

## “Big children should help small children”

**ATLE HETLAND**  
EN ROUTE

**W**hen heads of state and government hold their speeches on special occasions, such as the national day or New Year’s Day, they usually emphasize the country’s strength. That may be important, too, since a leader would like his or her country to do well and be better than when they came into power.

As long as growth is more important than sharing of resources, and finding more environmentally and socially acceptable ways of living well with what we have, then economic issues remain important. If there is growth, a leader can confidently speak to his or her countrymen and women. True, in most countries in the South there is need for growth, but not in the North, where the opposite is needed – and everywhere, it is essential that we learn to share what we have, create fairer societies and live more peacefully together. Leaders should boast more of that than of economic and military power.

When the world leaders and the rest who counts, as we say, meet for the annual meeting of the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, towards the end of January, they will focus on climate change and other important issues. I hope they will remember that there is a contradiction between growth and development. I hope they will realize that economic development, and indeed military development, is not at all the same as human and social development.

I hope that we in Pakistan, Afghanistan and elsewhere in our part of the world and beyond, we will remember that forgiveness is more powerful than revenge when searching for ways to reduce and end terrorism and other evils. I hope we can see that inclusion and dialogue are the only way, not confrontation and exclusion. It may be a tall order, but there is no other way. And if there is discontent in groups wanting to overthrow the existing leaders and have other change, we must analyze why they want it.

I believe that most European countries managed to integrate their former Nazis and Nazi-sympathizers in the new order in their lands. True, sometimes, the leaders were heavy handed and the winner dictated the peace, yet, they also included the former enemies. In many countries more than ten a tenth, sometimes a quarter, thought the Nazis were right. They may not have changed entirely, but their children did and they became supportive members of the new, democratic regimes. Sadly, today, we see right-wing groups in Europe, too, with xenophobic and even racist attitudes. When that happens, we must ask why it does, and we should offer new ways for inclusion.

This year, I was touched by the New Year’s speech by King Harald of Norway, the head of state of my home country. He didn’t speak about the state power I have referred to above. He spoke about the responsibility each of us, and he cited children from a kindergarten who had visited him in connection with the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Norwegian constitution in 2014. “We should say kind words to each other”, they children had told the king.

Furthermore, the king said that “big children should help small children”, again with reference to the kindergarten visit. He indirectly made reference to a mobbing tragedy in a Norwegian school, when a thirteen year old boy had been a victim for so long that he had ended his own life. In a note the boy had written that it wasn’t true what adults say, that if mobbing happens, they should tell it to somebody and they will help solve it. “But the adults don’t do anything”, the boy wrote in his note.

King Harald spoke to those who are directly responsible for mobbing, the bullies in the schoolyard, at workplaces and elsewhere, saying that they have other and better sides in them, too. They should make use of those to do good in their everyday life.

The king mentioned a large demonstration in Oslo organized by Norwegian Muslims against terrorism and the misuse of religion as a cover for wrong actions. He mentioned a 19-year young man, Faten Al-Hussaini, who in his speech on that occasion had said; “we have proven that we can stand shoulder to shoulder as one nation”. The king also sent his thoughts to the many parents and families in Pakistan grieving after the terrorist attack at the school in Peshawar in December.

I find the educational role of the Norwegian king and other leaders to be important. They can use their position to be moral role models, not only power politicians. But they must also speak about issues in realistic and logical ways. They shouldn't speak about issues in detached idealistic ways. They should be advisers on how we can behave in this world – and leave religious issues and faith to the religious leaders. True, inspiration can be sought in religion, in any religion. The Norwegian king touched upon that, too, in his speech since Norway now has become a multi-religious country and is no longer just a Christian country.

“Big children should help small children” has an important educational message for children. But the message is certainly for adults, too. We learn values as children which we take with us into adult life – and we may gain new and better values in some fields in adult life.

We should all live so that we can feel self-respect and we should show respect towards others. We must be considerate and remember that we are not alone; we live with others, who are as important and valuable as we are. Indeed, we must try to see things from the perspective of those we disagree with, and we must learn to feel compassion with those who suffer and have nothing. Yet, we may never quite feel the pain they feel.

All this mean that we must try to listen to everyone; the spouse or friend we disagree with, and the politicians we disagree with, which also include the Taliban and everyone else. We should cherish own values if they accommodate all. We should fight – peacefully – for all we believe is right.

And then again, making reference to the Norwegian king, who underlined that we should listen to others, we should not be afraid of getting close to others. Yet, we should also know that we cannot come close to another person without also holding some of his or her life in our hands, he said, quoting the Danish philosopher K. E. Løgstrup.

The New Year is still young. We still have many days to do what is right. I will try to do my best – together with you – and I will also listen and learn from you.

The writer is a senior Norwegian social scientist with experience from university, diplomacy and development aid.

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