

LOOKING BEYOND THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC IN 2021



The year 2020 will remain indelible in the mind of this generation. With the emergence of covid-19, all the ambitious plans of 2020 came to nought. It will go down in history as a year that defied the power of science and human prediction. As the year winds to a close, the pandemic's socio-economic fallouts still stare us firmly in the face and leave us to look into 2021 with significant trepidation, reservations and *in proviso*. Indeed, it is beginning to sink into human consciousness that despite our technological advancement and scientific precision, the future is entirely out of any human control. Yet amid these uncertainties, we must look into 2021 with great hope.

Hope indeed tends to be vague, wishful, and even superficial as accurately observed by the Right Reverend John, Bishop of Salford. In his recent BBC Radio Four broadcast; he quipped, "*hope we will not be late for the event.*" But for Christians who understand its meaning, hope is a virtue much more grandeur. It is a firm conviction that no matter the darkness surrounding us, there is light at the end of the tunnel, no matter the difficulties before us now, solutions are waiting for us behind the curtains and despite the present challenges, there are possibilities and opportunities; darkness cannot have the final word.

Nevertheless, looking into the future with hope from the wreckage of a year that went awry is very demanding. It is tough, if not impossible, to dance with the devil on your back. In the song "*Lord of Dance*" the author Leo Buscaglia tells a powerful story about his family. His father came back from work one day and announced that he had lost all he has worked for in life because his business partner had run away with their fund. That evening, his mother sold some of her expensive jewellery and bought food for a very sumptuous feast. Some people criticized her for reckless spending at a time when starvation was threatening her family. She replied that the "time for joy is now when we need it most; not next week; tomorrow is in the hands of God."^[1] Her courageous act rallied her family and gave them the hope that they needed to face the future with confidence and trust; that God was in control.

Undoubtedly, the global community's most pressing desire is to get the pandemic behind us, for things to return to 'normal'. The emergence of the vaccines indicates that we may be edging close to the goal. However, the looming fear is that once this health crisis is under control, the economic superpowers would plunge even more deeply into new forms dominations, exploitation and self-preservation at the cost of the weak nations. Without a second thought, they will shove aside the opportunity offered to the global human community by the pandemic for an economic and social reset^[2]. AEFJN underlines that any effort to go back to the pre-

COVID-19 era of economic geopolitics and domination would mean that the global community has not internalized the critical lessons of the pandemic.

As a way forward, we propose that the global community, led by the economic powers, explore the salient revelations of COVID-19 like reducing travels to only the needful. Avoid the mad rush for prosperity without growth and reprioritize corporate and national goals. Europe and the US must be prepared to overcome the inertia of economic geopolitics and dominations while exploring the most significant opportunities offered by the pandemic for the furtherance of human fraternity and social solidarity.

Recently, Pope Francis noted in his encyclical (*Fratelli Tutti*) that a worldwide tragedy like the COVID-19 pandemic has revived the sense that we are a global community, all in the same boat where one person's problems are the problems of all [31]. However, the international community has not shown any readiness to tap into this rare opportunity. Indeed, the response will require a recalibration of the human heart to overcome ego inertia and look beyond personal conveniences, geographical barriers, and sociopolitical interests. The goal should be to open us to the grand ideals of human fraternity [52]. Unless we recover the shared vision and passion for creating a community of belonging and solidarity [36], 2021 may go down in history as one of the missed most significant opportunity to build a new world order and a more peaceful global community. The time to start is now! 'Time and tides', they say, 'waits for no one!' In this vein, all of us at AEFJN call on all people of goodwill to look toward 2021 with hope despite the vicissitudes of 2020!

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[1] Munachi Ezeogu, "unpublished works".

[2] Zanny Minton Beddoes, "*After the Crisis, Opportunity*" in *The Economist*; November, 2020.