

PARTNERSHIP WITH NGOs FOR A CULTURE OF PEACE

What is a culture of peace, and why has it come so recently onto the agenda of history

The concept of a culture of peace derives from the much older concept of peace, which has often been conceived as the absence of war. In this regard, one can consider that the League of Nations after World War I and the United Nations after World War II were designed to produce peace, but not specifically a culture of peace. UNESCO was an exception, however. It was founded at the same historical moment as the United Nations, as one of its specialized agencies, but those who drafted the Constitution of UNESCO recognized that peace, conceived as the absence of war, was not enough, and they wrote into the Preamble of the UNESCO Constitution “that a peace based exclusively upon the political and economic arrangements of governments would not be a peace which could secure the unanimous, lasting and sincere support of the peoples of the world, and that the peace must therefore be founded, if it is not to fail, upon the intellectual and moral solidarity of mankind.”

Hence, it is quite appropriate that the concept of the culture of peace was introduced by UNESCO. It was first proposed at the Yamoussoukro Conference on Peace in the Minds of Men (1989, Cote d'Ivoire) which was sponsored by UNESCO. Professor Felipe MacGregor, one of only two members of both preparatory meetings (I was the other), brought with him from Peru, the concept of a culture of peace which he had formulated in his book by that name, published in 1986.

At first the culture of peace was not clearly distinguished from peace. In his book, Professor MacGregor links culture of peace to education for peace and “respect for the rights of the person and his/her dignity and solidarity.” His book foreshadows the later UNESCO formulation of culture of peace, insisting on the importance of education for peace, human rights, especially the rights of women and children, the responsibility of the media, democratic participation, the overcoming of enemy images and what he calls “eco-development”. The Yamoussoukro Declaration which MacGregor helped to write in 1989, called for “a new vision of peace by developing a peace culture based on the universal values of respect for life, liberty, justice, solidarity, tolerance, human rights and equality between women and men.”

A more elaborate definition of a culture of peace was provided by Sema Tanguiane, an advisor to UNESCO Director-General Federico Mayor, for the International Conference on Education that took place in October 1994. With a few modifications his formulation was adopted by the 1995 UNESCO General Conference: A culture of peace "consists of values, attitudes and behaviours that reflect and inspire social interaction and sharing, based on the principles of freedom, justice and democracy, all human rights, tolerance and solidarity, that reject violence, endeavour to prevent conflicts by tackling their root causes to solve problems through dialogue and negotiation and that guarantee the full exercise of all rights and the means to participate fully in the development process of their society".

Later, in the newsletter of the International Peace Research Association in 1997, Professor Michael True and I provided a view of a culture of peace based on Professor True's research on the successful use of nonviolence during the 19th and 20th Centuries by social movements such as those associated with Gandhi, King and Mandela and my experience from the early returns from the culture of peace programme at UNESCO, such as the national project in El Salvador :

(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 of 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.

It can be said that the concept of the culture of peace has come only recently onto the agenda of history, because earlier approaches of peace through the United Nations Security Council, “based exclusively upon the political and economic arrangements of governments,” have not succeeded, while social movements have developed alternative principles of non-violent action that have begun to replace war and violence as means of social change.

A brief history of culture of peace at the United Nations General Assembly

Beginning in 1995 with resolution A/50/173, the UN General Assembly recognized the UNESCO Culture of Peace Programme by requesting reports on its transdisciplinary project entitled “Towards a culture of peace”. At this point, while the UNESCO approach was not yet clearly formulated, there was almost universal sponsorship, with Europe (France, Georgia, Germany, Poland, Portugal, Slovenia and Spain), Asia (Kyrgyzstan, Mongolia, Philippines), Africa (Benin, Burundi, Guinea, Cote d’Ivoire) and Arab States (Morocco) joining the original sponsor Peru and many other Latin American countries as co-sponsors.

By the next year, 1996, with the adoption of resolution A/51/101, there was beginning to be a tension between the North and the South in the General Assembly, mirroring a tension that was developing at UNESCO in Paris. Many countries wished to consider the culture of peace under a separate agenda item instead of being confined to a human rights agenda item, as the Europeans insisted (a leftover from the Cold War when Western Europe championed human rights while Eastern Europe championed peace). In the end a compromise was reached, the agenda question was put on hold, and Spain, Portugal, Ireland and France signed on as European sponsors. This time the culture of peace was clearly defined as “respect for human rights, democracy, tolerance, dialogue, cultural diversity and reconciliation, and efforts to promote development, education for peace, the free flow of information and the wider participation of women, as an integral approach to prevent violence and conflicts and to contribute to the creation of conditions of peace and its consolidation.” Among other things, the resolution requested UNESCO to submit to the next General Assembly session a draft declaration and programme of action on a culture of peace.

In 1997, the culture of peace was transferred from human rights and discussed under a special agenda item, against the wishes of the European Union. As a result, neither of the resolutions on the culture of peace adopted during the 52nd session received the sponsorship of any European nation: A/52/13 (general resolution); and A/52/15 (International Year for the Culture of Peace). The general resolution

speaks of a "transformation from a culture of war and violence to a culture of peace and non-violence", after the rejection of a European request to eliminate this phrase. The resolution acknowledges receipt of a draft declaration and programme of action on a culture of peace, and requests it again, implying without giving any details that the sponsors wished to receive a revised and improved version for the following session of the General Assembly. A year later, resolution A/53/25 was adopted by more or less the same Member States, prolonging the international year into a decade for the culture of peace and non-violence.

It is very informative to analyze the North/South split over the culture of peace that came out into the open in 1997. Of the 54 co-sponsors of the culture of peace resolution, 18 were from Latin America. Except for them, only 4 of the original 51 signatories of the UN Charter in 1945 co-sponsored the culture of peace resolution (Liberia, Philippines, South Africa and Turkey), since the countries of the North were conspicuously absent. With few exceptions (Afghanistan and Mongolia) the other 32 co-sponsors were countries that have gained their independence since World War II. By considering the Latin American countries as having succeeded with national liberation earlier than countries in the rest of the world, one can say that the culture of peace support at the United Nations is linked to the process of anti-colonialism and national liberation. It may be considered that colonialism itself was a manifestation of the culture of war, and national liberation has been a step on the road toward a culture of peace.

The Programme of Action on a Culture of Peace that we proposed from UNESCO to the General Assembly in 1998 reflected the formulation described above for the International Peace Research Association, although it was couched in diplomatic language. Hence, the six points listed above were listed as (1) Education for peace, (2) Understanding, tolerance and solidarity, (3) Democratic participation, (4) Free flow of information and knowledge, (5) Equality of women and men, and (6) Sustainable human development for all. A seventh point of respect for all human rights was added. In the draft document (A/53/370), these seven points were described as dialectical alternatives to corresponding features of the culture of war and violence. For each point, a list specific actions was provided, using proposals that had been suggested to us by various UN bodies in response to our inquiries from UNESCO.

Once the document went to informal discussions at the General Assembly, the North/South split came to the surface. The European Union required that all reference to a culture of war and violence be removed because, according to their representative, "there is no culture of war and violence in the world." The opposition of the American representative was more blunt, referring to mention of a human right to peace and saying that "peace should not be elevated to the category of human right, otherwise it will be very difficult to start a war." On the other hand, the resolution was strengthened by adding an eighth point: "international peace and security", including disarmament. This last point had not been included in the draft from UNESCO because it was said that it was not within the "fields of competence" of UNESCO, but it could be included in the final version because it is clearly within the fields of competence for the General Assembly.

Because of the opposition from the North, the Declaration and Programme of Action was not adopted until the last day of the 53rd General Assembly session. Had it been delayed further, it would have been killed and could not have been re-introduced in another session. The man who had seen it through an unprecedented number of informal discussions over a period of nine months, Ambassador Anwarul Chowdhury of Bangladesh, rejoiced in its passage and declared, "I believe that his document is unique in more than one way. It is a universal document in the real sense, transcending boundaries, cultures, societies and nations. Unlike many other General Assembly documents, this document is action-oriented and encourages actions at all levels, be they at the level of the individual, the community, the nation or the region, or at the global and international levels."

The Role of NGOs: The global movement for a culture of peace

It was a great victory when the United Nations General Assembly adopted the Declaration and Programme of Action on a Culture of Peace in September 1999 as Resolution A/53/243. However, a price had been paid: the major powers removed a key phrase in the draft document that would have allowed for "an extra-budgetary and voluntary fund whereby governmental and private agencies can provide financial support for its implementation"(A/53/370, Section IIIA, paragraph 4). Hence, the United Nations and its

agencies have not implemented the culture of peace during the International Decade for a Culture of Peace and Non-violence for the Children of the World (2001-2010).

Anticipating a lack of funding and follow-up by the UN system, the culture of peace Programme of Action (A53/243, Section B, paragraphs 6-7), called for the involvement of civil society as well as the United Nations and the Member States in partnership for a “global movement for a culture of peace”:

6. Partnerships between and among the various actors as set out in the Declaration should be encouraged and strengthened for a global movement for a culture of peace.

7. A culture of peace could be promoted through sharing of information among actors on their initiatives in this regard.

The global movement for a culture of peace was initiated by UNESCO during the campaign for commitment to the Manifesto 2000 during the International Year for a Culture of Peace (2000), for which I was the director. We engaged UNESCO National Commissions, UN and UNESCO field offices, non-governmental organizations, universities, and media organizations in a massive international campaign with the result that 75 million people signed the Manifesto, promising to promote a culture of peace in their daily lives. In countries such as Brazil (15 million signatures) and Colombia (11 million signatures), this laid a base for further development of the movement.

The global movement has continued to develop during the first five years of the Decade for a Culture of Peace and Non-violence for the Children of the World (2001-2010). In order to measure this development, in November 2004 we established a website and a network to contact thousands of non-governmental organizations, requesting them to contribute to a report on progress toward a culture of peace to be submitted to the United Nations General Assembly for its scheduled plenary meeting to mark the mid-term of the Decade.

The results of this survey are now available. Over three thousand pages of text and 500 photographs have been submitted from 700 organizations in more than 100 countries. The information is available on the Information Board of the website <http://decade-culture-of-peace.org>.

In response to the first question of the survey, “Has your organization seen progress toward a culture of peace and nonviolence in your domain of action and in your constituency during the first half of the Decade?”, an overwhelming majority of the respondents from every part of the world reply that they have seen progress, although it is difficult to measure quantitatively.

In response to the second question of the survey, “What are the most important obstacles that have prevented progress”, there are two frequent responses: a) lack of adequate resources; and b) lack of media attention.

In fact, most people are not aware of the culture of peace and that it is advancing because of the lack of attention from the mass media. As one organization states, “bad news seems to be big news and good news seems to be no news.”

Because of the media silence, most people are not aware of the distinction between culture of peace and the traditional definition of peace as the absence of war. For example, as stated by the Japanese Society for Developing the Culture of Peace: “in Japan people are apt to think that peace means the situation without wars and nuclear weapons through the experience of the World War. Peace Education means the teaching of the nuclear weapons in Hiroshima and Nagasaki, air raid attacks and the battles in Okinawa ... We spent a lot of time to make understood the difference between peace and culture of peace to fellow groups or people who made efforts for peace.”

A summary of the survey results has been submitted to the United Nations to be considered during the plenary meeting scheduled for the General Assembly in the fall of 2005 to mark the midterm of the International Decade for a Culture of Peace and Non-violence for the Children of the World (2001-2010).

Challenges for NGOs for the second half of the Culture of Peace Decade

During the second half of the Culture of Peace Decade (2006-2010), the most important challenge is to continue and strengthen the progress toward a culture of peace that has been made by civil society at local and regional levels during the first half of the Decade, and to continue and strengthen the sharing of information among the actors in this regard.

The development and widespread use of quantitative indicators for progress in a culture of peace can make a major contribution. Several initiatives have been launched over the years, but they have not yet been followed up in an effective manner.

With regard to further development of partnerships, a model is provided in Brazil, where there are increasing partnerships between civil society and local and regional government. For example, as described in the survey presented to the United Nations, the Culture of Peace Parliamentary Advisory Board, a body of the São Paulo Legislative Assembly, the first organism of its kind in the world, gathers representatives of 36 institutions of the civil society and 12 deputies of the State Assembly to formulate, supervise and assess parliamentary policies for a Culture of Peace based on the principles of the Manifesto 2000. Other such partnerships are being developed throughout Brazil. In general, partnerships with local and regional government promise to be a fruitful avenue of development for the culture of peace.

With regard to the media, it is necessary to break through the silence of the commercial media so that the culture of peace and its advances become known by the general public. As stated in the survey presented to the United Nations, many initiatives are already underway at the level of alternative media: “including those described in reports from the Good News Agency, the Transnational Foundation for Peace and Future Research, the Peace Research Information Unit Bonn, the Danish Peace Academy, Education for Peace Globalnet and the International Coalition for the Decade, as well as others in the planning stage such as the Signis Asia Assembly from Malaysia. All of the arts are employed, e.g.: Agencia Internacional para el Fomento de Acciones con Hip-Hop; Conseil International de la Danse; International Forum for Literature and Culture of Peace; Jipa Moyo Comics; The Art Miles Mural Project. Two other Internet sources of culture of peace information have already been supported by General Assembly resolutions: the CP Internet pages of the UNESCO Website and the Culture of Peace News Network.”

With regard to resources for a culture of peace, we have yet to see any breakthroughs. One possibility, mentioned in the survey report to the United Nations, is the potential for culture of peace tourism, which would link the principles of a culture of peace to the largest industry of the world.

With regard to the United Nations, it will be important that the countries of the North re-engage in the culture of peace initiative, both at the level of the General Assembly, and at the level of UNESCO. Perhaps these countries thought that their withdrawal from the culture of peace process would lead to its disappearance, but the civil society initiatives show that it is not disappearing, but growing everywhere instead.

The global movement for a culture of peace is at a point in its historical development where it is open to new strategic options and initiatives. Hopefully, in the coming months and years, there will be an increasing number of forums and venues where strategy can be formulated and debated, and where new actions can be initiated and new partnerships developed.

Internet references for further information:

World Report on the Culture of Peace: <http://decade-culture-of-peace.org/>

United Nations Programme of Action on a Culture of Peace: <http://decade-culture-of-peace.org/resolutions/resA-53-243B.html>

UNESCO Website for Culture of Peace: <http://www.unesco.org/cp>

Brief Illustrated History of Culture of Peace: <http://www.culture-of-peace.info/history/introduction.html>

National Culture of Peace Project in El Salvador: http://www.gmu.edu/academic/ijps/vol1_2/UNESCO.htm

UNESCO Monograph on Culture of Peace: <http://www.culture-of-peace.info/history/introduction.html>

Culture of Peace News Network: <http://cpnn-usa.org>