



GLOBAL CENTRE FOR PLURALISM CENTRE MONDIAL DU PLURALISME

Connection and compassion in times of crisis A letter about COVID-19

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Like many of our peer organizations around the world, over the past week, the Global Centre for Pluralism has put in place several measures to help ‘flatten the curve’ of COVID-19, and support the heroic efforts of medical teams and front-line responders at this unprecedented juncture in our history.

All of us at the Centre are taking social distancing very seriously, as we all must. We are working from home, planned travel has been cancelled and events and activities that would have involved the gathering of our staff and guests are postponed. However, our work is about connections, as a team and with our wider networks of pluralism leaders worldwide. As such, we are trying to find other ways to connect, virtually, and to support one another, from a distance, as we navigate this uncertain time.

In light of the crisis, we are reviewing the deadline for submissions to our Global Pluralism Award and will be communicating any changes very soon. Alongside the tireless efforts of front-line responders and medical staff, we believe strongly that the work of building connections in these times of isolation remains some of the most important work that can be done right now. If necessary, we will adjust the timelines of our Award to ensure it continues to be a platform for inspirational initiatives, as we all see our communities through this crisis.

As an organization that deeply values learning, we have been reflecting on what lessons to draw from this crisis. It is clear that the pandemic will change the global landscape immeasurably. However, what form will this change take? Will it result in hardened isolationism? Will people and nations remain cut off from one another? Or, will we strengthen the ways we connect with and support one another across divides? Will we develop – and act on – more compassionate understandings of inequality, privilege and social isolation from this experience? I believe that there is a powerful opportunity within this crisis. This is a crisis that we all share. It is happening to us all, and this can bring us together. Our global collective isolation offers us an opportunity to realise how deeply we are connected.

We believe that this crisis offers us immediate opportunities to reach out, even from our necessary social distance, to break down the divides of race, class, ethnicity, age, language, and so on, that so often keep us siloed. Inspiring stories are already emerging. ‘Caremongering’ groups have begun in Canada as people volunteer to care for the most vulnerable in their communities with daily errands like groceries and filling prescriptions. People are posting videos of themselves reading children’s books and singing nursery rhymes to support isolated children and their parents. Iranian medical staff in their hazmat suits shared videos of themselves dancing for patients to keep up morale. We have surely now all seen the videos of Italians, young and old, making music for one another from their balconies.

If we are looking for tools to help us overcome the new social and spatial separation, we find fabulous examples among our Global Pluralism Award laureates. [Soliya](#), based in the U.S., offers remote training for those looking to improve their virtual facilitation skills for online cross-cultural conversations. [Wapikoni](#), based in Canada, is compiling lists of films, documentaries, podcasts, books and games from Indigenous artists around the world, recognizing that arts and culture bring people together in times of crisis.

The pandemic also offers us a deeper awareness of the experiences of those who face inequalities and social isolation on a regular basis. For those of us with the privilege to afford alternative childcare when schools shut down, work remotely when offices close, and access quality health care, we must seize this opportunity to support those with less. When our lives return to normal, let us think of those who are feeling alone, as newcomers to Canada, as those struggling financially, or in other invisible ways. We now all know how this feels, and we have the power to reach out and connect to counter isolation.

What are the stories of resilience you have heard? What compassionate initiatives are you involved in? We want to know about them. Please share them with us on Twitter and Facebook.

Rose LeMay, who heads up the Indigenous Reconciliation Group and delivers cultural competence and anti-bias training across Canada, said it well, “There are all sorts of measures for contagion and ‘the curve’. Let’s also measure how contagious is community, caring and kindness. Be the carrier.”

With your wellbeing top of mind, we send good wishes to all of you, our community.