



Life Matters Journal

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LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

Dear Readers,

In this issue, John Whitehead writes on the connection between nuclear weapons and the environment and the Gaza war. Sean Wild writes on climate protection as a human right and the wider societal lessons we can find in the Drake/Kendrick Lamar beef. Finally, Aimee Murphy presents the next article in our series on the core values of Rehumanize, this time on dignity-affirming dialogue.



What a dramatic couple of months it has been. We have seen dramatic police crackdowns on campus protests, escalation of the war in Gaza, and much closer to us here at Rehumanize and *Life Matters Journal*, the sentencing of our former director Herb Geraghty to 27 months in federal prison for violating the FACE Act.

We are beginning a new chapter at Rehumanize, with a new executive director, new staff writers, and a renewed spirit for our pro-life work. These turbulent times reinvigorate our work, showing all the more need for peace-seeking, consistent life ethic in the world today.

The arc of history bends toward justice, but it is a long, wide arc. There are always reasons to hope.

We are happy to have you with us in the struggle.

Peace,

Joseph Antonello

This journal is dedicated to the aborted, the bombed, the executed, the euthanized, the abused, the raped, and all other victims of violence, whether that violence is legal or illegal.

We have been told by our society and our culture wars that those of us who oppose these acts of violence must be divided. We have been told to take a lukewarm, halfway attitude toward the victims of violence. We have been told to embrace some with love while endorsing the killing of others.

We reject that conventional attitude, whether it's called Left or Right, and instead embrace a consistent ethic of life toward all victims of violence. We are *Life Matters Journal*, and we are here because politics kills.

Disclaimer

The views presented in this journal do not necessarily represent the views of all members, contributors, or donors. We exist to present a forum for discussion within the Consistent Life Ethic, to promote discourse and present an opportunity for peer-review and dialogue.

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Life Matters Journal

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“A Tragedy Beyond Words”: The Devastating Effects of the Gaza War

By John Whitehead

More than seven months after the October 7 terrorist attacks, the Israeli war in Gaza grinds on, with no clear end in sight. The war’s most likely near-term outcomes are either a continuing conflict and humanitarian crisis in Gaza or a wider war in the Middle East. An end to the war and efforts to remedy the suffering in Gaza are better, if less likely, options.

War in Gaza

The immediate cause of the war was the October 7, 2023 attack on Israel from the Gaza Strip led by the Palestinian militant group Hamas. The attackers killed people indiscriminately in southern Israel.¹ An estimate made in February 2024 placed the resulting number of dead at 1,163 people, 767 of them civilians.² The victims included children ages six and under, with the youngest being a baby girl whose pregnant mother had been shot while in labor.³

Hamas also took more than 250 people hostage. While more than 100 hostages were released in November, perhaps roughly another 100 are still alive and being held by Hamas.⁴

Israel has responded with a bombing campaign against Gaza followed by a ground invasion of both northern and southern Gaza.⁵ Aimed at defeating Hamas, this military campaign has had a devastating effect on Gaza’s people.⁶ Hundreds of thousands of Palestinians have fled their homes to escape the fighting. The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) estimates that by October 12, 2023, more than 400,000 Palestinians had been displaced. By March 20, 2024, about 1.7 million had been displaced, with these people now living in or around emergency shelters.⁷ Tens of thousands of refugees are clustered in small areas of southern Gaza, notably the district of Rafah. The United Nations (UN) estimates that, in Rafah, more than 1 million people “are squeezed into an extremely overcrowded space.”⁸

The World Health Organization (WHO) reports widespread damage to Gaza’s civilian infrastructure, such as hospitals, schools, and water and sanitation facilities. WHO estimates up to 80 percent of civilian infrastructure has been destroyed or severely damaged and will take decades to rebuild.⁹

Food and other humanitarian aid are scarce in Gaza. The UN’s estimates are that prior to the war, 500 humanitarian aid trucks came into Gaza daily. As of March 2024, 164 aid trucks were arriving daily. The World Food Programme (WFP) says that meeting Gaza’s basic food needs would require at least 300 trucks per day. Carl Skau, WFP’s chief operating officer, comments, “The complicated border controls, combined with the high tensions and desperation inside Gaza, make it nearly impossible for food supplies to reach people in need, particularly in the north.”¹⁰

Given limited food supplies and the war’s other disruptions, Gaza is now facing famine. The Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC), the global organization responsible for declaring famine situations, said in March that famine could strike northern Gaza by May and central and southern Gaza by July. Roughly half of Gaza’s population could be enduring catastrophic hunger by the summer.¹¹

Precisely how many people have been killed in Gaza since the war began is controversial. As of late April, Gaza’s health authorities place the death toll at more than 34,000 people. Since Hamas runs the health authorities, though, such estimates are open to criticism.¹² Defenders of Israeli policy argue Hamas’ numbers may be false or may not distinguish between civilians and Hamas militants.¹³

Caution is certainly warranted in evaluating Hamas’ figures for those killed in the war. Nevertheless, massive numbers of civilians have undoubtedly been killed in Gaza over the past seven months. A military campaign waged in a very densely populated territory (more than 2 million people live in the 25-mile-by-6-mile Gaza Strip), including urban areas such as Gaza City, is inevitably going to lead to many civilian deaths.¹⁴

Even presupposing dramatic exaggeration by Hamas, if the actual civilian death toll were only a quarter of Hamas’ numbers, that would still mean more than 8,000 civilians have been killed. Such numbers are more than 10 times the number of civilians killed in the original October 7 attacks. Such a tally — let alone possible higher numbers of civilian deaths — points to the terrible human cost of the Israeli campaign, which is unlikely to end soon.

As of this writing, mediators are seeking a ceasefire between

Israel and Hamas, while the Israeli military is bombing the enclave of Rafah, as an apparent prelude to a ground assault.¹⁵ Martin Griffiths, the UN under-secretary-general for humanitarian affairs, has warned that an assault on Rafah would be “nothing short of a tragedy beyond words... a ground invasion would spell even more trauma and death.”¹⁶

Tamer Al-Burai, who has been sheltering in Rafah with his extended family, told Reuters they had decided to flee the area. “We have women, children, elderly and sick people, who may face problems escaping should the invasion happen suddenly,” Al-Burai said.¹⁷

War in the Middle East?

Beyond the threat of further bloodshed in Gaza, continuing the military campaign threatens to escalate into a regional war. Early in the conflict, the Gaza war sparked violent exchanges in Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, and Yemen between Israel and the United States on the one hand and pro-Palestinian militant groups such as Hezbollah and the Houthis on the other.¹⁸

In January, a drone strike killed three United States soldiers stationed in Jordan.¹⁹ The United States attributed the attack to various militant groups aligned with Iran and responded with air strikes in Iraq and Syria.²⁰

The biggest escalation to date came in April. An Israeli air strike on Iran’s consulate in Syria on April 1 killed 13 people, including two generals. This strike may have been retaliation for a drone attack the same day which Israel attributed to Iran.²¹

Iran retaliated on April 14 with a massive strike of missiles and drones against Israel. The Israelis, supported by the United States and other nations, successfully shot down most of the Iranian strike, which ultimately caused minimal damage.²² Israel apparently retaliated April 19 with an air strike on a military base in Iran.²³

The recent exchange between Israel and Iran seems to have been an exercise in international shadowboxing: the two countries are demonstrating their resolve against each other while doing little actual harm. Nevertheless, two major Middle Eastern powers have now attacked each other. Taken together with the other violent exchanges that have occurred across the Middle East since the Gaza war began, Israel and Iran’s recent round of attacks is very ominous. A regional war involving Israel, Iran, or other nations would be a bloody disaster that could drag the United States into another conflict.

How Will It End?

The Gaza war’s human toll and dangers of a wider war are even more disturbing given the vague and discouraging goals the Israeli government is pursuing. In February, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu released a brief statement offering a post-war plan for Gaza. The plan includes Gaza’s demilitarization, Israeli control of the territory’s northern and southern borders, replacing Hamas’ rule with “local elements with administrative experience,” and a “comprehensive de-radicalization program.”²⁴

This proposal for essentially indefinite Israeli governance of Gaza is hardly just and does not seem likely to stop armed Palestinian resistance to Israel. Combined with the embittering toll of the war, a re-occupation of Gaza will likely fuel further violence from whatever remains of Hamas, new militant groups, or both.

A better alternative would be an agreement in which Israel, in return for the release of the remaining hostages, ended the current campaign and withdrew from Gaza. The Israeli government could establish new security arrangements within Israel, such as a fortified buffer zone around the Gaza Strip, to guard against a repetition of the October 7 attacks. Meanwhile, humanitarian aid should be allowed into Gaza free of wartime disruptions.

The United States, as Israel’s leading supporter, might be able to pressure Israel into accepting such an agreement by making key aid conditional on its acceptance. Such an outcome is unlikely, given the United States’ past support for Israel even amid the Gaza war: the United States Congress recently passed, and President Joe Biden signed, a bill providing roughly \$14 billion in military aid to Israel.²⁵ The Biden administration has also continued to transfer weapons such as fighter jets and bombs to Israel.²⁶ The administration did pause some weapons transfers to Israel in light of the assault on Rafah, but whether that will affect Israeli military operations is unclear.²⁷

Nevertheless, United States citizens concerned with protecting Gaza’s people can try to influence government policy. They should contact the Biden administration by phone, at 202-456-1111, or email their representatives in the House and Senate to advocate pressure on Israel to end the war and withdraw from Gaza.

Those interested in supporting organizations that help Palestinians in Gaza and elsewhere might consider donating to Action against Hunger, United Palestinian Appeal, Anera, and Islamic Relief USA.

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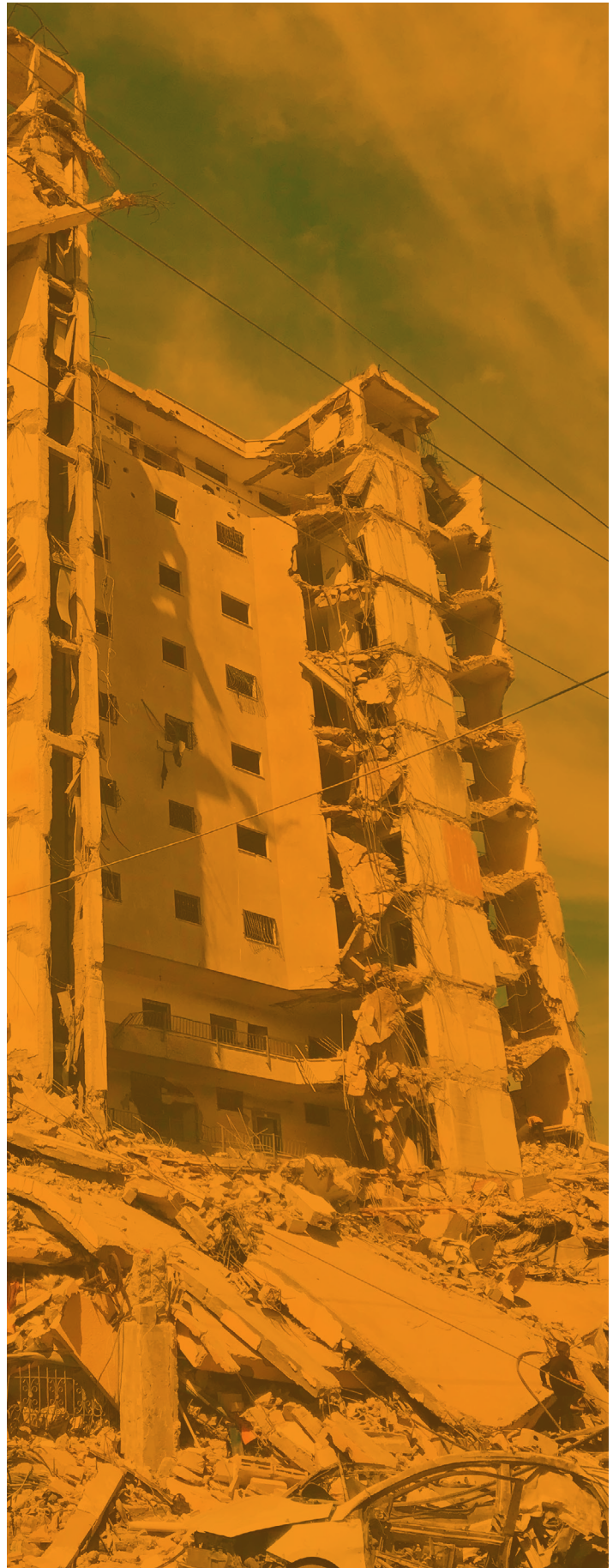
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Drake vs. Kendrick: Addressing Serious Issues

By Sean Wild

We are currently witnessing a beef for the hip hop history books, namely the feud between two of the biggest names in hip hop today, Drake and Kendrick Lamar. Beefs between artists are as old as rap itself and have always been a part of hip hop culture: Tupac vs. Biggie, Jay Z vs. Nas, etc.

While these clashes often center around who is the better rapper, this current music rivalry has given rise to a number of very serious allegations. Topics such as grooming, parental absenteeism, and domestic abuse have all been brought up in the tracks being hurled back and forth between the two artists.

The conflict can be traced back to Kendrick Lamar's feature on the 2013 Big Sean song "Control."¹ In his verse, Kendrick called out a list of other rappers (including Big Sean and fellow feature contributor on the track Jay Electronica). Among the names was also Drake.

These call outs were meant to be seen as friendly competition. Up to this point, Drake and Kendrick were on friendly terms, each having featured on each other's tracks in the past.

Fast forward to 2023. Drake and J. Cole release a track together called "First Person Shooter." On J. Cole's verse, he names himself, Drake, and Kendrick Lamar as the big three artists in current hip hop.

About five months later, Kendrick did a feature on the Metro Boomin-produced track "Like That," with the rapper Future. On that track, Kendrick said (paraphrasing) to forget the big three, he's just big me, dismissing Cole and Drake as not on his level.

Recently, however, the beef started to escalate this spring. Personal shots were taken by Drake with his release of the tracks "Push Ups" and "Taylor Made Freestyle." The latter, aside from making claims that Kendrick was under the thumb of Taylor Swift, with whom he collaborated with on a remix of her song "Bad Blood," also caused controversy due to its using AI to create verses in the voices of Tupac Shakur and Snoop Dogg. Many, including the estate of Tupac, found this very disrespectful of the late rapper, which resulted in Drake removing the track from streaming services.

Kendrick then responded with two tracks of his own, "Euphoria" and "6:16 in LA." The same day "6:16 in LA" was released (May 3rd), Drake responded with "Family Matters." On this

track, many serious allegations are made, including accusations of domestic abuse, claims that Kendrick is not an involved father, and even a claim that one of his children was actually fathered by someone else.

Less than one hour after "Family Matters" dropped, Kendrick released "Meet the Grahams," a scathing track aimed at various members of Drake's family. Again, with this track, many serious allegations were made, including that Drake has a secret daughter he abandoned, that Drake has preyed upon and groomed minors, and that people around him may be involved in sex trafficking. The next day, Kendrick dropped another track called "Not Like Us," making similar claims as in "Meet the Grahams."

As of this writing, the latest track released was on May 5th, which is Drake's response track, "The Heart Part 6" (a play on a series of Kendrick Lamar tracks called The Heart Part 1-5). Drake spends much of this track denying the allegations thrown at him and claiming that his camp leaked false information about a secret child to Lamar to make him look foolish. It should be noted that none of the allegations by either camp have been verified.

This beef has served as a catalyst for both artists to produce high levels of their art, with quality tracks coming from both rappers. However, this feud has gone beyond the scope of proving who's the better lyricist and has brought a number of weighty topics to the forefront of our current cultural consciousness.

Accusations of grooming and trafficking are not topics to be taken lightly. A just and ethical society necessarily holds the protection of children in a pivotal place. We have seen the exposure of a number of predators amongst the famous in recent years. The extensiveness of despicable actions such as grooming, sexual abuse, and trafficking among some who run in the upper echelon of society has been exposed as an unfortunate reality (see the high profile cases of Harvey Weinstein, Jeffrey Epstein, and R. Kelly). Living in a post-#MeToo world has made these types of actions clearer in the public's awareness and brought the hope that our society is changing to better hold those responsible to account.

This growing awareness also applies to the seriousness of domestic violence. The National Coalition Against Domestic Violence (NCADV) reports 1 in 4 women and 1 in 9 men experience severe intimate partner physical violence, intimate partner contact sexual violence, and/or intimate partner stalking.² This, as well as other statistics provided by NCADV, paint a frightening picture.

There is hope that, like the #MeToo movement's attempts to address sexual misconduct, this growing awareness can help shape our world into a place where domestic abuse becomes less prevalent and, hopefully, becomes a thing of the past.

Is there any truth to the claims being made by the two hip hop stars or are these accusations made just to tarnish each others' reputations? Whatever the case, the types of issues brought up in the Drake-Kendrick beef are something their listeners and humanity at large must continue to wrestle with and combat in order to progress towards a safer and more virtuous world for all.

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European Court Rules Climate Protection a Human Right in Switzerland

By Sean Wild

A group of more than 2,000 Swiss women have sued and won against the Swiss government for not taking enough precautions when it comes to climate change. The women, all 64 years of age or older, made a claim that the lack of action by their government violated their human rights as they are more susceptible to the negative health impacts climate change can cause. The case, *Verein KlimaSeniorinnen Schweiz and Others v. Switzerland*, was filed in 2020 in the European court of human rights. A 250 page judgment on the case was released last week, April 9th, 2024, in favor of the group of senior women. This historic decision is the first time such a high profile court has made a decision on what a government's obligation is in relation to climate change.

One of the primary attestations the group of women, many of whom are part of a group called Senior Women for Climate Protection (KlimaSeniorinnen Schweiz), brought before the court have to do with the major heat waves that ravaged Europe during the summer of 2022. The European State of Climate Report found 2022 to be Europe's warmest summer on record, resulting in the deaths of more than 15,000 people across the continent specifically from heat. The claim was made that the government's lack of action when it came to climate change has left vulnerable populations, such as senior women, to be more at risk, particularly from heat stress. As such, this lack of action violates the human rights of the senior women.

To understand the claims made in this case, one must go back to 1950. In the wake of World War II, the European Convention on Human Rights was convened by a collective of countries who had recently formed what was dubbed the Council of Europe in 1949. This Convention drafted a document inscribing a catalog of human rights and freedoms warranted to all citizens of Europe. The European Court of Human Rights was also established

at this convention to oversee any potential disputes or violations of these rights.

Fast forward to 2015, many of the world's countries met in Paris, France for the UN Climate Change Conference (COP21) to adopt the Paris Agreement, an international treaty outline various goals and actions countries will be taking in order to combat climate change. Each country set its own goals, with the plan to convene again for COP26 in 2021. During this time, Switzerland had been criticized for its unambiguous climate goals. The country did, however, pledge to cut its greenhouse gas emissions to 20 percent of 1990 levels by 2020. However, they only ended up cutting emissions by 11 percent. Overall, Switzerland's climate policies and actions have been rated "insufficient" by the organization Climate Action Tracker.

Looking at the above lackluster climate action and resulting severe weather, the court found Switzerland to be in violation of the women's right to life as defined by the European Convention of Human Rights and the Swiss Constitution. The court ruling did not specify in what exact steps the Swiss government to realign its climate plan. It did relay certain standards to be adhered to, particularly that steps taken must be based on the best scientific evidence available and the Swiss government must be transparent about the effectiveness of any action taken.

This decision also challenges the "drop in the ocean" strategy used by many countries and businesses. Due to the global-wide causes of climate change, one company, for example, can point to another and claim that the other company is also contributing to climate change, or contributing more so, thereby deflecting any blame or responsibility for their own contribution. The Swiss ruling sets a precedent that a country (or business) can be held liable for their drop in the ocean. As climate and energy director at the Center for International Environmental Law, Nikki Reisch said, "All of these

countries are subject to the same obligation. Where there's a gap between their climate measures and what science shows is necessary to protect human rights, they will have to act to close that gap or face legal consequences.”

This recent ruling is one of many climate-related cases being brought to court. It was one of three climate cases brought before the European court of human rights that day, with the other two dismissed as inadmissible. In addition, there are seven other cases pending, which have been waiting for the results of the April 9th decisions before proceeding. One of these cases involves a group of climate activists and environmental organizations taking on the Norwegian government for allowing new oil drilling to be done in the Arctic region.

Aside from Europe, The United States has been starting to see its share of climate-related court cases. Communities in Colorado are currently in an ongoing litigation against Exxon Mobil and Suncor Energy for the considerable environmental damage resulting from these company's operations, particularly in the Colorado area. Another climate accountability lawsuit was brought against a number of gas and oil companies, including BP, Chevron, ConocoPhillips, Exxon Mobil and Shell, and the American Petroleum Institute, by Pennsylvania's Bucks County. These are just a couple of many ongoing cases across the country.¹

This win by the Senior Women for Climate Protection and the wave of ongoing climate litigation shows the steps many will take to fight for their right to life in relation to the negative effects of climate change. The implications on the court's role in holding to account those responsible for climate change are vast. “It cannot be that because climate change affects everyone, no one can seek remedy, or because so many countries are responsible for climate change, no one can be held accountable,” said Joie Chowdhury, a lawyer at the Center for International Environmental Law.² The times may be a-changin' in how countries take responsibility for their role in climate change.

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Linked Threats to Humanity: How Nuclear Weapons and Climate Change Are Connected

By John Whitehead

Among the threats to human life, nuclear weapons and climate change pose dangers that set them apart from many others. Nuclear weapons and climate change not only can kill people but can radically alter the planet in devastating ways. They can both kill and hurt people in the present and change our world in ways that cut off or shorten the lives of generations to come. Nuclear weapons and climate change are also linked because each can reinforce the threat the other poses, in a vicious circle.

As the world marks Earth Day, we would do well to consider the threats posed to people and our planet by nuclear weapons and climate change, how these twin threats aggravate each other, and the need to protect humanity and the environment from both.

Mutually Reinforcing Destruction

Nuclear weapons and climate change can reinforce each other's threat in at least four distinct ways:

1. Climate change and extreme weather events can contribute to nuclear pollution by dispersing nuclear waste or other nuclear-related materials into the environment.
2. Climate change may contribute to international tensions and conflict, increasing the likelihood of nuclear war.
3. The vast sums spent on nuclear weapons and the military divert resources away from addressing climate change.
4. Nuclear war can have a catastrophic effect on Earth's climate.

Climate Change and Nuclear Pollution. Nuclear weapons have had toxic consequences across their production and use. Mining uranium, processing uranium and plutonium, and testing nuclear weapons have all polluted the environment, with terrible results for people and ecosystems alike.¹ Moreover, these activities have left behind toxic materials that still threaten communities today.²

As climate change produces more extreme weather events, the risk grows that such events may disrupt deposits of nuclear-related materials and spread them more widely. The world received a reminder of this risk in February 2024, when wildfires in Texas came close to the Pantex complex near Amarillo. Pantex has historically been a site for assembling nuclear weapons and today is a storage center for plutonium.³

The wildfires caused a pause in operations and a partial evacuation at Pantex. Although the fires never reached the complex, the incident suggests that facilities handling highly dangerous materials are vulnerable to the types of disruptive events climate change makes more common.⁴

A still more alarming reminder of this problem exists in the Marshall Islands. A major US nuclear testing site during the Cold War, the Marshalls is now home to more than 3 million cubic feet

of radioactive waste produced by such tests. This waste, which includes lethal amounts of plutonium, is currently housed in an aging concrete structure known as Runit Dome. As sea levels rise because of climate change, the ocean could break open the structure, releasing its contents.⁵

Michael Gerrard, a legal scholar at Columbia University, comments, "More than any other place, the Marshall Islands is a victim of the two greatest threats facing humanity — nuclear weapons and climate change."⁶

Climate Change and Conflict. Peace and environmental groups have identified the disruptions from climate change as contributing to world conflict. The International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN) points to how climate change threatens access to food and water, leading to armed conflict and refugee crises. "The resulting global instability," ICAN comments, "is increasing the danger of nuclear war."⁷ A 2013 survey of 50 studies on the topic similarly found "strong support for a causal association between climatological changes and conflict across a range of geographies [and] a range of different time periods."⁸

For example, researchers have argued climate change led to a 2006-2009 drought in Syria. Over 1 million people subsequently migrated to cities. The resulting social stresses may have contributed to the 2011 uprising and civil war.⁹ Tensions between nuclear-armed nations India and Pakistan are aggravated by conflict over shared water supplies, a conflict that climate change may worsen.¹⁰

Granted, whether climate change is linked to conflict is a highly controversial question. Some have disputed the link. Further, even if the two problems are linked, we should not assume climate change inevitably fosters conflict. To do so risks falling into a fatalistic attitude that regards conflict as unavoidable amid a changing climate. This attitude could become a self-fulfilling prophecy. Instead, we should recognize that even in a warming, weather-stressed world, humans still have choices about whether to respond violently to problems.¹¹

We should not assume climate change automatically leads to conflict. Rather, we should be aware that climate change may aggravate political tensions and make peaceful conflict resolution more difficult. This possibility is reason enough for peace activists to be concerned about climate change.

Diversion of Resources. The United States is currently working to upgrade its nuclear weapons arsenal. This "modernization" program has been marked by spiraling costs, with a 2023 Congressional Budget Office report estimating the program would cost \$756 billion over a decade.¹² Further, nuclear modernization is just part of US military-related spending. The Biden administration's current national security budget request is \$895 billion.¹³

These hundreds of billions spent on nuclear weapons and the

military are funds that could be spent on sustainable and green technologies or other efforts to counter climate change.¹⁴ When one considers the money spent by other nuclear-armed nations on their arsenals, the opportunity cost grows still larger.

Further, the hawkish policies of the United States and other nations involve another, more abstract but real, opportunity cost. An emphasis on military competition with other nations, with all the accompanying mutual suspicion and hostility, severely hampers nations' ability to cooperate on addressing climate change. The unfolding Cold War between the United States and China, for example, will, if left unchecked, consume political attention and energy that could be put to more constructive uses.

Nuclear Climate Catastrophe. Using nuclear weapons in war would not only kill enormous numbers of people but would wreak havoc on Earth's climate.

Multiple studies have modeled the effects of global nuclear war or even a more limited nuclear exchange. These studies have indicated that nuclear war would throw huge amounts of soot into Earth's upper atmosphere, cooling the planet — one study estimates global average surface temperatures would fall by more than 15 degrees Fahrenheit. This global cooling would disrupt food production on land and in the sea.¹⁵

A 2022 study in *Nature Food* concluded that “the reduced light, global cooling, and likely trade restrictions after nuclear wars would be a global catastrophe for food security.”¹⁶ The authors projected that the global cooling caused by a nuclear war between India and Pakistan could lead to over 2 billion people dying. A nuclear war between Russia and the United States could lead to over 5 billion deaths.¹⁷

As dire as the current climate situation is, these analyses indicate the far worse climate consequences of nuclear war. Nuclear weapons pose the greatest climate change threat of all.

Countering Linked Threats

Nuclear weapons and climate change pose monumental, linked threats to humanity and the earth. While peace activists and environmental activists will naturally have their respective areas of specialization, both groups should remain aware of both threats and their connections. Both groups should support each other in their efforts to counter these linked threats. The success of these peace and environmental efforts will determine our future — or rather, whether we have one.

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Core Values: Dignity-Affirming and Persuasive Dialogue

By Aimee Murphy

Early in the conception and development of *Life Matters Journal/* Rehmanize International, our team was convinced of the need for a space for people to be able to talk about these often-heated topics in a respectful, rehumanizing way. I think the story of how I arrived at this conclusion will illuminate why I was so committed to this idea.

I had experienced the polarized, cacophonous rhetoric during my time in undergrad. Almost every time I participated in activism or outreach on abortion, euthanasia, or similar “pro-life” issues using the rhetorical stylings that prevailed, I was met with screaming and counter-protests. I could see the looks on my peers’ faces as their walls went up and any opportunity for personal encounter, dialogue, and changing hearts and minds was completely precluded.

It was in processing these experiences and learning from my own contrasting conversion to a pro-life viewpoint that I recognized that change for most people requires a feeling of respect, safety, and community. I’m autistic, so my own conversion to this philosophy was very logic-based (though emotional at times), and unfortunately resulted in a lot of isolation that I was more or less content to suffer for my convictions. As a stubborn neurodivergent, I didn’t care if my newfound commitment to nonviolence made me “rebellious” and unpopular — I leaned into it and was fine being a “punk for life.”

But eventually I came to realize that, for most people, change is *really* freaking scary. It involves reevaluating paradigms and relationships and past actions, and often making different plans for the future. Change involves upheaval and discomfort and introspection. And with a change as central to moral understanding as the commitment to nonviolence (and the often-unpopular commitment to it that challenges both party lines), it can really shake up a person’s life.

Therefore, this sort of change often comes in the sort of spaces where we are allowed to be vulnerable, where we are welcomed with our uncertainties and humbly accompanied in a space of authentic encounter. Of course, change happens as we learn new things and process their implications within a larger context, but perhaps more important than pure facts alone, change happens

when our minds are pulled *and* we feel safe and sure enough in our new footing and relationships. It takes trust in a new community for most people to even entertain the possibility of change, because when it can mean the uprooting of our social life and allegiances, change requires that a new community be there to catch us.

Thus it was that I realized the truth that, if someone is continually being screamed at and protested with a violent pathos, then *of course* they wouldn’t feel welcome or safe among those protesting them. There, the motive to maintain the status quo and resist change is strong.

But instead, if such a person were approached in a way that is rehumanizing, that is friendly and curious, that is hospitable and welcoming, then there is a solid foundation for a sustained change. So if we want to reach everyone with our message, no matter how persuasive we think it might be, we must be kind, humble, and most of all able and willing to see the dignity of our interlocutors. We have to rehumanize both those whose rights we’re struggling to protect, *and* those who embrace ideologies of dehumanization and violence; because our ultimate goal is protection and care for *each and every* human being... *even* those who are guilty of such viciousness.

Though this task might be a difficult one for us to achieve with our latent biases and prejudices, it’s vital to our philosophy and to our movement to be gracious, kind, and hospitable in dialogue. In another vein, it’s also likewise important that we be well-equipped with up-to-date facts and logical talking points, to be able to make the most persuasive arguments that we can. For this, I would recommend reading my book, *Rehumanize: A Vision to Secure Human Rights for All*; keeping Google news notifications on for keywords related to CLE topics; and having deep conversations with your circles about the “what if” questions that your ideological “opponents” might bring to the table.¹ Being ill-equipped to have these often intense discussions by lacking the necessary factual and contextual knowledge is a missed opportunity and can often leave one’s interlocutors with a bad taste in their mouth, giving the impression that one is a mindless ideologue. So, coming prepared for discourse is a vital necessity for this core value.

Nonetheless, even with the best arguments, it remains sorely vital

that our posture be one of authentic curiosity and openness. That means we ask lots of questions — lots of “why” inquiries — that help each person to understand where the other is coming from. And it also means having humility when you talk: to first affirm the good you see in the other’s perspective and to admit when you’ve made mistakes or errors in recall or past judgment.

In all my years of outreach, I’ve hardly met anyone who openly said only malicious or hateful things; so, when you meet someone in the process of your work, always invite with a question where you can find common ground (e.g., “So, would you say you support human rights?” or “What issues of life and death are you passionate about?”).

Remember: we’re not here to be antagonistic, but to *encounter*. In engaging in this conversation, we need to always keep at the front of our minds the inherent dignity of the person in front of us, and remember *sonder*: the idea that each other human’s life is as vivid and complex as our own. We have no idea what circumstances led this person to believe what they do, to hold it as loosely or as fiercely as they do, or to feel such deep or light emotions as they do. To *sonder* is to rehumanize: to transfer our own understanding of how difficult and beautiful and awful and awesome it is to be human — for every single human being. And *sonder* can help us see the good in others, and draw them back to that goodness.

“Calling in” is different than “calling out”: for most people, you’ll want to do the former. I tend to reserve “calling out” for the people who have *power*: the president, national politicians, sometimes a state representative, CEOs, corporations enabling violence for profit, etc. These are entities who would be rather unlikely to actually sit down and have a conversation with us where we would actually feel heard: so, we protest them, we bring our megaphones, and we march to their offices and make them uncomfortable with our presence.

But, for most Jo(e) Schmoes, whom we encounter in our daily lives, not only do they not have power, but they also tend to be much more approachable. So, the work there is “calling in,” or recognizing the good they believe in, and inviting them to a more holistic, more consistent approach to ethics: the Consistent Life Ethic, where *every* human being is respected, valued, and protected.

I won’t lie: more than likely, you will not change someone’s mind in the first conversation you have with them. Heck, you might be friends with someone for decades and they might still be firmly planted against your philosophy.

First, I have to say: it is still good if you maintain a friendship with someone who disagrees with you, *even if they never change their mind*. Having diverse friendships is good, because it saves us from being stuck in epistemic bubbles or echo chambers.

Second, I must also say that: instead of building up antagonism, instead of constructing walls of ire, angst, and judgment, hopefully, you can develop a friendship that will create the space where they *would* feel comfortable changing their position and joining our community, if the logic and emotions were to align in the future. By creating a space where others feel safe, respected, and curious, you’ve built a good foundation that — I think — is crucial for changing hearts and minds.

Notes

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