**How Can We Obey the Law Against War?**

“Why are your legs so badly injured?,” I inquired. Laughing, while trying to hide his pain, my father answered, “I have them because I knew it was going to make you stick around me all day staring at them.” He was right. My fascination with the human body and its ability to take different forms made me gaze at his legs all day. Growing up, I always dreamt of becoming a medical doctor. “I want to be able to play with people’s organs and understand how they really function,” I used to say. Despite my fascination with the sight, I knew that my father’s injuries caused him a lot of discomfort. My mother always repeated the story of the time when he was shot by rubber bullets when he was tried to cross a checkpoint. I was only eleven when I saw my father in this state. It left a long lasting impact. I am still engrossed at the fact we, human beings, are able to harm one another, kill a soul, and initiate wars.

Growing up in the midst of conflict in Palestine, I sometimes got into situations that were not different than my father being shot by a rubber bullet. Having to cross checkpoints from one city to another, and breathing tear gas from clashes between protesters and Israeli troops were part of my daily routine. Oddly enough, I even thought that breathing tear gas was a commonality for people around the world. It was when I left Palestine for the first time in 2010 that I realized that these things were not only foreign to everybody else, but they were also something they would not tolerate.

Encountering these events made me wonder whether one day, we, as humans will be able to challenge our brutal ability of starting wars, and work towards a more peaceful world. If you ask a school child about the year that World War Two started, they are likely to quickly give you the correct answer. However, if you ask the same child about individuals who made an effort to prevent wars, or pacts that were signed to make wars illegal, such as the Kellogg-Briand Pact, they would seldom be able to give you a solid answer.

After the catastrophic death of more than 16 million people during World War I, people around the world became aware of the real cost. It was important to guarantee that such (mis)use of mass power would not take place in the future. Peace advocates, such as Nicholas Murray Butler and James T. Shotwell, assisted the French Minister of Foreign Affairs, Aristide Briand, who initiated the Pact. Briand signed a bilateral agreement with the United States to outlaw wars between the two nations. The agreement came to be known as the Kellogg-Briand Peace Pact. This April 1927 agreement gained support from President Calvin Coolidge and Secretary of State Frank B. Kellogg, who suggested inviting other nations to join them in outlawing war. Initially, fifteen nations signed the pact, and 47 nations soon followed. Among the early signatories were: France, the United Kingdom, Ireland and Canada. The Kellogg-Briand Pact contains two Articles. Article I states that the contracting parties solemnly declare that "they condemn recourse to war for the solution of international controversies, and renounce it as an instrument of national policy in their relations with one another.” In Article 2, the contracting countries agree that the settlement of all disputes with each other "shall never be sought except by pacific mean.”

Despite the initial optimism, the limitations of the Pact quickly became apparent. In 1931, Japan invaded Manchuria in northern China. The League of Nations did little about this blunt act of aggression. It became clear that there were no mechanisms in place to enforce the articles of the Pact. And when Germany invaded Poland in the fall of 1939, the Kellogg-Briand Pact was all but alive.

Despite its practical failure, one must not completely dismiss the Kellogg-Briand Pact. The spirit behind the Pact remains very alive. History has proven time and again that people have a lot of power to fight for peace. After all, it is the same spirit of the Kellogg-Briand Pact that brought an end to, among other things, wars, slavery, and apartheids.

In order to be able to bring the countries that signed this pact into compliance, the youth should, first, be aware of its existence. Attending a liberal arts college has given me the opportunity to meet a lot of passionate people who aspire to work towards preventing wars. I have been part of various student clubs and organizers whose chapters are working around the world. As an activist, I could work in a much better capacity by fighting against wars if I knew that there is a law that makes war illegal. Without knowing about this Pact, activists could hardly hold their leaders accountable for their decisions to engage in wars. The first step may be to have all the non-governmental human rights movement, such as Amnesty International, spread awareness about the Pact. The second step would be to establish a campaign by the leaders of various non-violent movements to put pressure on the governments who signed the Pact to obey the law against war. This campaign will include boycott, divestment, and political and economic sanction. This movement will take place against the government engaging in wars  that are not act of self defense until they comply with international law and human rights. In order to do so, it is crucial to target citizens, activists, businessmen, political leaders, and government officials that believe in the need to end the war. After all, these governments are more likely to follow our demand when they are pressured by their very own constituencies. This strategy has shown to be successful in the past. Notably, the South African BDS movement mounted enough political and economical pressure to cause the South African government to end its apartheid regime.

“The Kingdom of God is within man” says the 17th Chapter of St. Luke. The Kingdom of God is not within one man, or a group of men, but within all men. We, the people, have the power and responsibility to shape a world without war. Perhaps one day we can live in the world that Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King Jr. sacrificed their own lives for.