



The Bobby McFerrin pop song *Don't Worry Be Happy* could well have been the theme song for World Happiness Day celebrated at the UN, and around the world, on 20th March. At first glimpse this might seem rather trivial but the intent behind this celebration is of great importance. Central to human existence is happiness and without a sense of well-being societies become conflicted, divided and self-serving. What was celebrated was the need for all people to have a sense of well-being, which is at the heart of stable and peaceful societies. Professor Jeffrey Sachs, a panellist at the UN Happiness Day, asked why Denmark is so happy given that it has a miserable climate and high taxes? The response from the people of Denmark was that they feel safe, they trust the authorities, their governments put in place policies that enable people to make choices and there is a social safety net so no one is left in poverty. This year's report on world happiness identifies the fundamental building blocks of happiness as: trust, equality, engagement of the citizens in the political process, transparency and access to health, employment, education and justice.

Creating a sense of well-being ought to be at the centre of all public policy and the Sustainable Development Goals which focus on eliminating poverty, leaving no one behind and protecting the planet provide a framework for peaceful and happy societies. If people are vulnerable and the planet is suffering, then unhappiness pervades the whole society. Bhutan, the country which first measured the happiness of its citizens, argues that governments have to create the conditions for happiness and encourage in their citizens a generosity of spirit. Professor Sachs suggests that the only point of government is to improve the well-being of its citizens.

A sense of well-being is not reliant on wealth nor is GDP a measure of happiness, although an adequate income is important. Research indicates that the greatest societal enemies of happiness are a lack of trust in the authorities, growing inequality and no social safety net. Racism, xenophobia and demonising "the other" leave minorities vulnerable and insecure. The recent changes to visa requirements in a number of countries have heightened unhappiness and alienation. Making people feel welcome does much to engender well-being. Given the deal of discord, division and human misery in the world at the moment the government of the United Arab Emirates, in conjunction with the United Nations, is funding a Global Happiness Council, chaired by Professor Sachs and bringing together the world's leading economists, scientists, psychologists, city planners and other academics to provide practical tools for countries to use in their pursuit of happiness. They will produce a report and a series of recommendations by February 2018. *Don't Worry Be Happy*, a light hearted response to many of humanities ills, has a profound message for governments, if you don't worry about your citizens' human happiness then peace and prosperity will remain elusive.

Libby Rogerson @ IBVM NGO Office, New York.