

Make war a crime - the least we could do
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On Oct 24, I braved a mean traffic crawl along Jalan Tun Razak en route to PWTC to attend a charity dinner hosted by the Kuala Lumpur Foundation to Criminalise War.

However, I am still bereft of words to describe this meaningful cause championed by the foundation - guilt, anger and hopelessness now consume every fiber of my being in so far as any war is concerned.

According to of the foundation committee's chairperson, Tun Dr Siti Hasmah, the royal charity dinner was held to raise funds to facilitate the foundation's voluntary programmes on a national and global basis as well as to acquire a suitable premise to serve as the foundation's headquarters.

His Majesty Tuanku Mizan Zainal Abidin launched the foundation at this royal charity dinner.

One unforgettable aspect of the royal charity dinner was the ten-minute-long video footage featuring what casualties of war – mainly children and women – had to endure as hostile fire destroyed their homes and blew their family members to pieces.

Gory images of a massacre; bodies of maimed children lumped into a mass grave; child soldiers mechanically firing away their guns with little thought about humanity let alone compassion; torn limbs piled up on a deserted ground; a howling mother beside charred remains, one could only assume them to be of her child; a teenager lying on a hospital bed with a blown- away midriff.

As the guests cringed in their seats, in fact, some even turned away from the giant screens around Merdeka Hall, Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad knew that it was imperative for us to see the bloody images of war:

'It is not a pleasant thing to see, these video clips, but then if we do not see these we will not understand the horrors of war. If we don't understand then we will not be concerned about the facts of these young victims especially, and we will continue to subscribe to the idea that killing people, destroying countries is a legitimate way to solve problems between nations,' he said.

What dawned on me that night – besides the generosity of corporate tycoons in Malaysia – was the fact that, here in our safe cocoon, we are relatively unperturbed by the hostility of war. We bask in our safe haven of domestic stability and economic growth since independence, with no armed conflicts at all save and except for May 13, 1969.

Even May 13 is pale in comparison with the recent wars waged in the Middle East and African countries. But war, by any other name, has a profound effect on helpless women and children.

History and statistics by Amnesty International reveal that war has seen women being oppressed, raped, impregnated and infected with the deadly HIV virus. Children have been reduced to orphans and their basic needs of decent shelter, food and education sorely neglected.

Meanwhile citizens of war-torn countries are being illegally trafficked across the globe as prostitutes, cheap labour or even to facilitate illegal adoption.

The repercussions of armed conflicts robs a nation's fabric of history and culture. Political upheavals in Afghanistan and Iraq have seen its museums looted, records destroyed and historical books torn apart.

In addition thereto, war is a multifaceted beast extending its formidable arms onto the environment. The residues from firearm and bombing activities cause radiological and chemical pollution which threaten our fragile environment. Millions others face the risk of unexploded ordnance left after the conflict ended.

While we strive to be a developed nation with exemplary social, political and economic platforms, we must never take our country's peace for granted, for the price of a conflict – be it political or otherwise – is just too expensive for us to pay.

World War II American general Dwight D Eisenhower was right when he said: 'Every gun that is made, every warship launched, every rocket fired signifies in the final sense, a theft from those who hunger and are not fed, those who are cold and are not clothed.'

'This world in arms is not spending money alone. It is spending the sweat of its labourers, the genius of its scientists, the hopes of its children. This is not a way of life at all in any true sense.'

'Under the clouds of war, it is humanity hanging on a cross of iron.'

Make war a crime – that is the least one could do.

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