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## 2020 High School Scholarship Essay Contest \$1,000 Award Winner

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My time in Guatemala the last four summers opened my eyes to new perspectives, as my world generally is limited to my high school life in my affluent California suburb. When translating at medical clinics in rural regions of Guatemala, I witnessed the socioeconomic realities of underdeveloped countries by listening to people's stories. Rigoberta Menchu Tum was a fierce advocate for the rights of indigenous people, and my experiences in her native Guatemala illustrate the need for a multidimensional approach to peace.

I met an older woman who had a tumor but no access to advanced medical care to get the help she needed. I met a young man who was expected to take care of his family while laboring in the fields, where he had been exposed to pesticides that caused kidney failure. I met mothers who were struggling to take care of their children and kids who did not have access to educational opportunities. In many rural, indigenous Guatemalan communities, this is the norm. The anxiety and confusion that poverty creates is anything but peaceful.

Many of the social issues I saw in rural Guatemala, however, were vastly different from those of Central America's urban areas. I worked with a largely indigenous community, a group of people whose wealth had been historically drained from their communities. A peaceful society uplifts all of its people, not allowing ethnicity, religion, gender, and other factors to determine one's destiny. As a Pakistani-American, I would often hear stories of my grandparents fleeing India during the Partition of the Subcontinent, a period scarred by Hindu-Muslim violence. Division and oppression fosters the hate needed to upend peace; this is what Rigoberta Menchu Tum witnessed in her homeland during Guatemala's civil war.

The solution to discrimination and poverty is not simple, however. But there are steps we can take to become a society more cognizant of the realities much of the world's population faces. Instead of harnessing the power of markets to enrich corporations, we must create opportunities for the working poor. The global community must come to a consensus that poverty is immoral, and must come to a consensus on what needs to be done to alleviate it. All humans, regardless of socioeconomic status, gender, religion, or ethnic background must be allowed to succeed. Nations that empower the disadvantaged have always seen the most progress.

Even if we can stop the dropping of bombs and violence that plague humanity, we are not at peace. The people I met in Guatemala, while they may not be threatened with violence the way they historically have, the environment of fear that poverty and discrimination creates is certainly

not peaceful. Closer to home, when children in Sacramento face food insecurity and parents worry about their families - that is not peace. When immigrants face fear of their uncertain future because of their documentation status - that is not peace. Therefore, as long as poverty and discrimination wage war on humanity, we must stand up and fight back.