

Contribution to the Seminar “Compassion the key to Global issues”
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Compassion and global issues: a scientist’s perspective

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Dear colleagues, Signore, Signore,

Thank you for this invitation to speak at today’s seminar "Compassion - The Key to Global Issues." As a scientist, expert on the energy transition in Vietnam, and former Lead Author of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), I will address three points:

1. The IPCC's contribution to humanity that led to its Nobel Peace Prize.
2. Beyond climate change, a concerned scientist’s view on global issues, with challenges and reasons for hope.
3. The importance of compassion in addressing global issues, with examples.

I. On IPCC’s Peace Nobel Prize-winning work

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) is a scientific organization established by the United Nations in 1988, to set the facts straight before the eyes of climate negotiators.

The IPCC synthesizes and disseminates comprehensive scientific knowledge on climate change, its impacts, risks, adaptation and mitigation strategies. IPCC reports research from thousands of scientists worldwide. Its rigorous peer-review process achieves the highest standards of accuracy and reliability.

That's how the IPCC plays a crucial role in raising global awareness about climate change. For example, its Fourth Assessment Report conclusively attributed climate change to human activities. Driving climate-skepticism out of the conference room was a major progress towards the reaching the Paris Agreement to protect the climate.

We, scientists, have been sounding the alarm for more than thirty years, more like fifty. Today, the planet's global warming is over 1.1-degree. The effects of climate change are becoming evident to everyone. We will likely exceed the 1.5-degree threshold, leading to even more severe consequences, unless we halve greenhouse gases emissions by 2030, which requires a miracle. In terms of sea level rise, one meter is unavoidable, but we can still hope to avoid a sudden three meters sea level rise. Indonesia and Myanmar, two ASEAN countries, are already moving their national capital to better grounds.

One meter is sure, three meters is looming.

Every half degree avoided counts, we know what must be done. Technology and financial resources needed to address climate change are available.

Unfortunately, despite progress in renewable energy technology, greenhouse gases emissions are still increasing. We are not moving in the right direction.

The Nobel Peace Prize awarded to the IPCC in 2007 recognized its contribution to protect humanity from the climate chaos it is causing. Nowadays, the IPCC model of scientific contribution to peace and security is being replicated to many other global challenges beyond climate change, e.g. biodiversity.

2. On Global Issues and reasons for hope in Humanity

As a concerned scientist, I refer to the Doomsday Clock, a symbol created in 1947 by Manhattan Project physicists, as my favorite visual metaphor for the urgency to prevent global disaster. Initially set at seven minutes to midnight, the Clock has been adjusted over the years to reflect the changing global threats. As of 2024, the Doomsday Clock is set at 90 seconds to midnight, the closest it has ever been to the symbolic point of global catastrophe. We all know why we have so little time:

1. Nuclear threats are still looming large, with tensions between major powers and regional concerns particularly over Iran and North Korea.
2. As I said for Climate change, avoiding dangerous global warming requires a miracle. One meter of sea level rise is a certainty, three meters is a risk.
3. Biological threats: COVID-19 exposed the world's vulnerability. We are not prepared well for the next pandemic. Dangerous biotechnology research is poorly controlled.
4. Technological risks: Disinformation, AI advancements, and growing reliance on digital systems pose risks not only to critical infrastructure, but also to social cohesion, human rights, privacy and democracy.

In addition to these global existential threats, ages old socio-political issues of civil unrest, conventional warfare, and illegal immigration remain. These issues not only result from but can also exacerbate the challenges posed by environmental degradation, climate change, and technological disruptions.

However, facing these daunting challenges, we can take hope in humanity's demonstrated capacity for progress.

The last generations achieved unprecedented advancements in science, technology, healthcare, and quality of life. Medical breakthroughs have dramatically reduced mortality rates and eradicated diseases like smallpox. The development of the internet and global communications has connected people across the world like never before. Space exploration has taken us to the moon and beyond, expanding our understanding of the universe. Efforts to promote international cooperation, such as the United Nations and various global treaties, on arms control and environmental issues for example, have helped prevent another world war.

So, while the threats we face today are formidable, the ingenuity, resilience, and collaborative spirit of humanity give us reason for hope. Humanity created these problems, humanity has the capacity to solve them to create a more peaceful, sustainable, and prosperous future.

3. Compassion address global issues: practical examples

Compassion, the empathetic response to suffering and the desire to alleviate it, is a powerful catalyst for inclusive, equitable solutions to global challenges. Fostering understanding and collaboration, compassion drives us to consider the impacts of our actions on vulnerable communities and work together to ensure that we share fairly the benefits and costs of progress. Compassion, deeply rooted in empathy and proactive support, is crucial for addressing the challenges of sustainable development:

We don't just need an energy transition, we need a Just Energy Transition.

For example, the initiatives by France to integrate offshore wind power has been coupled with extensive community engagement programs, ensuring that local populations benefit directly from the projects. This compassionate approach ensures a harmonious transition that supports both the environment and communities.

The three pillars of compassion outlined by Ha Huy Thanh - understanding, sharing, and creating solutions - are essential for effective global cooperation on sustainable development. Every autumn, the Climate Conferences show that understanding ourselves, others, and the situation lays the foundation for finding common ground and developing shared goals.

The most compassionate speech I remember is the closing remarks of Glasgow climate conference's president three years ago. When Alok Sharma apologized for a weak final agreement, I and plenty of observers cried along with him, as this was the day we lost the option to avoid dangerous climate change.

To operationalize compassion in global governance, we need to integrate it into our leadership development programs and decision-making processes. We must lift up stories of compassionate problem-solvers and build grassroots movements that translate inspiration into concrete action and policy change. The 2009 Charter for Compassion, endorsed by over two million individuals and over 120 cities, is an example of how to do it.

How about countries then?

Vietnam is the perfect example of a nation that, in many ways, embodies the potential for a compassionate approach to sustainable development.

Throughout its history, Vietnam has demonstrated remarkable resilience in the face of challenges - from colonialism and war to poverty and natural disasters. As the book "Compassion" so beautifully illustrates, central to this resilience are the values of solidarity, adaptability, and sacrificing for the greater good deeply embedded in Vietnamese culture.

Today, Vietnam stands at a crossroads. Having achieved remarkable progress in reducing poverty, it now must sustain this momentum while addressing rising inequality, environmental degradation, and climate vulnerability. This challenge offers a unique opportunity: to chart a new course - one that balances dynamic growth with inclusive development, traditional values with modern innovation, national sovereignty with global citizenship. What if Vietnam were to place compassion at the center of this journey? To use its experience of overcoming division and hardship to model a new kind of development - one grounded in empathy, shared prosperity, and harmony with nature?

Vietnam would become a global leader in the just energy transition - not only by replacing fossil fuels by renewable energy, but by ensuring that nobody is left behind in the process. By investing in re-skilling programs, social protection, and regional economic diversification. Vietnam can show the world how to navigate this transition with both ambition and compassion.

I have been working in Hanoi the last 10 years, and I saw how much international partners are ready to support Vietnam on this journey. From development agencies to philanthropic foundations to mission-driven businesses, there is a growing ecosystem of partners who share Vietnam's vision of a more compassionate, sustainable future. By working together in a spirit of solidarity and mutual learning, we can help unlock Vietnam's potential as a beacon of hope and inspiration for the region and the world.

Initiatives like the Green Climate Fund, the Loss and Damages Fund, and Just Energy Transition Partnerships embody the spirit of compassion. Let us share

a thoughts for the Maldives islands' people, who are going to loose their entire homeland because other countries burned so much coal and oil.

Dear fellow humans, compassion is as vital to solve climate change mitigation as it is to solve other global issues. Cultivating compassion, feeling our shared humanity and interdependence, shifts our mindsets from zero-sum competition to positive-sum cooperation.

4. In conclusion

To sum up the facts, yes: global issues in front of us are worrying. One meter of sea level rise is certain, three meters is a risk. We don't just need an energy transition, we need a Just Energy Transition. But there is hope in humanity's capacity for rapid progress and innovation. We have seen many examples: compassion in action facilitates sustainable development.

Ultimately, the power to create a more compassionate world lies with each of us. We all have a role to play as messengers of compassion, whether through our personal actions, our communities, or our institutions. Let us walk the path of compassion together - for ourselves, for each other, for the Earth and all its inhabitants. For in the end, it is the only path that leads to a future in which all can thrive.

Grazie, Cam on