

**"How will living through a pandemic while gaining an international education help me make a difference in the world?"**

We currently live in a world consumed by uncertainty and fear. For an international student, in addition to this we are going through it completely alone with our families thousands of miles away. The reason most of us pursue an international education is because we have the urge to gather knowledge to make a difference which we would not be able to in our native countries. However, doing this during in a foreign country, in a pandemic has brought a lot of other aspects to how we can help make a difference. In this essay I am going to discuss what my personal views are on the question above.

To begin, I have spent a good time of my life thinking that one person is unable to make a difference in the world. However, since I have moved to the States, I have observed that statement to be untrue. I have witnessed so many good deeds, some of which I had participated in myself, to learn that every act of kindness and help is valid, no matter how small. In addition, I have learned about a myriad of social and environmental issues and how to get involved in solving them. Most importantly, I have discovered that my voice matters and can be used for change. With all of that said the pandemic has brought a lot of those issues in the world to the forefront and displayed how much work we have in front of us.

One issue that was incredibly prominent is social injustice. To say that my view on diversity and social justice has changed since my education in the States started, would be a gross understatement. I grew up in the small country of Bulgaria with a population of less than 7 million people the majority of which is white. We do not have diversity; we do not speak of it and we do not know anything about it. Since, I have arrived here, I have had the pleasure of

making friends from all over the world, learning about their culture, traditions, languages, etc. It has been the most enriching and enlightening experience of my life. It has expanded my mind and my view of the world exponentially, something that might have never happened if I were back home. With all the beautiful things that I have learnt, I have also, learnt about that struggles that my friends have had to face. The stories of discrimination, hate, mockery and hardships were heartbreakingly devastating. As we all know though this pandemic the rise against discrimination and racism was one of the most prominent events of this year. I was very lucky to be here and in school, since in my country those movements were lightly acknowledged. Due to my proximity and access I was able to be an ally by listening to stories, having the difficult conversations, and educating myself. The fact that I was in classes provided me with the opportunity to analyze what was going on in my papers and discussion boards and get an even bigger perspective on the matter. I truly believe that having the ability to arm myself with such knowledge will make me be of better service in the pursuit of equality and social acceptance. I can aid in making that difference in the world. Moreover, I have seen that in the camaraderie of how international students help each other adjust to living in a new country, especially during these difficult times.

Another thing that I have gained through my international education, in addition to helping spread the word about social and economic injustice, is the enormous issue with global warning. These are things that were rarely discussed in my country and were always brushed off as a myth. Through my education in America, I was introduced to the various ways that I can help contribute to make a difference in the world. One was volunteering for the Palos Verdes Peninsula Land Conservancy to help restore the natural vegetation in that region by cleaning up the area and planting native plants. Though that job, I was able to make contacts and put my newly earned skills of filmmaking to create a couple of informative videos on how people can

get involved and help this cause. This experience was eye-opening, because it made me think about the waste and destruction of vegetation around us. It inspired me to make changes in my own personal life to live more ecofriendly and reduce my footprint. I have used the extra free time in the pandemic to evaluate my lifestyle and make those changes to reduce my waste. The fact that I reside in Los Angeles provided me with access to zero-waste, package free shops and many more businesses, groups, and individuals to accommodate and make my new lifestyle easier. In addition, the fact that our schools make the effort to spread awareness and implicate programs to encourage us to be less wasteful, is encouraging and helpful. For comparison, my country barely has a recycling system in place and has consistently been rated as one of the places with worst air-quality in Europe.

I can go on for hundreds of pages how having the opportunity to not only live but get an education in America has enriched and changed my life. The fact that I had the luck to be here during the pandemic and continue my education is one of the few blessings of this year. It is something I will never take for granted, especially knowing how much my family is sacrificing to keep me here. One of the most important things I have gotten from my education here during the pandemic is that I have a voice. And it does not matter that I am just one person, I can use my voice to help people and be ally, to make change happen. I can march alongside my brothers and sisters and use this newfound voice to push against the injustices of this world. The fact that I am here, and I have the immense opportunity to learn not only from my incredible professors but from my peers is the best thing that has happened in my life. I have found purpose, validity, worth and strength to make the world I live in a better place.