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HOST: Maybe it was easier to avoid heated debates before we were all living under pandemic rules. Or maybe this is just the result of our small bubbles of safety, but when we have different opinions. getting caught up in Twitter arguments or disagreeing with family members, it's easy to forget about what the other person is going through. As Mustafa Ahmed reminds us, human rights begin with human. It's time to be vulnerable and listen to our emotions and to other people's ideas, especially now, when everything from statues to money to masks is so polarized. Welcome to The Conversation Piece. Let's listen to Mustafa the Poet from The Walrus Talks Human Rights.

MUSTAFA AHMED: Hi, Hey, I'm a 17-year-old poet. My name is Mustafa and I'm from the Regent Park community. And, uh, it's an honour to be here today, sharing the stage with such a wealth of knowledge. And, um, I don't regularly sit down before a performance before a talk, but I'm so happy that I did today. Cause there was just so much that I learned from, uh, human rights, uh, such a broad topic and I'm uh, I'm so humbled that I was chosen to come here and speak about my perspective. When I thought human rights, I began to ask my friends what human rights means. Um, and a lot of them said they didn't know, actually all of them said he didn't know. So I said it didn't exist. It didn't exist around the world, but I knew that it did. And I knew that it's something that I think that we'd like to believe is universal, but it's not because there's a difference between laws that are placed and laws that are enforced a huge difference between laws that are in place and laws that are enforced.

And the ones that are enforced are enforced by the people. And so one topic that a lot of people touched on today where the now 300 girls, about 300 girls that were stolen in Nigeria. And I did my best to raise awareness, you know, amongst, amongst my classmates and my school and my community. But what I really took from it, what's the Twitter hashtag? #bringbackourgirls. It wasn't bringing back their girls. It wasn't bringing back her daughter. It was bringing back our girls. It's what, when you, when what happened was when they did that, it was just inclusive. It was that inclusivity. And you just, you just feel that entitlement and you just, you feel, you feel like you're a part of something greater. And what that is is that, that family of humanity. And I think that's where human rights begins. Human rights begins with humanity.

Like I can talk to my friend and I know that human rights is something that was adopted by the political world. And so a lot of people that would connect it back to that, they connected back to the definition of a United nations would have forward. But for me, it's about something that just happens between two people. It's these underlying laws of the universe that we have, and we are just born. I'm not going to turn to my friend when he insults me and tell him, Hey, you just violated human rights code two seven, three, five, six. Revoke your statement. Because if he doesn't revoke a statement, I'll probably violate another human rights code and that doesn't solve an issue.

What my goal, my goal is to help him understand, force him into understanding because that's the most thing. I want him to understand why it is that I feel that way, because if we're able to trigger our minds and stimulate our minds and, and just, just try and understand, because we have the ability to do that. We have the ability to understand something and understand and wrap our head around the concept. We begin to feel it with our heart and it made so much sense to me. Human rights begins with human. And I think a lot of people think it's a given that when you're born, you're a human, but no, because being a human with being a human comes a lot of responsibility. It's about using your heart and using your mind and not disregarding the emotional aspects of your heart. Because I may have another friend who takes pride in being heartless and I'm heartless.



Of course, they need their heart to pump blood throughout their body. They need that biology to, to, to exist, to be alive, but they may disregard that part. But you can't because now that you, your soul is in this body, you have to be able to use every aspect of your body, that emotional, that emotional aspect, the aspect that helps you think that helps stimulate your mind. And so that's what I try to do through poetry. Cause I'm a pull it in. I'm an artist. And that's what I try to do. Cause I know that the arts, what it does is like it triggers so much different emotions that other things can do that sometimes that math couldn't do for me, that science couldn't do for me, the arts that did that for me, even my two year old nephew will look at me when I'm hurt and I'll turn to him and I'll be like, listen, we have our, we on my finger and he'll look at me and he'll read, he'll look at me, he'll read the motion or he'll read my hand and he'll read my face and he'll understand he, my uncle is going through something right now and he'll kiss my hand and he'll kiss it, kiss it, kiss it.

And he's like, is it better? And I'm like, yes, it's better because you know why? Because he put himself in that position that it's that innate trigger that just puts yourself there. It puts yourself there because you have that. Everyone has that empathetic drive, that sympathetic drive. And he had that as well, because he knows that when he's hurt, I'm going to kiss his finger. And you know, sometimes he was never hurt and he just wanted a kiss on his finger, but that's not the point. It's the fact that he knows that a kiss is just great and everyone wants to be kissed. And so that's why I'm going to move on and I'll tell you why I was so I'm so happy that I was here sitting down today. It's of course, to, to hear all of the amazing speakers, but he and Brown, I'm happy.

I heard you today because what I'm going to be touching on right now. And the piece that I'm gonna be sharing today is on mental health. And it's about me opening myself up. I opened. And so that's what I do when I'm in the writing process, I try to make myself as vulnerable as possible. And I knew that I had a lot of people in my life who were suffering from mental health issues, mental health disabilities. And I didn't know why. And it was not something that I understood. So it was hard for me to feel for them. So I had conversations with mothers. I had conversations with those patients and my sister worked at each at the time. And I went in and I tried to do some work over there. And I just really wanted to understand. I made myself as vulnerable as possible. And every time I perform it, I try to put myself back there so that other people can feel as well. So without further ado, this piece is entitled invisible disabilities.

Invisible disabilities they can see. We'll tell for happiness they can see. Crutches for relaxation. They can't see invisible disabilities. He said, it's an internal battle. And that everyone in his army is half willing and blind that he fights with doubts wrapped around his own ankles. alongside his heart, his opponent, his own mind. He locked on his waist the metal shackle, because at times he can not resist the temptations of the other side. Sleep is the only thing his piece is enshrined in. Chopped in the darkness of anxiety searching, depending on a temporary, we like to shine in. And after the lie that he wants to lay close with, he find that he accepted his diagnosis and all they did was confine him. And so did their words.

Bullies. Bullies with big poisonous claws, sharpen using insults that even he thought defined him. He just wanted people to see him. As he fought in this invisible war for his sanity, because they needed to know that when he is laughing, it's in agony. That when he's hyperactive, his illusions are wrestling with this reality that his depression spirals from past experiences, that ended tragically. That is medication strips him of emotion, hence why he doesn't socialize naturally that he can't accept himself anymore. Because



he looks into the mirror with the lenses of humanity and they never gave him a chance. He forgot how to enjoy himself. And no one is willing to teach him or give him that chance. And so all he has is a dance. It's a dance, a contemporary dance with his illusions. His confusion makes them sweat. Left. Fourth, beginning new sets, every rotation, another we've got send every rotation. Another is upsets and every rotation comes another hope for his own death to come.

And he's a son. And so what happens when the mother holds the hand of a child, but can't touch him anymore. When she knows of the battle he fights inside, but it's still blindfolded in the swore when she tries to sympathize with. But her level of understanding is too poor. What happens when the mother tries to brush joy on a child's emotions that were already destroyed at the core. When the mother and sons relationship cannot be maintained. When any relationship a child's had cannot be restored. When the boy can't even love himself like he did once before. So he tries to sing invisible disabilities. They can't see stitches for laughter. They can't see ... band-aids for hope. They still can't see invisible disabilities. So he watches the hands on the clock, struggled to keep forth. There are too many reasons to be grieving. So his river of tears have lost their courses.

Eyelashes have felt more liquid than the clouds because the thread of his explanations are constantly cut short. He once felt like a child, once thought love was nothing less than amazing. But now the sons keeps in horror as fire raging, and it's raised curve away from his eyes. A blazing - see they vial, but no one is correctly. Gazing. See this young boy carries the weight of a mountain on his body, but all they see is a backpack, and so... Who's the one not engaging - we're disengaging. Alienating him from a sense of normality. He sees a door for the physically handicap and it's opening automatically, but his door is yet to be created. So he doesn't know how to enter society, invisible disabilities. You will never see. You will never see. And it's not something you must see. It's something you must know exists that the invisible first aid kits and bandaids and crutches and wheelchairs are coming. And this boy must know that we'll care. That the battle will be fought with those that can feel. And that's far better than those that can just see. So let us use love and compassion to make visible invisible disabilities because human rights, however, you may define it. However, the United nations may define it. However, the world may define it. Don't ever let that influence or replace our natural ability as human beings to be compassionate, understanding and empathetic.

Thank you.

HOST: Mustafa Ahmed is a spoken word poet and has been a speaker with us a few times - and he's just one of the over 800 fantastic Canadians who have walked and wheeled the stage at The Walrus Talks. If you enjoyed this talk as much as we did, our YouTube channel is the place to find all The Walrus Talks. Until then, sign up to our weekly newsletters to stay in touch. At [thewalrus.ca](http://thewalrus.ca) slash newsletters.