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The crazy world we live in

Prepared by Herbert Jauch for The Villager newspaper

Like most people across the world, Namibians focus mostly on their own lives and challenges with many waging a daily struggle for survival. We tend to accept the conditions under which we live and work as a given and forget that these conditions are made by people and therefore can also be changed by people. Given the fact that many people are still struggling to make ends meet, it seems obvious that changing these conditions is an urgent task in Namibia and in Africa as a whole. A recently published report on global poverty and inequality reminded us that this challenge is indeed global and that the way the world operates right now needs to be changed.

At a time when the world's political and economic leaders hold their annual meeting in Davos, Switzerland under the fancy title "World Economic Forum", the international development organisation Oxfam released a new report that once again showed how crazy and absurd our world has become. Never in its history has humanity been so divided along the lines of wealth and poverty. At a time of great technological progress and the real possibility to wipe out poverty world-wide, one third of the world's population still lives in poverty, unable to even meet their basic needs. On the other hand, the world's richest 85 people have a combined wealth of US\$ 1,7 trillion. This is as much as the wealth of the poorest 3.5 billion people combined! Such figures are almost incomprehensible and it is perhaps worth writing out U\$1.7 trillion in figures: 1 700 000 000 000 ...

Business leaders and most politicians will argue that we merely have to accept such inequalities as a by-product of free market capitalism which they claim rewards those who work hard and allows them to accumulate wealth unhindered. They may even claim that it is in human nature to be greedy and that each country has to just open their doors to foreign capital in order to reap economic benefits and to create employment. Practically, this means less taxes for corporations and the rich and less protection for the poor and vulnerable. Dozens of countries have followed this path for the last 30 years and the outcome was precisely the absurd levels of inequality which we are seeing today.

Despite that, the global elites (like those meeting in Davos) continue to sing the same old song and urge governments of the world to become even more "business-friendly". Even when the economic conditions of the poor deteriorate, even when mass unemployment continues to rise, even when hopelessness is spreading, we still hear the same old song: Liberalise your economy, reduce the taxes, make business operations easier, reduce wages and workers' protection and most of all do not control and redistribute your national resources in favour of the poor!

The rich and powerful of this world are so confident and arrogant in their approach

today that they simply ignore the lived experiences of the world's majority. They continue preaching the free-market gospel which is then repeated by local political and economic leaders. This creates the impression that no other way is possible, that all countries merely need to adapt to the global order, no matter how unjust it might be. This mental control is probably the biggest weapon in the hands of global elites today and breaking free from it has to be the starting point if we want to build societies that are human, that are socially just and that are sustainable in the sense of using the resources we have not for our own immediate personal interests but for the common interest of the current and future generations.

This may sound like a far-fetched dream but throughout human history we have seen that people are able to change their circumstances, that they are able to fight back and that they can live by their ideals as they struggle to build a new society. We must not forget that liberation and emancipation are long processes and not mere events. Many Namibians have bravely fought colonialism and achieved independence but we seem to have fallen prey to the logic of a global wild west capitalism. Naked materialism and individualism have gradually replaced our human values of solidarity and social justice and we seem to think that individual gain this is the only way to go. However, our own experiences and recent developments in other parts of the world, especially Latin America, have shown that other ways are possible. We should not be scared of envisioning and then building another kind of society and another kind of world. It is indeed possible.

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