasured wisdom. I also believe we most urgently need collaborative problem solving, citizen peacebuilding, and community education which goes way beyond what most of us are familiar with. I advocate for a “constellations of initiatives” approach which is outlined in detail in [“13 Steps for Long Term Culture Change”](#) (78 pages; May, 2017).