THE ROLE OF PEACE EDUCATION IN PREVENTING CONFLICT

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Terrorist impulses ferment in poverty, oppression and ignorance. The elimination of these conditions and the active promotion of a universal respect for human rights must become a priority.

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I. INTRODUCTION

War has been a constant threat to mankind since the dawn of civilization. This threat ranges from the everyday violence of small-scale civil conflicts, to the vast devastation left by the great world wars. Now that we have entered the 21st century, the progress that has brought our world closer together has not been successfully matched by a mutual respect and understanding of other cultures.

The consequences of war are particularly damaging to civilian populations, displacing them within their own state, depriving them of security and stability, and preventing them from achieving self-fulfillment and self-realization. The resulting insecurity and instability that follows from these circumstances – lack of basic needs, harsh surroundings, and oppressive governments – forces many to turn to violence in defense of their right to survive. These tragic circumstances have increased societal awareness of the need to understand and to prevent the conditions leading to violence.

The roots of conflict stem from a wide number of causes. This violence can be reduced through the practice of dialogue and negotiation – skills which can be taught through an active program of peace education. Many charitable organizations and individuals are working to promote the spread of peace education throughout the world. Their valuable efforts are essential to the future peace and security of mankind.

The central thesis of this paper is to clarify an understanding of the following: in what way can the actors of peace *design*, *develop*, and *improve* upon their efforts to spread the message of peace – to bring about a world in which people consciously choose to cooperate for the benefit of all mankind, acting in altruism and selflessness, recognizing the values of non-violence and respect for human rights, tolerance and diversity.

II. THE ROOTS OF CONFLICT

Changing Minds

Wars and conflicts threaten peace and security to all. Their urgent nature calls for the need to reduce violence through education. Times have changed, and this requires a more proactive outlook. Education covers economic, political, social, cultural, moral and ethical issues, and is vital in transforming people's attitudes towards dealing with conflicts.

The impact of violence affects all countries. It is a global concern, requiring a global approach to a solution. The usual method countries use to deal with conflict and wars is through oppressive military measures. But control is not enough; it merely delays future violence. A preventive approach is becoming increasingly recognized – through provision of basic education promoting a culture of peace and non-violence. Governments must shift their central priorities from accumulating political and military power towards building a stronger educational infrastructure for peace. Security and stability are all dependent upon a sound education.

Regardless of whether the act of violence and war is justified by religious, economic, political, social, cultural or environmental disputes, it is time to adapt a renewed mindset that promotes peace. The Seville Statement on Violence affirms[1]:

> *War is not a fatality determined by genes, violent brains, human nature or instincts, but is rather a social invention. Therefore, the same species that invented war is capable of inventing peace.*

Given that the violence and war is a product of culture, through a modification of basic cultural mindsets mankind can work towards creating a culture of peace. We must strive to build a culture which consists of values, attitudes and behaviors that reject violence, one that attempts to prevent conflict by addressing its root causes with a new view to solving problems: through dialogue and negotiation between individuals, groups and nations[2].

[1] UNESCO. *The Seville Statement for Peace* 1986.
[2] United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. *Mainstreaming a Culture of Peace*.

In modern times, the maintenance of peace depends on attitudes and actions undertaken by the community as a whole. Nelson Mandela emphasized the importance of *group* participation:

> *Safety and security don't just happen: they are the result of collective consensus and public investment*[3].

Creating a world culture of peace requires the involvement of all parties in the society that together shape the world's culture – institutions such as the United Nations system, governments, politicians, scientists, NGOs, the media, civil society, and especially teachers and parents. Although peace education is often based in schools and other learning environments, it should involve the entire community, as peace education is not only a necessity in areas where there are conflicts, but in all societies. Parents are especially important: they must encourage strong family values that foster a culture of peace.

Every individual is capable of making a contribution towards a more peaceful future. The recent developments in today's world, including the tragic events of September 11, 2001 and the current international concern on Iraq's necessity to comply with the demands of the international community, have forced many people to believe that peace is an impossible dream. There is the lack of feeling directly involved in what is going on in the world, through people's lack of interest or simply because of ignorance of how they can become involved. People need to be made aware that they, too, can work towards the creation of a more peaceful world. People need to be reminded that an individual who acts with pure intentions can make a profound difference, can influence events that are important to the continued existence of mankind.

The threat to peace stems from a multitude of causes including poverty, environmental deterioration and social injustice. There are a variety of factors including economic, political, social, cultural and environmental grounds from which these causes are founded. Absence of certainty and security in terms of these factors makes it difficult to promote peace. When discussing the need for a shift of mindset, we need to more closely examine the underlying causes that force people to resort to violence, both in order to understand its societal impact and to come up with the proper solutions to reduce its spread.

Economic Dimensions

Economic issues are closely linked to the maintenance of peace and security – particularly as a result of globalization, as countries become more closely connected and interdependent[4]. Economic stability is an essential requirement in order to build peace within a society. The uneven distribution of benefits: economic growth, modernization and employment, has resulted in an increased gap between members of society.

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[3] WHO *World Report on Violence and Health*. November 2002.
[4] Miles 2002.

Inequality in economic opportunities and unemployment has left the majority of the members of society with insufficient opportunities to obtain a decent living without assistance from outside sources, preventing them from getting out the cycle of poverty. Unequal access to education prevents them from obtaining skills that would contribute to their development and self-sufficiency.

Without improvement to the current situation of developing countries, which constitute the majority of the world's people, global security will become increasingly threatened by acts of terrorism and political instability.

Political Dimensions

Political stability is closely linked to the prevention of conflict and the promotion of peace. Many political systems restrict democratic practices, violating human rights and increasing their own power at the expense of the public. This stimulates corruption, injustice and abuse within the society. Such totalitarian regimes force their own values and beliefs upon members of the society through the use of state-controlled media. This abuse of human rights is correlated with low life expectancies and high mortality rates, deterioration of the environment and the drain of labor and capital resources[5].

Peace cannot be maintained if there is injustice and disparity in the society. States should promote the values of democracy that provide empowerment to the people, the ability to influence policy, protect human rights and most importantly, hold the government accountable. Promotion of democracy prevents conflict, strengthens governance, improves the rule of law and creates stability.

Social Dimensions

Social issues that also have an impact on the maintenance of peace are changes in people's lives such as the breakdown of family structures, migration to areas that lack appropriate sufficient infrastructures, the loss of traditional values also as a result of isolation that follows from the breakdown of their personal history, the exposure to violence in the media as well as in daily life and the exposure to different cultures.

Advances in technology have enabled millions of people to enhance their mobility anywhere in the world, resulting in exposure to diverse cultures and making societies increasingly multicultural. But this process has brought drawbacks with its many benefits. It can provoke fear and rejection of the unknown, misunderstanding and intolerance of other cultures[6].

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[5] Ebrahimian 2002.

[6] UNESCO. *Plan of Action to follow up the United Nations Year for Tolerance (1995).*

Unfortunately, many people turn to violence in their intolerance and rejection of cultural differences. Education is vital to teach people to incorporate the skills of dialogue, peace, tolerance, understanding and respect for human rights.

Another factor threatening the development of peace is the narcotics trade. Drug organizations use violence in order to protect their supremacy. These conflicts tend to escalate towards the international level.

Cultural Dimensions

Exclusion of individuals and certain groups from participation in the fields of social, economic and political issues is another major cause of conflict. Marginalization in the decision-making process occurs because of discrimination in terms of cultural differences, ethnicity, religion, race, language and age: groups susceptible to discrimination are women, youth, elderly people, and minorities. The impact of marginalization these groups experience causes feelings of humiliation, alienation and denial of human rights and resources. This creates grounds for them to engage in violent actions, endangering both themselves and others[7].

The effect of cultural marginalization poses as a major threat to social stability. To truly attain the goal of a culture of peace, we must eliminate discrimination, encourage the promotion and respect of human rights, and teach the value of tolerance for those of differing backgrounds. This requires active involvement by all members of society.

Environmental Dimensions

Many are left without basic access to natural resources such as sanitation and a clean water supply. The lack of proper health care, water care and sanitation infrastructures leads to high mortality and disease rates and poses threat to the promotion of peace and stability.

Indigenous and minority groups are frequently denied access to own property, denying them independence and provoking feelings of resentment. Feelings of insecurity and instability as a result of unemployment, poverty, lack of education, good government, health care infrastructure and the increase of drug abuse provide further grounds for resorting to the use of violence.

Threats to peace come from many dimensions: economic, political, social, cultural and environmental. Peace can only be attained if each nation has an interest in maintaining peace and security. Nations must cooperate in order to attain global equity. This cooperation must come in terms of economic, social

[7] Balanandan 1998

and political change and the promotion of peace at national, regional and global levels.

III. REDUCING CONFLICT

Democracy and Equality

The protection of public well-being involves guidance provided by governments as well as the members of the society. Promoting peace alone is not enough; there are still many other issues directly linked with maintaining peace. Other factors preventing the objective need to be dealt with; in most cases it is the government that can provide this.

The first and fundamental commitment of the government is to provide all members of society with a peaceful environment, one that is conducive to freedom and opportunity. However, not all governments fulfill this obligation. Many governments fail to recognize even the most basic of human rights, increasing their own power at the expense of the populace.

Unlike an oppressive regime, a democratic government offers equal opportunities for all through economic, political, social and cultural aspects of people's lives. A truly democratic government aims for the benefits of all, towards sustainable development, ensuring the elimination of poverty by creating employment opportunities. An equal and democratic society is essential for the creation of sustainable peace.

A democratic regime offers equal opportunities for education; this is another requirement in getting out of poverty: education for all groups at all levels, both formal and non-formal. Education is essential for fulfillment, essential for providing literacy and numeracy skills, essential for continued development and quality of life.

A society that promotes education to all members of the society will make progress towards peace, as education will empower people to have the ability to form opinions and act on issues concerning societal development. This ability is essential for spreading the universal values of human rights, peace and tolerance, understanding and democracy.

Besides offering equal opportunities in terms of economic aspects, a democratic regime stimulates participation of all members, particularly minority groups such as women, children, indigenous and elderly people. By empowering its own people, it will strengthen its own competency and at the same time maintain the values of peace and compassion.

In our increasingly interconnected and multicultural world, it is extremely important for democratic societies to develop a sound infrastructure. Examples are the provision of health and water care and equal access to natural resources to produce a healthy population. A democratic regime further fights the trade in narcotics and other drug abuses, which pose a threat to security and peace in the

society and undermine the infrastructure that has been built up. In addition, a democratic outlook promotes education of tolerance, mutual understanding and the celebration of diversity.

Government Programs

A primary role for the government in any plan for the creation of a more peaceful society is to act as an information source, spreading the word to parents and society. The government can act to establish projects and programs to promote education for all. Through infrastructure development, ensuring equal access to all for basic and secondary education, and through the provision of learning materials and resources, the government can act as a major catalyst in changing the values of the society as a whole.

Educational Programs

Establishing a strategy to promote peace through education can be accomplished through the incorporation of the universal values of peace, non-violence, tolerance and respect for human rights into all education curricula and methods. Schools must work towards educating students in the benefits of literacy and numeracy, teaching skills and knowledge needed to fulfill self-development, in addition to teaching participation in society and how to collectively improve quality of life.

Governments can take active participation in UNESCO's Associated Schools Project in primary, as well as secondary, levels of education. The Associated Schools Project provides learning materials to schools and focuses on four main themes, including World Concerns and the United Nations system, Human Rights and Democracy, Intercultural Learning, and Environmental Issues, to enhance the education for a culture of peace[8], demonstrating the viability of intergovernmental and nongovernmental cooperation in the assistance of peace education. There are currently only a few hundred schools in the entire world that actively participate in UNESCO's Associated Schools Project. Much greater participation is needed to make this effort succeed.

Social Programs

Parents and teachers can play a major role in the reduction of conflict. Children and youth are desperately in need of mentors that can teach them the values of tolerance and compassion. When children leave their schools, they also need to be exposed to the values of peace within their home and in the larger society. This requires that education programs be created not only for children, but also for parents and for the society as a whole.

[8] UNESCO Associated Schools Project Network.

The role of the media is ever more important as our world develops its infrastructures and becomes ever more global. The media must place emphasis on moral values, actively cooperate with organizations, utilize all available resources to disseminate the message of peace, tolerance, non-violence, respect for human rights and the promotion of democracy.

Scientists must work towards the creation of technologies that will benefit everyone and equalize standards of living. The transition to a technology and information-oriented society must not be isolated to the select few. Corporations must initiate, and contribute, to these causes. These enterprises have the monies, and therefore the ability, to provide a powerful contribution towards programs and projects aimed to eliminate the unequal distribution of wealth and resources throughout the world.

Cultural activities create social bonds between different segments of society, giving them common interests and background. Sporting events are a universal example of people setting aside their interests to accomplish a unified goal. Art activities stimulate members of the society to express themselves in a similar way. Cultural activities such as sporting events and artistic expression can work towards bonding people together. Organizations can work so that the message of peace can be incorporated into these activities.

We must build open societies, developing infrastructures and promoting democracy. In order to do this, we must educate governments as well as civil societies. The United Nations can play a unique role in this regard, raising the standards of the international community towards a global approach, stimulating cooperation with nongovernmental and intergovernmental organizations to build a better world.

IV. SUCCESSFUL PROGRAMS

Building a Culture of Peace

UNESCO has established the education for a Culture of Peace to create and encourage peace 'in the minds of men and women', based on the universal values of respect for life, liberty, justice, solidarity, tolerance, human rights and equality between men and women[9]. UNESCO's effort to create a Culture of Peace was advanced by the fall of the Berlin Wall and the disappearance of Cold War tensions. Towards the creation of a nonviolent 21st century, the decade of 2001-2010 has been declared as the *International Decade for a Culture of Peace and Non-Violence for the Children of the World.*

The United Nations and UNESCO have ratified strong resolutions defining a culture of peace. These have been widely accepted by the international community, including Resolution A/53/243, the *Declaration and Program of Action on a Culture of Peace*, which outlines eight critical action areas[10] and calls out for actors of peace to act at national, regional and international levels to eliminate the roots of conflict:

1) *Fostering a culture of peace through education,*
2) *Promoting sustainable economic and social development*
3) *Promoting respect for all human rights*
4) *Ensuring equality between women and men*
5) *Fostering democratic participation*
6) *Advancing understanding, tolerance and solidarity*
7) *Supporting participatory communication and the free flow of information and knowledge*
8) *Promoting international peace and security*

The values of peace and tolerance are an essential part of quality basic education. Basic education not only provides the skills of literacy and numeracy, but also provides the values and attitudes needed for self-development, improving the quality of life, and for active participation in society. Most importantly, basic education provides the ability for continuous learning, giving people the power to think, to form opinions and to work towards the promotion of peace, tolerance and universal respect for human rights.

Although basic access to education is essential for attaining a culture of peace, it is not enough. Educational and training programs must be available to people at all levels, both formally and non-formally. In such programs, the dimensions of peace education must include tolerance, respect for human rights and democracy, international and intercultural understanding, cultural and linguistic diversity.

[9] UNESCO: Mainstreaming The Culture of Peace
[10] UNESCO: Education for a culture of peace

> *A culture of peace will be achieved when citizens of the world understand global problems, have the skills to resolve conflicts and struggle for justice non-violently, live by international standards of human rights and equity, appreciate cultural diversity, and respect the Earth and each other. Such learning can only be achieved with systematic education for peace.*[11]

Building a systematic culture of peace requires committed efforts by educators, researchers and other members of society. Through education, people are taught tolerance and others' right to existence, and how to incorporate these teachings into their everyday lives. It requires a change in attitude, a difficult process that will not happen overnight.

But this is where the role of knowledge will come into place. Education can provide people with information, but most essential is the appropriate application of this information. This information must be transformed into knowledge.

Only then will people begin to adapt a change in mindset, attitude and behavior characterized by long-term goals. Only then will they be able to engage properly in the eight action areas and be able to contribute to the promotion of a culture of peace.

A complete change of mindset, pure intentions and sustained effort are important to achieving a culture of peace. Society must take preventive action rather than reacting only after an event. Only through prevention can future generations succeed.

How do we make people aware of the difference between knowledge and information? How can we support them in making the right choices to promote a culture of peace? This is where governments can answer that question: by ensuring that the principles of peace, nonviolence, and human rights - as laid down in the relevant legal frameworks - are integrated into the educational curricula and the pedagogical methods of the educational system.

The Children's Fund

UNESCO is a leader in promoting a culture of peace, but there are many other organizations working towards this goal: the United Nations Children's Fund, nongovernmental organizations, and privately-funded endeavors also play a significant role.

UNICEF's main focus is the promotion and protection of children's rights, basic needs and opportunities. It is also their objective to apply children's educational experiences to promote commitment to the principles of peace and social justice.

[11] Hague Appeal for Peace Global Campaign for Peace Education

Children and youth are especially susceptible to violence because they lack the basic skills for conflict resolution. The future of our world is dependent on the ways in which they learn to deal with conflicts. It is not only in the school environment that must be encouraged to develop the proper skills, knowledge and values, but also in non-formal environments. Family and peer groups, communities and society as a whole must cooperate to encourage the development of these skills.

UNICEF has adopted a number of educational initiatives to complement peace education. These serve to examine other factors linked with the promotion of peace and how they can contribute to creating a culture of peace. Children's rights, human rights education, education for development, gender training, global education, life skills education, landmine awareness, and psychosocial rehabilitation are examples of these initiatives[12].

UNICEF offices promote peace education through the improvement of school environments, developing educational curricula, including the provision of learning materials containing themes on peace, and training teachers. Outside schools, UNICEF offices have developed programs including after-school sports and recreation programs, youth clubs, and summer camps. Workshops and training programs for parents and community leaders show how to utilize media and other channels of communication for the promotion of peace, encouraging participation in cultural activities and art programs[13].

The Carter Institute

> *Confidence has defined our course [as a nation] and has served as the link between generations. We've always believed in something called progress. We've always had a faith that the days of our children would be better than our own. Our people are losing the faith. Not only in government itself, but in the ability as citizens to serve as the ultimate rules and shapers of our democracy.*[14]

The recipient of the 2002 Nobel Prize for Peace, former US president Jimmy Carter is a pioneer in working towards an end to the violence and suffering that affects millions of people across the world. He has shown time and again that an honest, sincere appeal by a trusted mediator can bring two adversaries to come together and set aside their differences in the interest of harmony.

In his four-year term as President and since founding the Carter Center, he has worked tirelessly to prevent confrontation and to catalyze the development of peace in areas of conflict. During his presidency, Carter established full diplomatic relations with the People's Republic of China and intervened to help bring about peace accords between Egypt and Israel.

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[12] UNICEF 1999.

[13] UNICEF 1999.

[14] Jimmy Carter, former president of the United States of America, 1979

The Carter Center areas of activities include the promotion of democracy, consisting of a competent and compassionate government, protecting human rights, working towards sustainable development offering all equal opportunities, empowering people, preventing conflict and promoting peace[15]. Jimmy Carter is a shining example of the difference one man can make in the fight for peace.

As recognized by the Norwegian Nobel Committee "for his decades of untiring effort to find solutions to international conflicts, to advance democracy and human rights, and to promote economic and social development," Carter understood that in order to prevent conflict, we must recognize the many social factors which play a contributing role.

The Open Society

George Soros is a multibillionaire financial investor whose impact upon the world is most seen prominently through his philanthropic works, political influence and efforts to develop an open society. His Soros Foundation Network and Open Society Institute work to transform closed societies into open ones. The network funds groups that stand up against authoritarian regimes, and works to protect against the negative consequences of globalization.

The Soros Foundation Network has a variety of initiatives that support public health, human and women's rights. It promotes art and cultural activities, education at all levels, stimulates the positive use of the media in fighting against closed societies, and works towards social, legal and economic reform.

> *Together with partners that share our principles and goals, the network is laying the foundations for a truly global alliance for open society*[16].

Central to the message of the Soros Foundation is the concept of an *open society*. An open society is one always open to improvement. It allows people with different views, identities and cultures to live together in peace. It recognizes that people act on imperfect knowledge.

Since no one is in possession of the ultimate truth, the open society keeps itself open to changes in order to make way for improvement. An open society is one characterized by the rule of law, a universal respect for human rights, minorities and minority opinions, a democratically elected government and a thriving civil society[17].

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[15] The Carter Center, December 2002.
[16] Soros.org *The Soros Foundation Network.*
[17] Soros *Open Society – Reforming Global Capitalism, 2002.*

V. LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

What potential strategies can help to promote a culture of peace? Ethics is at least as important a value as are the basic skills of reading, writing and mathematics, and ethics should become a core part of *every* educational curriculum. People must focus on a longer-term perspective. Even if world peace is not achieved within our lifetimes, we must think of our children and of the generations to come.

We must work so that our grandchildren will look back upon our actions with pride at how far we have come. We must work so that we can ensure they will be given a just world in which to live. This is a compelling achievement to strive for. International cooperation is required in order to achieve peace – we must look beyond nationalist perspectives in order to create a better tomorrow. This is a demanding goal: encouraging countries to encompass a global perspective will not come without effort. The people have the power to enact this change - they must create the will.

The Open Society Initiative promoted by philanthropist George Soros becomes increasingly relevant in this age of accelerating change. Society must embrace the democratic values of openness and equality. An open society tolerates differing perspectives. No single group, government or organization has a monopoly on truth. Government and civic society must remain open to change in order to adapt to our increasingly interconnected world.

These are issues of human interest, not state interest. It is in the interest of the international community to look within countries, not just between countries. We must work together; we must intervene to eliminate conditions of poverty and inequality, even if it does not concern us directly. This is essential to the future of peace: oppressive regimes affect the entire international community. There is no place for these regimes in an interconnected global open society.

> *Terrorist impulses ferment in poverty, oppression and ignorance. The elimination of these conditions and the active promotion of a universal respect for human rights must become a priority*[18].

All countries have a role to play in creating this future, and all countries must actively take part. These issues transcend national borders. Alliances with NATO and other democratic and international institutions can help to reform the United Nations so that its member states act not only in terms of their own interests, but in the interests of all humankind. In addition to UNESCO's educational programs for a culture of peace, UNESCO must work to create incentive programs with corporations. With their extensive monetary resources, multinational corporations must focus not only on environmental concerns, but also on peace concerns. Together, we must focus on proactive, constructive measures that encourage the development of a culture of peace.

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VI. CONCLUSION

Finding stability and peace is certainly the greatest collective challenge that mankind has ever faced. Conflict is unavoidable, but violence is not. In many cases, the energy stemming from conflict can be directed towards achieving positive change. People need to be taught of alternatives in resolving conflict, that violence is not a necessary means to achieve their goals. Peace education is a means of achieving this end. Peace education raises awareness of the roots and causes of conflict, and it provides people with the necessary skills and knowledge how to respond to conflict.

Through channeling this energy into programs that rebuild the community and strengthen bonds between communities, peace education can inspire people to look to the future for a better tomorrow. It can stimulate and revitalize morale and work towards developing the infrastructure of developing economies. The United Nations and its partners can encourage this directed effort for peace by raising standards and initiating programs that catalyze the growth of a truly universal culture of peace.

The creation of peace is a long, ongoing process that will take years to accomplish, but at least the generations to come will have the chance to experience its benefits. It must become our united goal as human beings to live with one another in peace and harmony. Through the generations to come that will benefit from the fruits of our efforts towards creating a world of peace, it can still be a rewarding effort to our being.

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