

# New Year's Letter from Yassin

Dear Friends:

Our lives are spent between fear and hope. As long as we live, we never free ourselves from them. Of course, our concerns differ based on age, need, time, environment, position, etc. It's normal to have, and hold, both fear and hope simultaneously. But we must balance them. One factor must not overcome the other. Hope overtaken by fear leads to weakness and pessimism, yet hope absent of fear can cause laziness and carelessness. Just as concern motivates us to work hard to prevent hazards and dangers from occurring on our planet, we also need hope to strengthen us and make us patient as we struggle to realize our dreams.

The new year is a good occasion for all of us to take account of ourselves, to reflect on our accomplishments and setbacks of the previous year, and to renew our lists of goals for the coming year, setting them in order based on priority. It's true there is no end to our needs; as we grow, our needs grow with us proportionately. If we ask people about their hopes and fears, we will hear many different dreams and concerns. Each person will have his/her own opinion about ideal living conditions, yet few worry themselves with the problems that affect the entire planet and humanity as a whole. Maybe we forget that such dilemmas will have an impact on our own lives also. We must focus some of our energy and efforts toward rectifying the general issues that affect us all. We have to set definite goals aimed at education and at benefiting the people. If a unified effort is not made, perhaps we will be the victims of our own actions. Perhaps we will pay for not fulfilling our responsibilities.

The following is a list of some of the threats we are going to face in the new year or in the near future. Please make working hard to prevent them a part of your new year's resolutions, and whenever possible inform and warn people about them.

## 1. Economic crisis/recession

I am not an economist, but I know that worldwide the downward spiral of the economy will affect the lives of millions in different ways. History has clearly proven to us that hunger and unemployment leads to fighting and conflict. Many people have their own ideas about how to solve this crisis, but few strike at the root of the matter, thus leaving us where we are today. We need to make real, fundamental changes in our way of spending and in our spending habits. Food, energy, and other resources should never be wasted.

## 2. Poverty/necessity

It's good to follow the reports from the UN (and from other humanitarian organizations) dealing with hunger and food shortages in different parts of the world. You will be shocked to find out how many people at this very moment have no place to rest. You won't believe the number of people who go to bed hungry every night, who have no clean water to drink, who are living with sickness and pain, deprived of medical treatment and proper medication, who are living in darkness with no electricity. Let us reflect how we feel when the power in our own homes goes out, when we miss a meal, or when we experience the pain from injury or sickness—and then let us remember that for millions worldwide, this is their everyday plight.

## 3. Global warming and climate change

Those who know me know how much I worry and talk about this issue. In fact, I wanted to place this issue number one on the list, but I felt that the previous two threats have a more immediate effect on many people, and while the majority of people may have trouble understanding our environmental challenges, they can easily relate to poverty and unemployment. I, however, truly grasp the serious nature of this threat. I am a student and supporter of Mr. Al Gore, and I encourage you to support him and his organization or to join any other organization that is working to reduce humanity's negative impact on the environment, which may soon leave millions homeless, jobless, hungry, and sick.

#### 4. War and conflict

How sad it is to see human beings destroying the planet instead of humanely building it up. Instead of saving lives, lives are ended. With just a fraction of the money and energy we are spending to wage war, we could provide food and medication for all the world's needy. It's shameful to increase the number of refugees, homeless, injured, sick, and poor while we fail to prepare for and recognize Mother Nature's warning signal—global warming. We can claim whatever we want, but history, reality, and fact tell us that war is just a distraction, and it's the wrong way to go about achieving any good.

#### 5. Sickness and disease

Do you know how many people worldwide suffer from HIV/AIDS and cancer and don't have access to the proper medication? Do you know how many people here in the U.S., the richest country in the world, live without medical insurance?

Although there are many, many more concerns that need to be listed, I just wanted to remind you of some of them, with the hope that you will add them to your list of personal concerns. Surely they will have a profound effect on the lives of millions, and there will be no fleeing or safety from them. I hope this will motivate us all to change our behavior and to make us understand our great responsibility. We need to ask ourselves every single day, what can we do to help solve the problems plaguing humanity?

But as we welcome the new year, there are also plenty of good signs, and new discoveries should encourage us to start the new year with hope and to be optimistic. Let me remind you of some of them:

A) There are many good, honest, restless scholars and scientists who work hard at solving our problems and innovating new concepts to make our lives easier. Their discoveries in neurological research, for example, have shed light on some of the mysteries of the function of the brain, and this may soon aid us in curing and preventing many diseases.

B) The new treatment for cancer is another big discovery, which promises to be of benefit to millions now suffering from this devastating ailment.

C) There are many wise people who have dedicated themselves to lives of peace. They are coming together and working to promote better understanding among the people of the world by calling for dialogue, peaceful relations, and peaceful coexistence between nations, sects, races, and religions instead of fighting. We should appreciate what they are standing and working for, and help them in every possible way to make that dream a reality.

D) The achievements of the peace-seekers and justice-lovers of the anti-war and civil rights movements are on the rise. Each year millions of new people join them. We should find hope and glad tidings in the new loud voices we hear from these groups.

E) People are tired of war, tired of being lied to, tired of racism; hopefully they will stand up for truth and justice and refuse to sacrifice their lives and the lives of their beloved ones for war-lords and their interests and bloody business in the name of security.

Let us look forward, wish and hope for the best, and do whatever we can to make a difference. Please stay strong and keep firm. If we have the will and patience, we can make it.

I ask God for His mercy and guidance for all of us, and I WISH YOU ALL A BEAUTIFUL AND HAPPY NEW YEAR.

Yours in concern,  
Yassin Aref

*January, 2009*