



Talal Abu-Ghazaleh Global

An Open Letter to America and China From an Arab Friend on the UN DAY FOR TOLERANCE

By TALAL ABU-GHAZALEH

“It is not ‘can any of us imagine better?’ but, ‘can we all do better?’ The dogmas of the quiet past are inadequate to the stormy present [...] We must disenthral ourselves, and then we shall save our country [...] Fellow citizens, we cannot escape history [...] We shall nobly save, or meanly lose, the last best hope of earth.”

– *President Abraham Lincoln, in a message to Congress, one month prior to the signing of the Emancipation Proclamation*

“We should embrace the vision of a community with a shared future in which everyone is bound together...and we must make the right choice, a choice worthy of the people’s trust and of our times. ... and build a new type of international relations and a community with a shared future for mankind. Together, we can make the world a better place for everyone.”

Chinese President Xi Jinping, Speech to the UN General Assembly, September 2020

The time has come for America to disenthral itself once again and rededicate itself to the first principles of American greatness, the greatest of which is tolerance and for which the need is not just urgent, but existential. The Coronavirus pandemic has rattled the world, and the most important question America faces is whether in the post-coronavirus order societies and nations will still have the confidence to govern themselves, because, in the words of Dr. Henry Kissinger, “failure could set the world on fire.” The fire has started, literally, and not just in America’s forests, but in her cities.

China’s experience with the Great Cultural Revolution has equipped it to engage with tolerance the difficulties and challenges that nations can face when confronted with an identity crisis. China must remain steadfast and not overreact to impulsiveness. China’s Great Cultural Revolution taught us that. In due course America will be back and will win the struggle it is going through.

Moving beyond my previous concerns that the U.S. and China may be headed for war, I am advocating in the aftermath of the U.S. Presidential election that the two nations now begin jointly to articulate their shareable interests with the rest of the world. To assure the good future all nations deserve, we must turn our attention to promoting resilience, developing tolerance, increasing equity around the world, and encouraging our youth to build a sustainable future. It is time to break the chains of the contemporary crisis and see our way to a better tomorrow.

With forty percent of the world's population under the age of twenty-five, youth are not the future; they are the present. It is their future that is at stake, and we must help to empower them to meet the global challenges of the twenty-first century, of which the Coronavirus pandemic is only the first to come. I do believe in the America that made my dreams as a young man come true.

At the age of 10, I was made a refugee to the Lebanese village of Ghaziyeh as a result of the war of 1948. The United Nations, with vital U.S. funding, provided me, as a distinguished student, with a merit scholarship that provided me an American education in Beirut. It is that American education that propelled me to be where I am today: at the helm of a global organization with over 100 offices worldwide, headquartered in the Middle East. The American dream is not restricted to America. As a Palestinian, I know firsthand the impact and values of the United States because of the opportunities it has provided for strivers like me. America was open, giving, and kind to me and I owe her much of my success. In many respects I am an American Ambassador of goodwill.

It is with this intimate and personal understanding of the generative power of American tolerance that I ask the Chinese leadership and the Chinese people to continue their support for an enduring global partnership with America. This global partnership will take time to establish but for the love of humanity it must be done with thoughtfulness and patience.

Indeed it is what I have already been doing. With great pride, I received a medal from President Xi for promoting Arab Chinese relations; received the Chinese Confucius Institute award for TAG-Confucius as the best center in the world; established our technology industry center in China; and, served as the Chinese visa center in Jordan supporting the Chinese Embassy and many more. Throughout our many decades of business relations and friendships, China proved to be reliable, fair and honorable. I owe China a great gratitude. In many respects I am also a Chinese Ambassador of goodwill.

In this spirit, I am initiating a one-year long "Virtual Global Partnership Summit" on November 16th of this year, on the United Nations designated "International Day for Tolerance." This initiative is in line with the principles of the UN Global Compact, founded by UN Secretary General Kofi Annan as Chairman and myself as co-chair, and which I continued to co-chair with UN Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon.

The date of this event is also the 10th anniversary of the Global Challenges Forum Foundation in Geneva, of which I am Founder. Together with my Co-Founder, Dr. Walter Christman, we are issuing a "Global Partnership Declaration" and inaugurating on 16 November at www.USChinaTolerance.com a platform to host and manage the global engagement process. The "Virtual Global Partnership Summit" will serve for one year as a facilitating partner -- inviting leaders of all nations, international organizations, global corporations, foundations, and indeed global citizens everywhere to join in the process of establishing a new Global Partnership for the 21st Century.

More than ever, in this hyper-connected world, the local is global and global is local. Challenges in one region have ripple effects across the globe. All challenges, no matter how remote they seem, are global challenges. And we must address them as such, in collaboration with one another. And this includes an American engagement with China. It has been done before. It can, and must, for the well-being of humanity, be done again.

The Honorable Anson Burlingame, an American statesman who is little-known today, can show us the way. On June 14, 1861, President Abraham Lincoln appointed Anson Burlingame as minister to the Qing Empire. Burlingame served as U.S. Ambassador to China from 1861 to 1867 and was invited by the Imperial Court to serve as China's Ambassador to All the Treaty Powers (including the U.S.) from 1867 to 1870. Burlingame fostered a policy of cooperation between the Western powers and China, intended to secure settlement of disputes by diplomacy rather than by force. His efforts culminated in the Burlingame Treaty of 1868.

Burlingame's legacy should be applauded as one of the most relevant reconciliation guides for our own time. His life story projects the promise of America; his underlying principles need to be studied and applied today. Honoring Burlingame's contribution will be a good start to address properly what has become an open wound both to memory and history. China is a responsible actor and, with the United States, can collaborate with all nations in building trust empowered by the mutual obligation and a shared commitment to make a better world for the next generation.

I am issuing a call for America and the world to co-create with China in the spirit of Anson Burlingame the development of Global Partnership principles for the 21st Century. The goal should not just be to preserve peace in a post-Coronavirus world but to address the global challenges that lie ahead together, through Global Partnership. What better day to launch this initiative than November 16th, the U.N. Day for Tolerance?

I am calling all wise leaders from both nations, who together with invited advisors from other nations, may work out together a sharable discourse and agenda for future collaboration, carry forth our endeavors to promote international tolerance, sustainable development, and win-win cooperation at all levels and amongst all peoples. We seek participants to co-develop Principles for a Global Partnership for the 21st Century, reaffirming the goals and objectives of the United Nations.

“Men of virtue can cooperate, even when they don't agree; men of meanness can't cooperate even when they agree.” -- **The Analects of Confucius**

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