

Is 'forced giving' an option to help the world?

by MARK PAVILONS

'No one has ever become poor by giving.' - Anne Frank

And Mother Teresa once suggested, 'if you can't feed a hundred people, then feed just one.'

Truer words.

Some believe that giving is in our nature as human beings, that we derive a sense of purpose, happiness and fulfilment from giving.

Of course, our ability to give financially is directly linked to our situation and economics.

Surprisingly, the average wage earners in Canada tend to be the most generous. Of Canadian families who give to charity, the amount given has declined for all but the very lowest income band, according to CanadaHelps (CH).

With all the global conflict in the world, and the constant need from Ukraine for more donations from the west, some believe charity begins at home, and should stay at home.

Of course, I agree that we need to address our own problems of poverty, inequality and homelessness. Fortunately, a lot of support is coming from the grassroots.

What some may not realize is we have an obligation, even a mandate, to give to other nations in need. Part of our membership in organizations like NATO, the G7 and UN requires us to budget and pitch in literally millions, perhaps billions, to other countries and their citizens.

The World Health Organization (WHO) recently launched its 2023 health emergency appeal of \$2.54-billion (US) to provide assistance to millions of people around the world facing health emergencies.

The number of people in need of humanitarian relief has increased by almost a quarter compared to 2022, to a record 339 million. Currently, WHO is responding to an unprecedented number of intersecting health emergencies: climate change-related disasters such as flooding in Pakistan and food insecurity across the Sahel and in the greater Horn of Africa; the war in Ukraine; and the health impact of conflict in Yemen, Afghanistan, Syria and northern Ethiopia - all of these emergencies overlapping with the health system disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and outbreaks of measles, cholera, and other killers.

'This unprecedented convergence of crises demands an unprecedented response,' said Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, WHO Director-General. 'More people than ever before face the imminent risk of disease and starvation and need help now. The world cannot look away and hope these crises resolve themselves. I urge donors to be generous and help WHO to save lives, prevent the spread of disease within and across borders, and support communities as they rebuild.'

WHO is currently responding to 54 health crises around the world, 11 of which are classified as Grade 3, WHO's highest level of emergency, requiring a response at all three levels of the organization. As it is often the case, the most vulnerable are the worst hit.

Here at home, CanadaHelps released its Giving Report 2022, revealing declines, largely due to pandemic pressures.

Data provided by CH indicates most charities are small and roughly 78% make less than \$500,000 a year in revenue. Most (90%) employ 10 or fewer full-time staff and 58% are fully run by volunteers.

For those who are involved in a non-profit, you are keenly aware of the work of our tireless volunteers. You know, first-hand how charities work on a shoestring budget, many with no government funding.

And yet, our kind hearts and commitment to our friends and neighbours makes King unique. That's something we should always admire and keep in our hearts.

Of course, the pandemic has hindered local giving and groups know you can't always go to the 'same well' for donations and contributions. And yet, somehow, our residents and business continue to rise to the challenge and give, give, give.

And why not?

Many of us are in a decent position here in Canada, with universal health care, fundamental freedoms, protective services and guaranteed rights to protest, speak out and be heard.

Even if you take global poverty off the table, people in many countries suffer daily from disease, and lack of simple medicine and basic needs like water. They are detained, beaten and killed by dictatorial regimes. In many nations there is no regard for human life.

It's 2023 and sometimes I just can't fathom the plight of these people, or how they live from day to day under such harsh conditions.

In 2020, the top 'giving' nations changed drastically, likely due to the pandemic impacts.

Canada and the U.S. failed to make the top 10, replaced by countries like Indonesia, Kenya, Nigeria, Myanmar and Australia.

I get it, our friends and neighbours right here are hurting.

Grocery thefts are on the rise, as food costs soar. The cost of over-the-counter medications, fuel, taxes, and more are really putting a strain on many citizens.

With random acts of violence permeating the news lately, it's hard to find the silver lining, or see the good in our fellow human beings.

But it's there, I just know it.

Should we 'force' Canadians to help each other out? Should the government impose a 'giving tax' with the entire amount going to charities who need it most?

Maybe our school curriculum should include one day a month of roll-up-your-sleeves volunteering. Our youngsters need to be more aware of what's really going around them.

The demand has never been higher, I get it.

But as Mother Teresa said, let's start with just one!