

The Nobel Prize winner worries about the poor, not only in his homeland of Bangladesh

YOU NEED A RESCUE

Mr. Yunus, how is your life under the current situation in Bangladesh?

My family and I are fine, and we maintain our distance from visitors. It is our responsibility to stay healthy and take care of those who are in need. We must especially stand by the elderly and the poor. Bangladesh is living through the same pain, same insecurity and fear like any other country. However, due to Bangladesh being the most densely populated country in the World, it is not an easy place to hold a lockdown or practice social distancing. Additionally, we have regular floods, cyclones, and other natural disasters to contend with. Due to global warming, they come more and more frequently and are becoming increasingly worse and more intense.

How has everyday life changed?

In Bangladesh, the number of infections are still rising, but there is no panic among people. Some wear masks, but you can still see many without them. In April and May, there were Government restrictions but these have been canceled since June. There is a certain normality and at the same time, a certain caution.

What are some of the consequences of the western textile trading companies and their orders to factories in your country?

The catastrophic Covid-19 pandemic has caused many shocks in the economy and devastating human blows. The clothing industry is calculated to return to its initial state in the future. But I ask if we should go back to where the world was before the pandemic as it was a terrible world. Global Warming was about to hit the point where human existence on this planet would be impossible. Through the increasing concentration of wealth, we experienced social and Political rumors. Artificial intelligence threatened a rapid, massive increase in unemployment. Why

should we return to this world? The pandemic gives us the chance to correct our mistakes and give people hope for a new world.

You recently started at the international colloquium "Summer of Purpose" a call for Covid- 19 vaccines to be a global public good. Do you think the demand is realistic?

It's the only sensible way to go because the Pandemic can only be defeated if we have a vaccine that can be given to everyone on the planet alike, both in rich and poor countries. More than 100 known Personalities - including 18 Nobel Prize winners and 32 former heads of state and government - are among the first to sign my call. We request that the heads of state and governments take measures to ensure that Covid-19 vaccines are deemed a global common good and are free of cost. Research on the vaccine naturally requires immense economic Investments for them to be used by the general public- but without that Profits are generated. The World Bank and regional development banks should work out details, and the World Health Organization should set up an international committee that oversees vaccine research and ensure free access for all.

You yourself come from a humble background. My family just owned two beds for nine children. My father had a small business and didn't earn much. While children of Small business owners usually have to help out early on in business, it was immensely important for my parents that we went to school. All nine children graduated from university. My Mother earned little from the sale of Needlework. As a child, I was always by her side and watched as she was looking for help, while knocking on the door and being refused. I supported everyone, listened to their stories, and gave them money or advice.

In 2006 you received the Nobel Peace Prize for the introduction of microcredit, which got countless people out of poverty. To what extent did the corona pandemic contribute to the success of the fight against poverty?

97 percent of our Grameen Bank loans are now given to women, enabling themselves and their children to have a better future. Poverty has decreased very strongly in the last 50 years. But we still have a long way to go to prevent it from coming back. There will be setbacks and poverty is not created by the poor, but rather from the system us humans have built. The poor of this world need support, especially now. If we don't redesign the system, poverty will not go away. It is time to act.

Interview conducted by Herlinde Koelbl

Our series »That was my salvation« becomes »I need a rescue« in these weeks: We speak to

those who fear for their families, their jobs and their livelihoods because of the Corona crisis.

Muhammad Yunus, 80 years of age, is from Bangladesh and has a PhD in Economics. He was a university professor, among others in the USA before he founded the Grameen Bank in 1983, that gives microloans to the poor. In 2006 he received the Nobel Peace Prize