

UNESCO and the Culture of Peace: Towards a Global Movement for Peace and Non Violence

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I would like to thank the organizers of this Triennial Conference of the Commonwealth Association of Museums for inviting me to introduce UNESCO's Culture of Peace Project to participants. I hope to demonstrate that it is a project whose activities are directly related to the theme of this conference. I can no longer speak on behalf of UNESCO but as one who directed the Culture of Peace Programme for over four years I feel sure that the comments which I make here reflect a position which is acceptable to the organization. This brief presentation will touch on the meaning of 'culture of peace', highlight some of the main achievements and continuing challenges of the project and will begin an exploration of how the Commonwealth Association of Museums (CAM) might contribute to the development of this global movement.

In 1945, UNESCO's founding fathers gave it a very special role, clearly noted in the famous words of the preamble of its constitution "to build the defences of peace in the minds of men" and women. They went on to note that economic arrangements of government are not enough to secure a lasting peace but that it must be founded on the intellectual and moral solidarity of humanity. Building peace is the only mission of UNESCO, and this is achieved through its tasks in the fields of education, science, culture and communication.

War-torn societies as well as other communities all over the world are searching for ways to restore peace and social justice, in short, positive peace not just the absence of war. The peace for which they yearn calls for non-violent relations not only between states but also between individuals, between social groups, between the state and its citizens and between humans and their environment. Threats to peace come in a wide variety of forms and humanity, working globally as well as locally, has the power to transform threat and difficulty into challenge, cooperation and growth. This positive peace is even more difficult to attain as it calls for a reversal of the dominant culture of war. It is clear that persons and states are predominantly moved by the reason of force but the critical transition at this time is to move to the force of reason.

The concept of the culture of peace was first proposed at the International Congress on Peace in the Minds of Men organized by UNESCO in Yamoussoukro, Cote d'Ivoire, in 1989. There it was felt that the emphasis throughout this century had been on war and violence but that with the ending of the Cold War there was the distinct opportunity and possibility to change to a culture of peace. Briefly stated a culture of peace is based on values, attitudes, behaviours and ways of life that reinforce non-violence and respect for the fundamental rights and freedoms of every person.

The Culture of Peace Programme (CPP) is a relatively recent initiative created in 1994 as an

organizational response to the Yamoussoukro Congress, the UN Secretary General's 1992 Agenda for Peace and a call by UNESCO's Executive Board to coordinate actions which promote, reinforce and create conditions for peace, security and sustainable development in societies which have suffered from violent conflict or which are at risk of succumbing to violent conflict. The 28th General Conference in 1995 declared that the transition from a culture of war to a culture of peace is one of the greatest challenges facing the world at the end of the 20th century and dedicated UNESCO's Medium Term Strategy for 1996-2001 to its promotion.

The Culture of Peace as defined and executed by UNESCO is both a process and a product. It is a process of building peace and cooperation between peoples. It stresses using words and not weapons, managing conflict situations in a non-violent way, and devoting resources to services instead of the military. It is a product when renewed opportunities are given to those who were involved in conflict situations (for example, those who missed out on education), and projects are designed and executed jointly by opposing parties.

Activities are based on the principles of inclusion, participation, and the need to promote and reinforce peace-building and dialogue. In keeping with these principles the programme works to transform violence and post conflict instability into a more positive atmosphere amenable to peace and development. When the programme first started its focus was on post conflict peace-building in countries where the United Nations had brokered peace agreements, but there is now an equal concern with conflict prevention. In both these areas there is one important feature, the fact that nationals must play a central role and that there should be a wide range of political and other perspectives represented. I would not want to make undue claims of UNESCO's role in this but readily state that there are many participants in culture of peace activities - NGOs, governmental, regional and intergovernmental organizations - and UNESCO's keen interest in promoting a global movement. This perspective informs the scope of the activities which are in the following areas.

- **The planning and execution of national culture of peace programmes.** These programmes are essentially development programmes and incorporate specific projects which fall within UNESCO's fields of competence and which have a peace-building component. Within countries coordinating bodies made up of all parties and incorporating the NGO community as in El Salvador and Burundi, with the approval of the highest authorities are key to the success of project activities. These projects can for example provide human rights training to journalists, technical assistance in devising peace education curricula, training activities with parliamentarians on democratic practices and festivals for youth. Ongoing national programmes with which UNESCO is associated exist among other places in El Salvador, Mozambique, Burundi, Somalia, Mali, The Russian Federation and the Philippines.
- **A focus on specific themes which are critical to allow societies to learn to live together.**
Some topics which are currently being developed include non-violence in schools

and the surrounding communities, the contribution of the media to peace-building, the promotion of inter-religious dialogue, the training of women as peace promoters and the socio-economic integration of vulnerable groups especially demobilized soldiers and returning refugees. By conducting activities on these topics simultaneously in a number of countries, a rich comparative perspective enhances what is being done in each setting.

- There is one theme being worked through at regional levels which is central to this conference. Democratization has been treated in UNESCO programming for some time but it is now being given greater focus in the context of culture of peace. Major workshops have been held in Latin America, Africa and Central Asia.
- The development of a networking and information system. The system links the many IGOs, government agencies, NGOs, research institutions and individuals promoting a culture of peace throughout the world. It has started to collect information on and keep contact with a growing variety of initiatives and promote their goals. Through these links (newsletters, an interactive website and occasional publications) it seeks to draw maximum benefit from UNESCO's network of partners and supporters, coordinate the gathering and sharing of essential information and involve political decision makers in the process of peace-building.
- The coordination of peace-building activities within UNESCO and the UN system. The importance of inter-agency cooperation in the United Nations for a culture of peace is gaining increasing recognition. Cooperative actions are being developed with other international organizations, including regional organizations and other UN agencies and programmes. In northern Mozambique for example, UNESCO is working with UNHCR to reintegrate returning refugees through the rehabilitation and reconstruction of basic infrastructures. UNDP and / or UNICEF are also working closely with us in Burundi, El Salvador, Bosnia and Haiti on a number of projects. We are also considering cooperative training, research and conflict resolution projects which contribute to peace on sub-regional or regional basis. Further, the United Nations is becoming an active partner in promoting the concept and actions of a culture of peace. Indeed the General Assembly at its 51st session in 1996 under its consideration of human rights questions requested not only a report on UNESCO's activities for a culture of peace, but also elements for a draft provisional declaration and a plan of action for a culture of peace.
- The contribution of women to a culture of peace has been given special attention. Besides the mainstreaming of a gender perspective on the transdisciplinary project "Towards a Culture of Peace", the priorities for women and a culture of peace are:
 - supporting women's initiatives for peace

- empowering women for democratic participation in the political process to increase their capacity and impact especially in economic and security issues, and
- gender sensitive socialisation and training for non-violence and egalitarian partnerships with a special focus on boys and young men

There has been significant change after the first two years of the programme and since 1996 it has been expanded into a transdisciplinary project in order to maximize the benefit from the expertise within the various sectors of UNESCO. A transdisciplinary approach has been adopted for a number of reasons. This approach mirrors real life by looking at a situation in its entirety, and identifying a comprehensive strategy for dealing with all aspects of a particular problem. Additionally, peace-building and post-conflict reconstruction within devastated societies cannot be easily compartmentalized and the areas of need cannot be separated into their component parts. Often, several sectors within UNESCO with different mandates find themselves engaged in similar activities or find their projects overlapping with those of other sectors or even other UN agencies. Because of the desire to avoid overlap of activity and to support comprehensive development, UNESCO relies on a transdisciplinary approach.

One of the more significant aspects of this project is the fact that the year 2000 has been named as the International Year for a Culture of Peace. This was proclaimed by the General Assembly on 20 November 1997. The year 2000 is in itself special as it has a landmark significance coming at the end of one millennium and heralding the beginning of a new one. Special years are proclaimed by the United Nations to highlight a specific group or condition and to gain world-wide attention. The main objectives of the year are to strengthen respect for cultural diversity and to promote tolerance, solidarity, cooperation, dialogue and conciliation based on activities at national and international levels.

The International Year presents a golden opportunity to reinforce ongoing activities in support of a culture of peace or to begin new ones. It could be used to stimulate national authorities to produce plans of action and to link a wide number of partners in the interest of peace and development within the community. At the regional level the year can enhance the emphasis on peace, democracy and development and reinforce the central role of the UN in promoting a culture of peace. A major emphasis will be placed on mobilizing public opinion and to do this all countries will be centrally involved and it is expected that national commissions will be playing a key role. This year will afford an opportunity to make actions to promote reconciliation and national unity and to prevent violent conflicts. Special plans are being developed for media focus and information exchange.

The culture of peace has taken on its own pattern of growth and from a modest beginning is turning into a global movement. The real power of the programme is in the partnerships which it forges and in the vast number of independent actions which are being carried out by a variety of countries and organizations.

There is growing international support for a Culture of Peace. Some examples from 1998 are:

- A. After the meeting of the Inter-Parliamentary Union in Windhoek, Namibia in early April which recognized the importance of promoting a Culture of Peace, many parliaments have established focal points with UNESCO to work on the International Year for the Culture of Peace.
- B. The Association of South East Asian Nations acknowledged the importance for the people of South East Asia for a culture of peace and called for the effective mobilisation of all pertinent institutions and key social actors towards fostering a culture of peace.
- C. In June the Assembly of Heads of State and Government of the OAU welcomed the International Year for the Culture of Peace as an occasion to promote the values, attitudes and behaviours which constitute the foundations of a culture of peace.
- D. The September Summit of the Non-Aligned Movement called in its final document, for the promotion of a Culture of Peace based on the principles established in the Charter of the UN and on respect for human rights, democracy and tolerance.
- E. The Secretary General of the Council of Europe noted that the Council is pleased to contribute to the work of UNESCO for a Culture of Peace.

On this note of the culture of peace being a global movement I wish to signal some of the main participants. First of all the United Nations. In a series of resolutions from 1995 onwards the UN has followed the development of UNESCO's actions for a culture of peace. However, the resolution in 1997 requested a draft programme of action intended as an integrated approach to pursuing the goals of a culture of peace for the entire UN system. In the recent preparation of our programme of action which is currently before the General Assembly, there were numerous contributions from each of these agencies signaling how they themselves within their programmes, are supporting the culture of peace. In addition there is an almost unending list of the many organizations and groups who are fully involved in promoting a culture of peace. Among these are parliamentarians, religious leaders, mayors, ombudsmen and the armed forces.

It is this momentum which we hope to see being kept up. In this way the start of the new Millennium will not only herald peace but the deep cultural roots of war will be eradicated and replaced by a culture of peace.

There are a number of ways in which museums can continue their active partnership in the global movement to promote a culture of peace. First and foremost there is the opportunity presented by the international year for the Culture of Peace. Each museum will certainly have the themes appropriate to their region to support this action but it should be remembered that each country is organising a national committee for the celebration of this important year, and working in close contact with national efforts may yield far greater results.

Wide and regular invitations to schools and other educational groups to visit these exhibitions could be coupled with lecture series based on the research.

Secondly, there is a great need for materials, especially at school level, to support the culture of peace. For one, there has been an absence of curriculum materials which highlighted the lives of persons whose manner was exemplary. We all know of Gandhi and Martin Luther King but there are undoubtedly hundreds of persons whose non-violent life style was critical for bringing home the message. It would be the research which would be most effective.

In conclusion a Culture of Peace is therefore claiming for the 21st Century, a world community of civil societies that are committed to the idea that the peaceful solution of conflicts on the basis freedom, democracy and respect for human rights is the best way of dealing with disagreements, differences, conflicts and the threat of war. However, none of this well meaning rhetoric of peace will mean much to people who find that they are deprived of accessible housing and stable sustaining employment throughout adult life. Thus, a Culture of Peace has to be incorporated within the process of sustainable development and more importantly, seen within the context of each country's historical and cultural realities.