

Reflective Essay: International Day of Peace Open Mic and Dialogue

One day at school, I learnt about the work of Amartya Sen and his definition of development, which has stayed with me ever since. He explains that development should enhance people's capabilities, the 'ability of people to live a life that they have reason to value'. This means that progress goes beyond simply acquiring material wealth or knowledge, or having the nicest things; it is about the ability to live a life we find meaningful. One of the biggest threats to this on the African continent and beyond is conflict and wars.

Every year, the world observes the International Day of Peace on 21 September, with this year's theme being 'Act Now for a Peaceful World'. When I read this theme, the first question that came to my mind was 'how?'. How can I take active steps right now that make an impact on the pursuit of peace in the world? I am sure many people share the same sentiments, and so, as the International Student Affairs Council at UWC, we sought answers and commemorated this day with two major activities.

The first step was learning from the lived experiences of students from countries affected by these conflicts through a group consultation session, including participants from South Sudan, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Kenya, Nigeria, and Cameroon. A quote that stood out to me was a participant who shared, 'I was born in war, and so was my father...' They didn't finish the sentence, but we all shared the same fear that the cycle could be repeated. Although, as expected, the conversation had sombre moments, it also included moments of laughter, stories of growing up, and resilience that made us smile and reminded us of the freedoms that Sen mentioned are found in the little things that the absence of peace takes from us.

This consultation fed into the open mic and dialogue that followed, featuring many performances of stories, poems, and music advocating for peace, both as a personal concept and as a global necessity. Some of these performances are available here, and I hope they inspire you. After the open mic, a discussion took place with some participants from the consultations, who shared their responses to the big question of how to take action from our own small spaces. One point that stood out to me was the importance of learning, learning about our history and culture, both individually and as a continent, through listening to stories from elders, reading books, attending lectures, and also writing our own.

The event concluded with us reflecting on the question, "What does peace look like to you?" Two responses stuck with me: one person shared "hearing the giggle of my little brother", and another, "the freedom to walk in peace without fear of mugging." They are very different, shaped by their individual experiences and hopes. But

they show that peace is at the core of our shared dreams - that everyone across the world can live a life they truly value. So I ask you, what does peace look like to you?

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