"We are intolerant of people who are different." Is this an accurate claim?

There have been prevailing conflicts between various distinctive groups of people today because of their difficulties in reconciling with one another. "Different" people have been usually considered 'The Other', those who are not perceived the same as a dominating group in some fundamental way such as in terms of their age, religion and nationality. Our "Intolerant" attitude towards these people has been hinted through our unwillingness to accept varying views, beliefs or behaviours, often leading to prejudice and discrimination. In my opinion, the claim that we are intolerant of different people is accurate to a certain extent. Conflicts caused by people's fundamental differences have been present almost everywhere and all the time as reflected in history and the present. However, I also believe that such intolerance can be and have been ameliorated with the help of the government in the forms of campaigns, laws and education. In some cases, globalization, which here refers to more interaction between people across borders, might help, too.

Many people believe that we are intolerant of different people because of humans' inherent sense of unease and sometimes even superiority over those from different backgrounds and beliefs. Since the historical times, there has been a plethora of dispute stemming from people's lack of tolerance for their divergence in their roots such as race and religion. Germany's holocaust under the reign of Adolf Hitler during World War Two is an example of a certain race's sense of superiority over the other races, in this case Aryan over Jews, leading to the massacre of more than 30 millions Jews in total. A more recent example would be the burning of churches in Malaysia in 2000 because Muslims felt offended that their god 'Allah', a connotation of God in Islam, was being called the same way by Christians whom they perceived as inferior because they adopted a different religion. These incidents reflect the prejudice people possess over the others who are different. In addition, the fact that there are countless other similar conflicts which have happened due to prejudice and discrimination suggests that perhaps it is human nature for one to develop a sense of unease towards different people.

In addition, there have been practices to amalgamate people with different characteristics and abilities, especially in schools and workplaces. Such attempts

reflect society's desire for people to stay identical instead of diverse, possibly because it is believed to be more 'convenient' in managing people. In most schools, every student is obliged to wear the school uniform, similar, approved shoes, hairstyle and even socks. This suppresses the young people's diverse fashion styles. In the workplace, an example of the attempt to amalgamate workers with different skills can be reflected through a movie, 'The Dead Poet's Society.' In this movie, a protagonist teacher gives lessons to his students in a different style. Instead of the school's traditional, rigid style of teaching in classrooms, he brings the students outside the classroom to teach values. However the school strongly disapproves of his distinct way of educating and soon dismisses him. Through these two examples, we can see that there is society's expectation for everyone to conform to its 'standard'. Penalty for failure to do so in the forms of detention and termination also suggest society's intolerant attitude at the idea of having a different person.

However, we are not all the time intolerant of the different people. The negative emotions towards the Other can be and have been made better with the government providing effective preventive measures and response. For example, the Singapore government has implemented several laws and measures to achieve ethnic harmony, such as the Sedition Act (provision against racist comments), HDB racial quota system (racially integrated living in flats), and Racial Harmony Day (an annual day to celebrate the racial diversity in Singapore and extends our understanding towards the other races). These measures have been effective in achieving racial integration in the country. Singapore is now recognised as one of the most peaceful countries in the world and this suggests that achieving tolerance towards the other races can be possible.

Lastly, increased connectivity between people across borders has been playing a vital role in ameliorating the lack of understanding for the different culture and races. In today's modern world, there are many chances for us to interact with one another from different countries with the help of technology, such as the Internet and our advanced transportation system. This helps expose us to the different types of people in the world and facilitates the learning about their different culture and religions. With the continuous interaction, we are eventually becoming more tolerant of the

different people because we now understand them better. Our previous prejudice about them can also be reduced.

In conclusion, it is true that we are sometimes intolerant of people who differ from us. However, it is not impossible to improve our tolerance on them as seen from the examples of the Singapore government and global interaction between people. Nonetheless, it is important to note that there are some cases, such as in school and workplace, where conformity is admittedly necessary and preferred; it is rules and regulations that everyone has to follow in respect of the institutions and there are so far very few ways to change the rigid styles that many of today's schools and workplaces enforce on people.