Towards a Global Movement for a Culture of Peace

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Education – in the broad sense of the term – is the principal means of building a culture of peace. Learning and practising the skills of active non-violence, of dialogue, of tolerance and solidarity, respect for human rights and the constant struggle for justice – these are the keys. Hence, the teacher and the teacher's union are privileged partners, and it is most appropriate that Education International has adopted this as a priority.

International non-governmental organisations, such as Education International, are being invited to sign specific partnership agreements with UNESCO for the Year. Focal points are being established for the Year in each country in order to establish partnerships for the Year with national non-governmental organisations, schools and universities, city governments, etc. And in each case, partners are invited to begin now to consider how they can extend their activities into the Decade that follows.
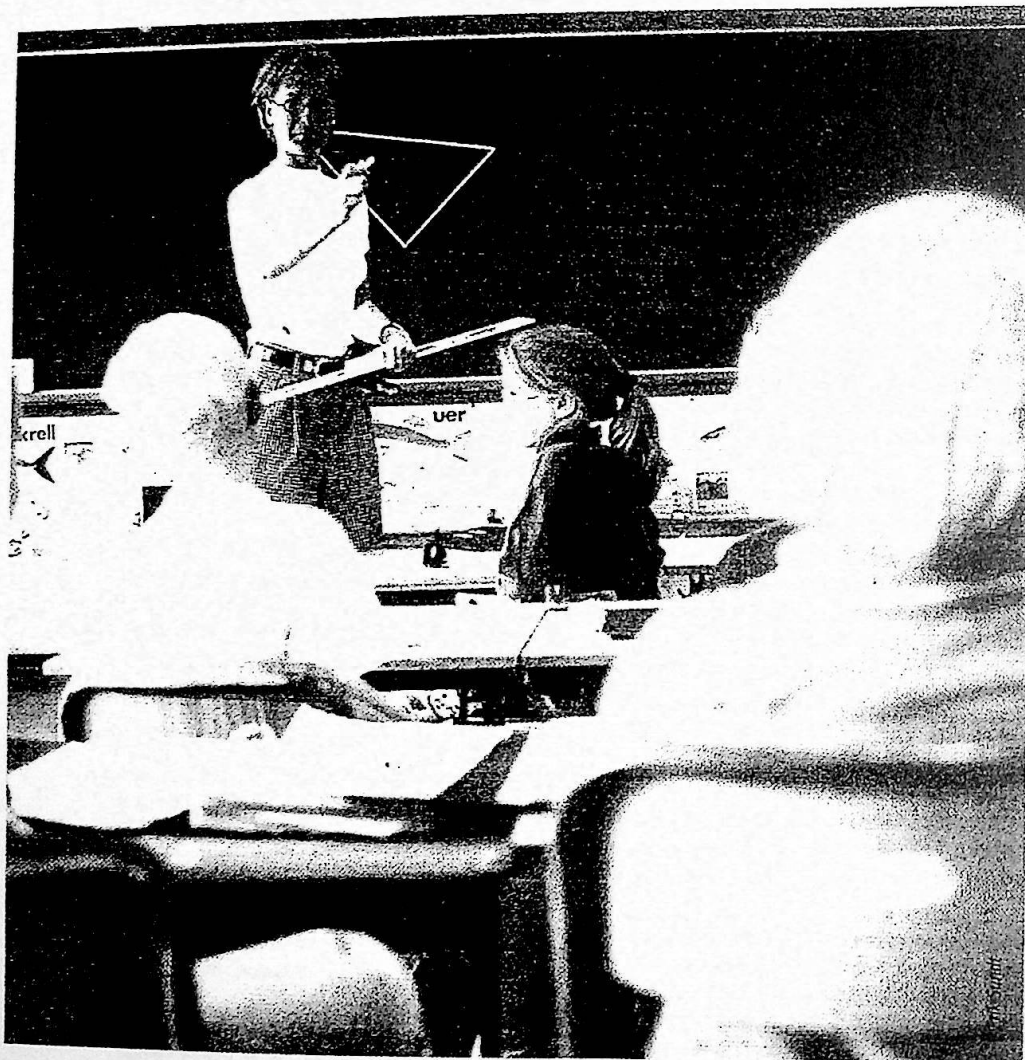
The nations of the world, gathered at the General Conference of UNESCO in 1995, declared that the major challenge at the close of the twentieth century is to begin the transition from a culture of war to a culture of peace defined as:

- a culture of social interaction and sharing, based on the principles of freedom, justice and democracy, tolerance and solidarity,

- a culture that rejects violence, endeavours to prevent conflicts by tackling their roots and to solve problems through dialogue and negotiation,

- a culture which guarantees everyone the full exercise of all rights and the means to participate fully in the development of their society.

The United Nations General Assembly took up this challenge by declaring the Year 2000 as the International Year for the Culture of Peace and the Years 2001-2010 as the International Decade for a Culture of Peace and Non-violence for the Children of the World.

Putting this message into the language that everyone can understand, the Nobel Peace Laureates have written the Manifesto 2000 through which each individual in the world is invited to make a commitment to follow the principles of a culture of peace in everyday life. It has been said that these principles – presented here in abbreviated form – correspond to the basic rules of the school classroom:

- Respect all life
- Reject violence
- Share with others
- Listen to understand
- Preserve the planet
- Rediscover solidarity

The full text, along with a signature form, may be found on the Internet at

http://www.unesco.org/manifesto2000

The General Assembly of the United Nations has now gone further and, in adopting a Declaration and Programme of Action on a Culture of Peace on 13 September 1999 (resolution 53/243), has called for a global movement for a culture of peace, based upon partnerships among states and the various actors of the civil society, including parents and teachers.

This movement, different from the others of the past, does not set itself up in opposition to any state or institution, but seeks to transform their behaviour through democratic means. This grand mobilisation will not end by achieving victory against an opponent, but can only continue to gain momentum with each step forward. It is not based on a negation but upon a positive and universally shared vision of the future.

Indeed, the global movement for a culture of peace is based on the vision of a future world of justice, solidarity, liberty, dignity, harmony and prosperity for all. It seeks to transform values, attitudes and behaviour of individuals, groups and institutions so as to put into practice the full range of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights – political, economic, and social.

The Manifesto 2000 is based upon human responsibility as the complement to human rights, beginning at the level of each individual. Each person is asked to sign "because I am aware of my responsibility for the future of humanity, in particular to the children of today and tomorrow". Each person is committed to action – "active non-violence" – in defence of human rights. The pledge is "to put an end to exclusion, injustice and political and economic oppression".

To launch this movement, UNESCO invites institutions and organisations of the civil society to join in a global network of partnerships for the International Year for the Culture of Peace and the Decade that follows. This is based, as a first step, on the circulation and collection of signatures on the Manifesto 2000, with a goal of presenting 100 million signatures to the Millennium Assembly of the United Nations in September 2000. International non-governmental organisations, such as Education International, are being invited to sign specific partnership agreements with UNESCO for the Year. Focal points are being established for the Year in each country in order to establish partnerships for the Year with national non-governmental organisations, schools and universities, city governments, etc. And in

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2000

For a culture
of peace
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each case, partners are invited to begin now to consider how they can extend their activities into the Decade that follows.

Support is also building at the level of national governments. Already over 40 heads of state have expressed their support for the Manifesto. Most of the major regional organisations of the world have joined with the United Nations to express their support for the Culture of Peace. And a growing number of national parliaments have established commissions and focal points for the culture of peace.

Like all social movements, this will gain its greatest strength from local and individual creativity and initiative. Hence, the goal of the institutional and organisational partnerships is to mobilise people to take action in their homes, schools, workplaces and communities based on the principles of the Manifesto 2000. Rather than trying to direct these activities from above, UNESCO and its partners are committed to developing communication systems, such as Internet Websites, where the myriad activities at local level can find expression and be shared globally. ◆

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