

Dear Friends of the Children,

As President of the International Pediatric Association, and speaking from nearly seven decades of life, I carry the weight and weariness of someone who has witnessed repeated cycles of violence in my homeland. I have watched generations rise and fall without seeing a lasting peace. My country, where God has been given many names and religions, now sees those religions used as weapons. Faiths that should teach compassion instead speak of God and fight in His name. Imagine what that does to our children: it teaches them hate, suspicion, and the certainty that the other is an enemy.

This is not an abstract fear. When violence is wrapped in sacred language, it becomes unquestionable. Moral certainty hardens into immovability. Identities fuse with conflict, so that belonging to a religion or a group becomes an existential necessity. Children learn hatred as inheritance. They inherit trauma and grievances, and with them a future of reprisals rather than reconciliation.

We live in places where civic spaces have weakened. Courts, schools, media, and other neutral institutions that might protect the common good are too often captured by those who profit from division. Retribution becomes part of our social memory, and faith itself is distorted—either to justify harm or to be abandoned by those who once found comfort in it.

Making war does not bring peace. War wounds bodies, minds, and communities in ways that linger for generations. Violence begets more violence; it deepens trauma, fractures trust, and makes healing and reconciliation far more difficult. The costs are borne most heavily by children—who suffer loss, disruption, and long-term psychosocial harm that undermines their ability to learn, to relate, and to build peaceful futures.

I do not imagine a perfect world. But I can and must imagine an ideal world for our children: a world that makes peace possible, likely, and sustainable. In that world, human dignity is central. Every child learns that all people deserve respect and basic rights regardless of their faith or background. Institutions, courts, police, the press, and schools are strong and impartial, and spiritual life is not allowed to coerce or justify violence. Education teaches empathy and critical thinking. Public life gives rise to shared civic identities so that no single identity monopolizes loyalty. Markets, parks, schools, and festivals are places where people meet, work, and form lasting friendships. There are rituals of reconciliation that acknowledge harm and repair relationships. Economic opportunity and fairness reduce the incentives to exploit hatred for gain. Leaders model restraint and are held accountable when they incite division. Public stories, books, media, and sermons should stress our common humanity rather than the ancient enmities used to bind us to hatred.

This is not mere idealism; it is practical and necessary. Small acts of courage and daily habits build the culture our children will inherit. Even in the darkest places, small wins' matter: children playing together in a shared playground, markets that remain open to everyone, a classroom where history is taught honestly. Change is generational and slow, but it accumulates. Not all conflict can be avoided, and that is not the goal. The goal is to manage difference without dehumanization and violence.

Faith itself can be a powerful force for peace. When spiritual leaders choose humility and compassion, religion can heal rather than harm. We must ask those leaders to speak and act for the protection of all people, not for the advantage of one group over another.

As President of the International Pediatric Association , I commit our organization to:

- Advocating for child-centered policies that protect children from the harms of identity-based violence;
- Supporting education programs that teach empathy, critical thinking, and media literacy;
- Partnering with civic and faith leaders to create safe, inclusive spaces for children to learn and play;
- Documenting and speaking out about the health and psychosocial consequences of violence on children.

I am older now and may not live to see a complete transformation. But I believe the habits, institutions, and relationships we build today will change what our children inherit. The work is long and painstaking, yet every ordinary act of honesty, friendship, and courage shifts the ground beneath us.

If you hear this, I beg you: look beyond the narratives that profit from hatred. Choose the small, often invisible work of building trust. Support the institutions that protect all people. Teach your children to ask hard questions and to see the humanity in others. In this way we can move toward a world where faith uplifts rather than destroys, where children grow with dignity and possibility, and where violence no longer finds sanctuary in the name of God.

With urgency and hope,  
Professor Joseph HADDAD

