

PEACE CULTURE REQUIRED FOR SUSTAINABLE GLOBAL DEVELOPMENT

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Summary

“Life is the supreme value to which all other values are subordinate.” Albert Einstein

The urgent requirement for a new ethical peace culture has become obvious at the dawn of the third millennium, considering the extent of cultural violence and the arsenals of nuclear weapons that threaten to destroy the Earth. This article presents a comprehensive vision of the urgent need for a new peace culture, literature, and media, which involve both regional and global scopes and implications. In view of the fact that the growing global culture of violence has become the greatest risk factor for the sustainability and future development of human civilization, the deep causes and dangerous implications of violence are examined and various ways to curb it and to replace it with a culture of peace are suggested. The building of a powerful culture of peace can impart to the individual a new global identity, and it can guide us in making the world a secure place from wars, hunger, famine, and environmental catastrophes.

There is a crucial necessity to develop peace literature, films, television, radio, and satellite peace programs, art, drama, Internet sites, and video, at the regional and global levels, that would usher in and promote a powerful and influential peace culture and a global peace climate. There is likewise a necessity for a new revolution of “objectivity”

in the media. “Peace culture news” should be considered “newsworthy,” and a balance should be achieved between the reporting of “good news” and the reporting of violence and crime that inflates the negative aspects of society and is a deformation of reality and normalcy. A revolutionary peace culture built on literature, art, and high technology communications is required in education too, in order to inculcate new ethical peace values at all levels and to create the vision of a global village beyond war. Various proposals, models and two case studies of peace culture organizations are presented: “The Bridge: Jewish and Arab/Palestinian Women for Peace in the Middle East,” and “IFLAC: The International Forum for the Culture of Peace.”

1. Introduction: The Necessity of a New Peace Culture

At the dawn of the third millennium, societies and civilizations are in a constant state of dynamic transformation—culturally, economically, and politically. Economic globalization needs a world at peace so that it can function securely and flourish, and one of the basic requirements for attaining this necessary security and an effective and sustainable development of the world, is the building of a new global and regional culture and literature of peace.

A harmonious peace culture that counteracts violence and exposes and promotes the progress of a peaceful human civilization is urgently needed. Its major aims should be:

- To address the global and regional, cultural and ethical root-causes of violence, conflicts and war.
- To build harmonious bridges of culture, understanding, and respect among people and nations.

A powerful and influential peace culture would create values, ideas, and ethics, which reached various sectors of the society. Culture is the very core and essence of individual and national identity. The kind of culture, literature, values, and norms that people exposed to and absorb, and what they read and watch, determines the basic ideas, ethics, and norms which affect and motivate them throughout their lives. The stories people read and hear become an integral part of that essence and core of their identity. Elie Wiesel reminds us that “We are the stories we hear and the stories we tell.” Religions, which are an integral part of culture, are often based on stories and parables. It is of crucial importance, therefore, that those stories we are told and which we listen to and internalize, and watch on television and in films, should be stories of peace and harmony that create and build and do not destroy.

After an “atomic mushroom” twentieth century that witnessed two devastating World Wars, and many cruel and senseless regional ethnic wars that most often did not bring any solutions to conflicts, it seems that humankind has not yet learnt that conflicts should be resolved by other means than killing. At the time of writing, there are still more than forty wars being waged in the world, and some of these could turn into major World Wars with possible nuclear effects.

In his autobiography, Albert Einstein, condemning the concept and practice of war, warned: “War is a terrible thing and must be abolished at all costs” He also warned us

that when something exists, “one day it will be used.” Nuclear arsenals exist abundantly, and in much more quantity than is necessary to blow up the whole Earth several times. It is clear that a war with nuclear effects could bring about the end of humankind, causing a “nuclear winter” where everything would perish. To counteract this eminent danger, it is therefore crucial to create and develop a dynamic, powerful, and influential global and regional culture of peace.

Another major reason for the necessity of a peace culture is that even after a war, when peace agreements are reached and signed between leaders and governments, they are not necessarily translated into peace and reconciliation between populations and nations. Mistrust, fears, resentments, and unresolved tensions usually continue to cloud and impede the development of normal peaceful relations between former enemies. A peace culture can provide for the reconstruction of the image of the former enemy, as well as building the bridges of understanding and new respect and acceptance between opponents. When people come to know and respect the culture of “the other,” mistrust and fears are abated, and this provides a chance of tolerance, confidence, and acceptance.

Some of the greatest generals in history have expressed their longing for a world without wars. For instance, General Douglas MacArthur said: “Could I have but a line a century hence crediting a contribution to the advance of peace, I would gladly yield every honor which has been accorded me in war.” And General Omar Bradley commented: “Ours is a world of nuclear giants and ethical infants! We know more about war than we do about peace. We know more about killing than we know about living ... it is not the magnitude of the problem that is the great obstacle. It is our colossal indifference to it.”

This “colossal indifference” should be counteracted. The beginning of a new millennium is a pertinent time to revolutionize our thinking and cultural policies. We should start aiming at becoming ethical and cultural “giants,” and learn peace and not mainly war. We have to shatter the indifference concerning the devastating impact and influence of our violent culture on our society. We have to rapidly find ways and means of solving the huge problem of how to transform our culture into a culture of peace that reflects the various exciting aspects of our real lives and real problems. A culture of peace can help us in comprehending life and in solving major problems. It could address the national and global levels, and bring to our consciousness the problems of war, poverty, and hunger still rampant in our world, guiding us in effective ways toward their eradication.

Evelyn Hardy maintains that “One day war will come to an end, not for moral reasons, but for its growing absurdity.” The very concept and ongoing practice of war—the killing of our children (on both sides) before the signing of the Peace Treaty—seems more useless and abhorrent than ever, particularly in the case of nuclear war, where no side wins. The crux of this absurdity lies in the fact that nuclear arms—supposedly, measures of security and deterrence—can cause the annihilation of mankind. An effective and influential peace culture could have the power to change all this, and to promote the vision and the creation of a world beyond war. It could have the strength to

surpass national, ethnic, and class lines, and to transform dissension, extremism, and fanaticism into openness, creativeness, and tolerance.

Peace also has the power to change the very formation of personal identity, by strengthening the sense of cultural belonging between individuals and nations and between the whole of humanity. The awareness of the oneness of humanity and the consciousness of common values and norms in all cultures, promote the necessary new identity of the “global citizen,” in addition to the identity of a particular culture. There is a dynamic balance and a symbiotic enrichment of both levels when they come in contact with each other. We are advancing towards global unity within diversity.

In his influential book *Education Through Art*, the English poet and critic Herbert Read, a pioneer in peace culture education, presents an optimistic view of human nature as capable of cooperative activity, mutual respect, and close communal relationships. His premises are that the arts are the best tools for developing personal values and moral virtue. The function of the arts in society and education, Read argues, are to expand human capacities and potentials. He criticizes the over-emphasis on science and technology, and on mainly abstract thinking at the expense of emotive wisdom, or what is termed today EQ (Emotional Quotient) versus IQ (Intelligence Quotient). According to Read, feelings, imagination, and vision that can be acquired through the arts, are even more important than abstract thought and ideas, for they involve not only the mind but also the heart.

For Read, aesthetic education properly conceived is also moral education; the ethical and aesthetical are intimately linked in his theory. Art, for him, is the means by which the deepest levels of the mind combine with the deepest levels of the heart, and are expressed through great works of art and literature. Consequently, he believed that the moral function of art and of aesthetic and literary education was to unite humanity in a common bond and common ideals. Read’s theory and conception of the establishment of a peace culture through the arts are especially valuable and pertinent today, and form the basis of the new peace culture required for sustainable global development.

In addition, modern communication technologies such as television, satellite, and radio can facilitate the intercultural peace dialogue between nations, as well as between civilizations, and promote the consciousness of global citizenship. This colossal task should be considered one of the major goals of humankind and of world governments, and it should be urgently carried out as a defensive measure of the very existence and sustainability of humanity. The promotion of an effective and harmonious peace culture would create bridges of understanding and respect among various ethnic groups and nations, and, moreover, it could function as the antidote to violence, conflict, and regional and global war.

The year 2000 was proclaimed by the United Nations General Assembly as the Year of the Culture of Peace—an important step forward. This laudable decision could be followed by a powerful, effective, and widely-spread regional and global campaign, bringing about the required change. As a follow-up to the Year of the Culture of Peace, the United Nations could initiate a Decade of Peace Culture, ushering in the beginning of a World Beyond War at the opening of our third millennium. This DPC (Decade of

Peace Culture) would help to implement intensive international programs, institutions, and procedures, as well as facilitate bridges between cultures that would lead to the effective and peaceful resolution of conflicts. These steps would help in avoiding conflicts and would lead early suppression of possible future ones. To promote a successful and fruitful DPC, a powerful world network of all peace culture organizations in the world should be developed under the auspices of the United Nations. This global peace network could be empowered to implement the vast and dynamic changes needed for the sustenance of the world, and the promotion and creation of a world beyond war.

A multi-layered framework of governance for building and propagating the culture of peace will need to be designed and implemented, to ensure that the organizations in the various countries operate in an interconnected fashion. In addition, the individuals in each country who usually have the most impact on issues of war and peace—cultural leaders, writers, journalists—should be personally involved and motivated to contribute the best of their talents toward the development and promotion of the culture of peace.

Leaders and thinkers that are often at the forefront of efforts to speed up (or slow down) new initiatives and developments, and who have a critical influence on governments and populations, must be encouraged to take on the task of adjusting their own perspectives and those of their followers. If this can be achieved on personal and regional levels, there is a good chance of global implementation. The year 2000 would then be remembered not only as the Year of the Culture of Peace, but also the gateway to a millennium of peace, backed by a powerful peace culture network of governments, international institutions, non-governmental organizations, and involved cultural guides and leaders.

Some of the questions that will be posed and discussed in this article are: How can a peace culture be developed? Can culture and literature help to reconstruct the world and make it more peaceful? Does a satisfying global living standard imply homogenization of the world's cultures? How can culture and literature help in the resolution of conflicts? Can the media become a vehicle of the culture of peace? Do women have a special role in promoting the culture of peace? How can modern education help in producing and promoting a peace culture? Is humankind able to self-organize culturally, ethically, and ethnically, in such a way that international law can banish wars and mass destruction? Suggestions, programs, case studies and models, are delineated in the following chapters.

2. Research: Facing the Challenge of Cultural Globalization

“How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of the messenger of good tidings that announces peace!” Isaiah

“He who walks with peace—walk with him!” The Koran

“War is a defeat for humanity. Only in peace and through peace can respect for human dignity and its inalienable rights be guaranteed.” Pope John Paul II

Research is the first step toward developing a dynamic and influential peace culture. What already exists—the regional and global compendium of peace works in literature, history, education, and art—and what was achieved in various national cultures around the world, should be thoroughly explored, analyzed, and used. Despite the fact that our global village has been affected by cultural upheavals and splits caused mainly by wars and differences in development levels, peace culture treasures exist in all civilizations. They have developed at different periods of history, and in different regions, and should now be collected and used in the present for reinforcing the common humane peace identity and the new global citizen consciousness. They can furthermore constitute important stepping-stones toward further developments.

The study of the world's literature, art, history, philosophy, and sociology of the development of culture in various civilizations can significantly contribute to our knowledge and understanding of the world in several basic areas. For example, various valuable literary peace sources that have stood the test of time, such as the poetry of Rabindranath Tagore and Wilfred Owen, Jubran Khalil Jubran's *The Prophet* and Leo Tolstoy's *War and Peace* could be widely presented to audiences around the world, in films and on television, and utilized in education at all levels. Research could also highlight new angles of peace themes in classical sources, such as the condemnation of violence and war in the works of Shakespeare. Classical peace masterpieces collected from the best cultural resources around the world should be used as models for building the contemporary peace culture. This does not mean that promotion of high standards of culture can only be achieved by homogenizing the world's cultures. People, nations, and ethnic cultures are different, and they should remain so. It is the rich variety of cultures, traditions, customs, art, and literature which adds dynamic color and vivacity to the tapestry of global culture. All these have to be made available to the whole world. Thus, research of new, creative, outgoing and pluralistic values, creations and visions should characterize the opening of the new millennium. The exploration and development of a positive and harmonious global culture, based on the cooperation of regional cultures, can play a significant role in regards to abating and avoiding conflicts and wars.

It is not easy to introduce a new true and authentic peace culture, and its proponents are sometimes criticized by cynical and defeatist commentators as being naïve and unrealistic. However, this cult of cynical and defeatist impotence which typically proclaims that wars have always existed and always will, should be energetically challenged. These derogatory circles also claim that humanity is doomed to suffer the tragedies imposed on it and caused by the culture of violence, for violence is an integral part of human nature. This argument too has to be forcefully challenged for recent scientific research has proven that this preconceived idea is a myth, and that people are not naturally violent unless circumstances such as war force them to become so, to protect themselves and their families. In one example, fighting soldiers were asked if they enjoyed killing the enemy, and the vast majority responded that they hated to do so, and many reported that they were consequently tortured by nightmares.

It has also been claimed that wars are unavoidable because they are a source of economic gain. However, recent research has shown that states today can rely on more important and less negative sources of wealth, following the example of countries like Japan, for instance, that have developed high technology, electronics, and

communications industries in the aftermath of the Second World War. A climate of peace is necessary for a truly neo-liberal economic globalization to develop. Wars and conflicts disrupt economic development, and therefore for economic globalization to flourish it needs the partnership of a stabilizing peace culture. Just as economic neo-liberal globalization is a product of patterns of research and human thought and action, facing the challenge of cultural globalization and the development of a global attitude towards peace can be triggered, organized, channeled, and controlled by responsible human thought and action.

There is sometimes the fear that a global culture might disrupt local ethnic cultures and eradicate them. However, the example of the unification of Europe should abate the fears of those who think that such processes endanger national cultures. In that example, the various countries have retained their own national cultures and have continued to develop them, despite the unification.

The process of building a new peace culture system must be connected to ongoing initiatives of the United Nations, governmental and economic institutions, civil society, and the public at large. The future of peace should have intra-state as well as inter-regional and international dimensions, based on solid and thorough research of all those dimensions.

There are several benefits to be reaped from the development of a holistic culture of peace, and these can be grouped in three major stages: before, during, and after, the occurrence of a conflict or a war.

Before. Peace culture can function as “preventive medicine,” for after coming into contact with “the other” and listening to the “story,” the enemy ceases to be an unknown threat. There is a popular saying: “An enemy is someone to whose story we have not listened to.”

During. An open, harmonious pluralistic culture can not only help in preventing conflicts, but also in disentangling actual conflicts when they are taking place, through the building of bridges of knowledge and understanding of the “other’s” view, and respect of the other’s culture. Ensuing descriptions of “IFLAC: The International Forum for the Culture of Peace,” “The Tent of Peace,” and “The Bridge: Jewish and Arab Women for Peace in the Middle East,” are pertinent examples.

After. A holistic culture of peace can also help in building renewed trust between people and nations after the conflict or war is over, as not only buildings but also images of the “enemy” are destroyed by either side. Deep residues of fear, hatred, and mistrust linger in the hearts of former opponents. These sentiments cannot be overcome merely by the signing of the peace treaty by leaders, but only by a thorough reconstruction of a positive image by the people themselves, and by acquiring knowledge, understanding, and respect of each other’s views, ethnicity, and culture.

Thorough research should also be made into the major philosophical peace concepts, notions, and attitudes in the cultures, literatures, and religions of neighboring nations; the positive commonality among them should be examined, analyzed, exposed, and

used. For instance, in the Bible and in the Koran, we discern the same emphasis on the search for peace. In the Bible it is written: “How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of the messenger that announces peace” (Isaiah), and in the Koran it is written: “He who walks with peace—walk with him!” It is important for governmental bodies and research institutes to set up global and national programs, in order to research and present the best national and international literary and cultural harvest of ethical and artistic works on coexistence, multiculturalism, and peace. It is likewise important to set up effective and powerful infrastructures, which would explore, coordinate, promote, and spread such works.

Peace research has developed considerably during the last decade. Departments of peace research, mostly based in departments of political science and government departments, have been founded in various universities, and peace research institutes have been established internationally. However, the specific discipline and research of a “peace culture,” based on literature and the arts, has been somewhat neglected. The International Peace Research Association (IPRA), has been a pioneer in this required new trend of “peace culture” research, setting up the “Peace Through Culture and Literature Commission” (PCL) at a conference held in July 1996. The title of this conference was “Building Non-Violent Futures,” and the founding of the PCL added a new perspective to peace research, and to the deep meaning of what building non-violent futures means and entails.

On this occasion, IPRA also inaugurated its peace culture Internet magazine “Horizon: Pave Peace.” Four issues of this yearly electronic magazine (which is available on the Ipra website) have been published, and various Peace Studies programs and universities around the world use them. Each contains research, articles, literature, and poetry from many cultures, and collectively they have contributed a significant effort toward the building of an international peace culture. The main aim of publishing an Internet peace culture magazine is to create a new cultural peace vision and horizon, and to pave the road toward a global cultural climate of peace and harmony through research and creative works.

During the recent IPRA 18th General Conference in Tampere, Finland (August, 2000), the name of the PCL was changed to the “Peace Culture and Communications” commission (PCC), to make its work still more effective by the use of telecommunications and modern technology. The PCC commission initiated an e-mail group list, and it invites researchers and creative writers all over the world who agree with the goals of building a global culture of peace to join and network together for the sustainability and advancement of our planet, and the creation of a global village beyond war.

Another recent innovative development toward the building of a new global cultural vision and consciousness is the establishment of “peace museums.” These have recently been founded in various countries to help propagate the peace culture heritage of nations, and to make it accessible to the whole of humankind. Peace museums have recently been established in various countries including the USA and England. Japan is a leading figure in this new trend, having already founded 60 peace museums. The peace museums are a great aid in conserving, promoting, developing, and presenting

regional and global cultures of peace. In addition, they organize public lectures, and exhibitions of peace books, poetry, and art, presented to the wide public. The peace museums represent a new conception of what a museum should be: they are “alive” and full of vital activity, and are becoming increasingly popular. Ideally, peace museums could be built in every major city and town in our global village, replacing the “horror museums” that expose and adulate murderers, violence, and war.

Governments around the world should make it a priority to fund both peace research and peace museums. Peace Research Institutes should be as well funded as war research institutes and centers, and they should in time gradually replace them. The Roman saying, “If you want peace—prepare for war,” should be replaced today by, “If you want peace—prepare for peace.”

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Biographical Sketch

Professor Ada Aharoni is a Peace Culture researcher, writer, poet, and lecturer. She writes in English, Hebrew, and French, and has published twenty-five books to date, that have been translated into several languages. She believes that culture and literature can help in healing the urgent ailments of our fragile Earth, such as: war, violence, famine, and the neglect of our environment. The themes of peace through culture and conflict resolution are major ones throughout her works. She studied at London University (England) and the Hebrew University (Jerusalem), where she earned her M.Phil. and Ph.D. degrees in Literature and Sociology. She has been awarded several international prizes and awards, and was elected as of the Hundred Global Heroines (Rochester, New York, 1998).