

OPEN DIALOGUE
FACULTY OF SOCIAL WELLBEING
10th January 2022

(Discussion and Reflection on the recent events that led to the murder of Paulina Dembska)

Thank you so much Dean, for your tireless initiatives to dialogue and reflect on the most sensitive of current events.

I would like to start my contribution, by conveying my deepest condolences to Paulina's family.

My heart, is feeling the pain that this tragedy has imposed on YOU.

I am truly sorry.

I am very sad.

I am in fact heartbroken.

I look at Paulina's face, and see my daughter's face.

I am utterly confused.

I am actually very angry and in pain.

Indeed, I am shaken, just as many of you and so many others, out there are.

During these past few days, I have been contacted by many people, in particular young people, through messages, and phone calls, asking me for some time to meet to share their feelings and emotions.

Undoubtedly, a shocking event like this, has intensified our need to share our feelings, our worries, and our fears.

Yes, right now, as a nation, we are mourning, and grieving; processing what Paulina's loss means to us.

As a nation, Paulina's murder has touched us immensely, and profoundly.

It has hurt most of us.

It has left many of us perplexed and confused.

Most of us, are living, as if Paulina was our own daughter, our niece, or our friend; someone close to us, part of our family and our life.

We might also feel a diminished sense of safety, and feel scared, helpless, or on the verge of giving up.

In the face of such a sudden tragedy, we might also be trying, to push the idea of Abner far away from us, from our household, from our family, from our circle of life.

But deep down inside, somehow, we know it, we feel it, that Abner too, is part of our community; and that Abner too, could have been our son, our nephew, someone close to us or our friend.

-Pause-

And yet ... in the midst, of all this chaos and confusion, and after all the painful encounters and reflections, that I had during these last days, a quote from Dalai Lama sprang to my mind, which says:

"Tragedy should be utilized as a source of strength. No matter what sort of difficulties, how painful experience is, if we lose our hope, that's our real disaster."

It was this quote that inspired me to convey a message of hope today.

As many of you know, I have lived most of my life striving and advocating for the rights of children and young people. I believe like

many of you here, that every child should be given the opportunity to thrive. No child should fall out of, the safety and protection net.

In the face of this tragedy, I hear like a clock ticking away, reminding us, again and again, that time is passing; and that we need to act now, before it is even more too late.

We need to give our society a new **hope**.

We need to give children and young people **hope**.

The Hope that our society is committed to protect them and safeguard their rights.

The Hope that they will find effective support structures in times of need.

The Hope that the present is worth living and the future is worth looking forward to.

And I see this **HOPE**. There has never been such a widespread and diverse show of solidarity, and anger, but also a new sense of DETERMINATION and RESOLVE.

Let us not let this tragedy be forgotten after a while.

We must ensure that we will effectively act on all the lessons learnt.

Let us continue with the momentum that it has garnered to act holistically.

Let this tragedy, give each, and every one of us, here and out there - whether we are policy makers, educators, guardians, parents, members of civil society organisations or members of the general public - **renewed energy and focus, to invest more in our support systems and services**.

We need to invest even more, in our children and young people, to sustainably empower our society with the necessary values and skills of resilience, to be able to overcome life's challenges.

It is by investing holistically in our children and young people, that we can ensure that such horrendous tragedies, will not continue to be repeated time and time again.

And most of all, let us be the mentors, and the role models for our children and young people.

Our children and young people earnestly need, true and effective models, that they can look up to, for the true meaning of respect, empathy, compassion, human dignity, equality, and responsible citizenship.

-Pause-

Our conversation today, should convey to the children and young people living on these islands, that we believe that there is HOPE for a better society, that is free of inequality, violence, and free of the patriarchal culture, that has dominated for so many generations.

This conversation should convey that there are people, who are determined to continue to stand up against violence, and for respect, empathy, compassion and human dignity.

We need to empower our Children and Young People to stand up for these values and rights.

I am convinced, that an Adult and Children and Young People collaboration, we can make this tragedy the beginning of the end to violence and the patriarchy.

