

Unesco's Culture of Peace Programme: An Introduction

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Peace, sometimes defined as absence of war, is more accurately understood as a dynamic process involving all individual and communal relationships.

As anyone involved in that process knows, peacemaking requires at least as much courage, imagination, patience, and strategic planning as war-making, with infinitely more positive results. Its goal is nonviolent relations not only between nations but also between states and their citizens and between human beings and their environments. Achieving that goal requires day-to-day peace-building in our families, schools, media, sports, and other associations.

Unesco's Culture of Peace Programme, an integrated approach to peace-building and post-conflict reconstruction, originated in 1992 as the Organization's contribution to United Nations peace efforts. Conceived in terms of national culture-of-peace programmes and initiatives involving the member-states, it has developed programmes in El Salvador, Mozambique, and Burundi, and has contributed to many other national initiatives in Latin America, Africa, and Asia. These initiatives have shown that conflicts can be resolved peacefully when parties try to listen to one another and understand one another and also to maintain their integrity without killing (see Francisco Lacayo Parajon, Mirta Lourence, and David Adams, "The Unesco Culture of Peace Programme in El Salvador: An Initial Report," *International Journal of Peace Studies*, Vol. 1, No. 2, July 1996, pp. 1-20).

The culture of peace reflects new ways of looking at and thinking about old problems and new ways of resolving them. According to Federico Mayor, Director-General of Unesco, it is a vision "linked to the pursuit of social and economic justice" in which everyone plays an active part. Its purpose is "to provide the needed solidarity, both intellectual and moral to unite people

working around the world for justice and peace and to inspire hope and persistence for the common task."

The formulation of the culture of peace is deliberately broad, in order to include all the ends and means appropriate to the full range of non-governmental organizations working for peace and justice. It is, at the same time, "a very specific concept," Federico Mayor has said. It is "both a product of this particular moment of history and an appropriate vision for the future that is in our power to create." It represents "an everyday attitude of nonviolent rebellion, of peaceful dissent, a firm determination to defend human rights and human dignity" (Preface to David Adams, ed., *Unesco and a Culture of Peace: Promoting a Global Movement*, Unesco, Paris, 1995; further information is available from the Director, Culture of Peace Programme, Unesco, 7 Place de Fontenoy, 75352 Paris 07SP, France).

At the heart of the programme, according to Michael G. Wessells of Randolph Macon College, "is the view that cooperation across many levels of society and in diverse enterprises—business, education, health care, the arts, and security protection, among others—is essential for healing the wounds of war, for preventing destructive conflict in the future, and for promoting sustainable development." It provides a comprehensive vision around which peace and justice groups can mobilise their members.

The six principal components of the Programme include the common goals and methods associated with the various groups involved.

- (i) Power is redefined not in terms of violence or force, but of active nonviolence. This component builds upon the experience of active nonviolence as a means of social change and its proven success during the twentieth century. Using nonviolence as a means and strategy, social movements contribute to the establishment of new institutions consistent with the other components of a culture peace.
- (ii) People are mobilized not in order to defeat an enemy but in order to build understanding, tolerance, and solidarity. This component, corresponding to the central tenets of nonviolence developed by Gandhi, King, and Mandela, emphasizes the need for liberating the oppressor as well

as the oppressed, and places strategies for developing unity at the center of deliberation and action.

- (iii) The hierarchical, vertical authority which characterizes the culture of violence and war is replaced by a culture of peace, characterized by a democratic process, in which people participate on a continuing basis in making decisions that affect their lives. This approach represents both a tactical means and a strategic end, engaging people in decision-making at all levels, involving them, and empowering them through the victories achieved.
- (iv) Secrecy and control of information by those in power is replaced by the free flow and sharing of information among everyone involved. The accessibility of information undermines authoritarianism and encourages social change. It is the necessary basis for real, participatory democracy, both in the process of social change and in the new institutions resulting from it.
- (v) The male-dominated culture of violence and war is replaced by a culture based upon power-sharing between men and women, especially the caring and nurturing capabilities traditionally associated with and developed by women. This strategy—and goal—places the engagement and empowerment of women at the centre of the process of peace-building, as well as in the new institutions emerging from it.
- (vi) Finally, the exploitation that has characterized the culture of violence and war (slavery, colonialism, and economic exploitation) is replaced by cooperation and sustainable development for all. This component distinguishes the culture of peace from static conceptions of peace which perpetuate the violence of the status quo, and links it intrinsically with social justice and the changes necessary to attain and to preserve it.

Since each of the six points listed above is essential to a culture of peace, none must be omitted or weakened. Point six, replacing exploitation with development for all, and point five, emphasizing power sharing between women and men, for example, are essential in mobilizing and unifying movements for

social justice and equality for women. Similarly, point two, replacing divisiveness with solidarity, and point three, replacing top-down management with democratic decision-making, are essential to ensure that tactical means are consistent with the final goal of the culture of peace.

As the agency of the United Nations responsible for education and culture, Unesco is establishing a network for the exchange of information among non-governmental organizations working for peace, women's equality, and social justice.

Particularly relevant and useful to IPRA researchers, teachers, and activists are the culture of peace proposals outlined at the 1994 International Conference for Education. These guidelines for educational institutions recommend: (a) training in conflict resolution and mediation among teachers and students, extending to the wider community; (b) linking school and community activities that promote everyone's participation in culture and development; (c) incorporating information into curricula about movements for liberation and peace; (d) extending a sense of community not only to all people, but also to all forms of life, in order to preserve the earth's ecology; and (e) reviewing and renovating the teaching of history to give as much emphasis to the role of women as of men and to nonviolence movements as to military campaigns.

Violence and war are not inevitable. Like peace and non-violence, they are choices made by people to achieve specific goals. Peace exists only if it is "constructed," and only if it is "made" by individuals and governmental and non-governmental organizations that persist in their efforts to build it. Unesco's culture of peace programme offers a vision, a concrete language, and specific proposals for alternatives to violence. Furthering that process depends upon the cooperation and active involvement of non-governmental organizations such as IPRA. Appropriately, at the 1996 IPRA Conference in Brisbane on the theme "Building Nonviolent Futures," representatives of Unesco's Culture of Peace Programme and IPRA began to explore ways of extending this important new initiative to a wider audience by encouraging participation among IPRA members.

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