

The Human Right to Peace

Declaration by the Director-General of UNESCO

Lasting peace is a prerequisite for the exercise of all human rights and duties. It is not the peace of silence, of men and women who by choice or constraint remain silent. It is the peace of freedom - and therefore of just laws - of happiness, equality, and solidarity, in which all citizens count, live together and share.

Peace, development and democracy form an interactive triangle. They are mutually reinforcing. Without democracy, there is no sustainable development: disparities become unsustainable and lead to imposition and domination.

In 1995, the fiftieth anniversary of the United Nations and UNESCO and the United Nations Year for Tolerance, we stressed that it was only through a daily effort to know others better - I am the 'other'! - and respect them that we would be able to tackle at source the problems of marginalization, indifference, resentment and hatred. This is the only way to break the vicious circle that leads from insults to confrontation and the use of force.

We must identify the roots of global problems and strive, with imagination and determination, to check conflicts in their early stages. Better still prevent them. Prevention is the victory that gives the measure of our distinctively human faculties. We must know in order to foresee. Foresee in order to prevent. We must act in a timely, decisive and courageous manner, knowing that prevention engages the attention only when it fails. Peace, health and normality do not make the news. We shall have to try to give greater prominence to these intangibles, these unheralded triumphs.

A universal renunciation of violence requires the commitment of the **whole** of society. These are not matters of government but matters of State; not only matters for the authorities, but for society in its entirety (including civilian, military, and religious bodies). The mobilization which is urgently needed to effect the transition within two or three years from a culture of war to a culture of peace demands co-operation from everyone. In order to change, the world needs everyone. A new approach to security is required at world, regional and national levels. The armed forces must be the guarantors of democratic stability and the protection of the citizen, because we cannot move from systems of complete security and no freedom to systems of complete freedom and no security. Ministries of war and defence must gradually be turned into ministries of peace.

Decision-making procedures and measures to deal with emergencies must be specially designed to ensure speed, co-ordination and effectiveness. We are prepared for improbable wars involving the large-scale deployment of inordinately costly equipment, but we are not equipped to detect and mitigate the natural or man-provoked disasters that occur repeatedly. We are vulnerable to the inclemency of the weather, to the vicissitudes of nature. The protection of the citizen must be seen as one of the major tasks of society as a whole if we really wish to consolidate a framework for genuinely democratic living. Investing in emergency help and relief measures and - above all - in prevention and the long term (for example, in continent-wide water distribution and storage networks) is to be prepared for peace, to be prepared to live in peace. Currently, we are prepared for possible war, but find ourselves surprised and defenceless in our daily lives in the face of mishaps of all kinds.

The United Nations system must likewise equip itself with the necessary response capacity to prevent the recurrence of atrocities and instances of genocide such as those which today afflict our collective conscience - Cambodia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Liberia, Somalia and Rwanda...

There is today a general desire for peace, and we must applaud the clear thinking and strength of mind displayed by all the warring parties in the accords that have been reached in El Salvador, Namibia, Mozambique, Angola, South Africa, Guatemala and the Philippines. These agreements fill us with hope but also sadness, when we think of the lives sacrificed on the long road to the cease-fire, and of the open wounds, so difficult to heal. Thus, as we revive the concept of the 'construction of peace in the minds of men', we now call on all adversaries who still put their trust in weapons to lay down their arms and seek reconciliation.

Condemnation will not suffice. It is time for action. It is not enough to feel outrage when we learn of the number of children exploited sexually or at work, of refugees or of those suffering from hunger. We must react, each of us to the best of our abilities. It is not just a matter of looking at what the government is doing. We must part with something of 'our own'. We must give, give of ourselves. We must stop imposing models of development, models for living. The right to peace, **to live in peace**, implies jettisoning the belief that some are virtuous and correct while others are wrong, and that some are always giving while others are always in need.

It is clear that we cannot simultaneously pay the price of war and the price of peace. Guaranteeing lifelong education for **all** would enable us to: control population growth, improve the quality of life, increase civic participation, reduce migratory flows, level out differences in income, assert cultural identity and prevent the destruction of the environment

through substantial changes in energy use patterns and urban transport; promote endogenous development and the transfer of knowledge; foster the swift and effective operation of justice, with appropriate machinery for international co-operation; provide the United Nations system with appropriate facilities to tackle transnational problems in time. None of this can be achieved in a context of war. What is needed, then, is to reduce the investment in arms and destruction in order to increase investment in the construction of peace.

The distillation of traditions, thoughts, languages, forms of expression, memories, things forgotten, wishes, dreams, experiments, rejections, culture finds its supreme expression in our everyday behaviour. Infinite cultural diversity is our great resource, which is underpinned - this is our strength - by universal cultural values that must be passed on from the cradle to the grave. Family members - especially mothers - teachers, the media, **everyone** must help to spread the ethical principles, the universal guidelines that are so necessary today for haves and have-nots alike: the latter because they have a right to the basic minimum standards that human dignity demands; the more fortunate because material goods fail to deliver the expected pleasure. Where there is no longing, possession brings no enjoyment. In education, tools are useful. But nothing can replace the friendly words of a teacher, or the caresses and smiles of parents. The only real education is education by example . . . and love.

Learning without frontiers - whether geographical, or frontiers of age or language - can help to change the world, by eliminating or reducing the many barriers that today impede universal access to knowledge and education. Education must help to strengthen, reclaim and develop the culture and identity of peoples.

Globalization carries with it a danger of uniformity and increases the temptation to turn inwards and take refuge in all kinds of convictions - religious, ideological, cultural, or nationalistic. Confronted with this threat, we must 'emphasize the forms of learning and critical thinking that enable individuals to understand changing environments, create new knowledge and shape their own destinies'. Indigenous peoples must be placed on an equal footing with other cultures, participating fully in the drafting and application of laws. Peace means diversity, a blending - of 'hybrid, wandering cultures' as Carlos Fuentes put it; it means multi-ethnic and multilingual societies. Peace is not an abstract idea but one rooted firmly in cultural, political, social and economic contexts.

Above all, this profound transformation from oppression and confinement to openness and generosity, this change based on the daily use by all of us of the verb 'to share' - which is the key to a new future - cannot be achieved without our **young people**, and certainly not behind their backs.

We must tell them - they who represent our hope, who are calling for our help and who seek in us and in external authorities the answers to their uncertainties and preoccupations - that it is in themselves that they must discover the answers, that the motivations and glimpses of light that they are seeking can be found within themselves. Although at times it may be difficult, given both their consternation and our own, to present the situation to them in those terms, our position as lifelong teachers and learners obliges us to say to young people, as Cavafy put it in a poem: 'Ithaca gave you the journey . . . She has nothing left to give you now'. Each according to his own plan. Each according to his own way of thinking. Free from self-serving outside interference, especially when it robs the young of their own 'core', the intellect, talent and resourcefulness which are the most precious individual and collective treasure of humankind. Sects and the escape provided by drug addiction are the clearest symptoms of this pathological state of mind that is our great problem today. Indeed, education means activating this immense potential and using it to its fullest so that each may become the master and architect of his or her own destiny. We cannot give to youth what we no longer possess in youthful vitality but instead we can offer what we have learned through experience, the fruit of our failures and successes, of the burdens, joys, pain, and perplexity and the renewed inspiration of each new moment.

Let youth hold high the banner of peace and justice! So convinced am I of the relevance of this goal to the proper fulfilment of our mission that I have proposed to the General Conference that it designate 'UNESCO and youth' as a central topic for discussion at its next session. That will be an appropriate moment since the General Conference will be considering for adoption the 'Declaration on the Safeguarding of Future Generations'.

At all the United Nations conferences, regardless of the subject under consideration (environment, population, social development, human rights and democracy, women, housing), there has been a consensus that **education** is the key to the urgently needed change in the direction pursued by today's world, which is increasing disparities in the possession of material goods and knowledge, instead of reducing them. To invest in education is not only to respect a fundamental right but also to build peace and progress for the world's peoples. **Education for all, by all, throughout life: this is the great challenge.** One which allows of no delay. Each child is the most important heritage to be preserved. UNESCO may at times give the impression that it is only interested in preserving stone monuments or natural landscapes. That is not true. Those efforts are the most visible. And the heritage thus safeguarded the least vulnerable. But we must protect our entire heritage: the spiritual, the intangible, the genetic heritage - and, especially, ethics. These are the basic, universal values that our Constitution sets forth with inspired clarity. If we sincerely

believe that each child is our child, then we must radically change the parameters of the 'globalization' currently under way. And the human being must become the beneficiary and main actor of all our policies and strategies.

A system collapsed in 1989 because, concentrating on equality, it forgot liberty. The present system focused on liberty, will know the same fate if it forgets equality - and solidarity. The din made as the 'Iron Curtain' collapsed drowned out the tremor that ran through the foundations of the 'winning' side in the Cold War. We must, then, for the sake of both principle and self-interest, redouble in every field the fight against exclusion and marginalization. We must **all** feel involved. We must all work to ease the great transition from the logic of force to the force of reason; from oppression to dialogue; from isolation to interaction and peaceful coexistence. But first we must live, and give meaning to life. **Eliminating violence: that is our resolve.** Preventing violence and compulsion by going, as I said before, to the very sources of resentment, extremism, dogmatism and fatalism. Poverty, ignorance, discrimination and exclusion are forms of violence which can cause - although they can never justify - aggression, the use of force and fratricidal conflict.

A peace consciousness - in the interests of living together, of science and its applications - does not appear overnight, nor can it be imposed by decree. First comes disillusionment with materialism and enslavement to the market, and then a return to freedom of thought and action, sincerity, austerity, the indomitable force of the mind, the key to peace and to war, as affirmed by the founders of UNESCO.

Science is always positive, but the same cannot always be said of its applications. Advances in technology and knowledge can be used to enrich or to impoverish the lives of human beings; they can help to develop their identity and enhance their capacities or, on the contrary, they can be used to undermine the personality and coarsen human talent. Only conscience, which is responsibility - and thus ethical and moral - can make good use of the artefacts of reason. Conscience must work in tandem with reason. To the ethics of responsibility we must add an ethics of conviction and will. The former springs from knowledge, and the latter from passion, compassion and wisdom.

We are now approaching the end of a century of amazing scientific and technological progress: we can diagnose and treat many diseases which cause suffering and death; we communicate with extraordinary clarity and speed; we have at our disposal instant, limitless information. However, antibiotics and telecommunications do not compensate for the bloody conflicts which have cut down millions of lives in their prime and inflicted indescribable suffering on so many innocent people. All the obscenities of

war, brought home to us nowadays by audio-visual equipment, do not seem able to halt the advance of the huge war machine set up and maintained over many centuries. Present generations have the almost impossible, biblical task of 'beating their swords into ploughshares' and making the transition from an instinct for war - developed since time immemorial - to a feeling for peace. To achieve this would be the best and most noble act that the 'global village' could accomplish, and the best legacy to our descendants. With what satisfaction and relief should we be able to look into the eyes of our children! It would be also the best way to celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, in 1998.

Other 'rights' have been added since 1948. These should all be taken into account, and to them should be added the right which underlies them all: **the right to peace** - the right to live in peace! The right to our own 'personal sovereignty', to respect for life and dignity.

Human rights! At the dawn of the new millennium, our ideal must be to put them into practice, to add to them, to live and breathe them, to relive them, to revive them with every new day! No one nation, institution or person should feel entitled to lay sole claim to human rights, still less to determine others' credentials in this regard. Human rights can neither be owned nor given, but must be won and deserved afresh with every passing day. Nor should they be regarded as an abstraction, but rather as practical guidelines for action which should be part of the lives of all men and women and enshrined in the laws of every country. Let us translate the Declaration into all languages; let it be studied in every classroom and every home, all over the world! Today's ideal may thus become the happy reality of tomorrow! Learning to know, to do, to be and to live together!

In these first days of the new year - a time for taking stock and making plans - I appeal to all families, educators, religious figures, parliamentarians, politicians, artists, intellectuals, scientists, craftworkers and journalists, to all humanitarian, sporting and cultural organizations and to the media to spread abroad a message of tolerance, non-violence, peace and justice. Our aim must be to foster understanding, generosity and solidarity, so that with our minds more focused on the future than on the past, we may be able to look ahead together and build, however difficult the conditions or inhospitable the setting, a future of peace, which is a fundamental right and prerequisite. Thus, 'We, the people' will have fulfilled the promise we made in 1945, our eyes still seared by the most abominable images of the terrible conflict that had just ended - 'to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war', 'to construct the defences of peace in the minds' of all the peoples of the Earth.

Federico Mayor January 1997