

Religious Diversity and Local Responsibility in North and South Contexts: the Role of Interfaith Dialogue towards the Building of a Culture of Peace

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Introduction

This Third Diversity Forum bringing scholars, educators, policy-makers, and members of civil society organizations from various Commonwealth countries to reflect on the related themes of inter-faith dialogue and cultural diversity holds deep implications for the well-being of not only all humanity, but also of our planet. It also resonates meaningfully with my own life experiences, initially growing up in the multicultural and multi-faith society of Malaya and then Malaysia, where I first learned to respect other cultures and faiths able to live in relative harmony with each other. Later, while studying and working in North Commonwealth nations such as Australia and Canada, I also gained valuable exposures to multiculturalism and multicultural education policies, albeit while conscious of gaps between theory and practice, including discrimination and racism.

In other South contexts (e.g. Uganda, South Africa, Philippines, Indonesia) and through international programs of agencies like UNESCO and civil society movements, my involvement in peace education and inter-faith dialogue yielded fruitful lessons on the possibilities and challenges of building a culture of peace through intercultural and interfaith dialogue. In recent times, the opportunity to participate in local, national and global inter-faith dialogue initiatives, notably the Parliament of the World's Religions and the coordination of the Griffith University Multi-Faith Centre, have affirmed the vital need for all peoples, communities, institutions, governments, inter-governmental agencies and civil society organizations, to uphold and practice both our local and global responsibilities to promote faith and cultural diversities while nurturing a common humanity and peaceful universe.

Inter-Faith Dialogue

To begin with, the idea of inter-faith dialogue seeks to promote understanding, respect and reconciliation across diverse faiths within and across nations. It is now acknowledged to be a key component of

deeper mutual respect and understanding, as well as to join hands, minds, heart and spirit in overcoming common societal, international and global problems (e.g. wars, militarization, inter-cultural conflicts, racism, poverty, North-South inequalities, human rights, ecological destruction). As I will later note, such international inter-faith dialogue movements draw their inspiration and strength from many inspiring exemplars of local community and grassroots efforts.

Inter-faith dialogue, if it is to be fruitful and authentic, rests on several assumptions and principles. These include an openness to learning about and from each other's wisdom and knowledge about faith and spirituality and a spirit of humility and willingness to be self-critical, acknowledging contradictions between theory and practice. In dialogue, there is also openness within each faith to engage in re-interpretation of beliefs in the context of contemporary societal realities, and to challenge any tendencies towards extremism and intolerance by any leader or followers. In this regard, as many faith leaders have emphasized, intra-faith dialogue needs to complement inter-faith dialogue.

Importantly too, inter-faith dialogue needs to involve not only leaders but also ordinary citizens from all walks of life and sectors, including professionals, civil servants, media and educators. Finally, the role of education in promoting inter-faith dialogue is essential and vital, so that children and youth, who will be the future leaders and adult citizens, can also grow up to promote a culture of respect, harmony, justice and non-violence.

Building a Culture of Peace

Secondly, in this new century, realities worldwide clearly reveal the vast realities of peacelessness and conflict facing humanity. Inevitably bombarded by stories of violence, conflicts, and suffering. New wars; old wars that drag on; millions of refugees; the ongoing hunger, homelessness and poverty of billions; the resurgence of older diseases and newer ones like HIV/AIDS; and natural disasters. In the face of such "gloom and doom" news, it can be easy to feel great despair, and for some people, hopelessness or perhaps even indifference.

But despite the suffering, destruction and understandable feelings of despair, the good news is that there are growing signs of hope. These conflicts and violence in all levels and forms are being challenged courageously and hopefully by peoples, communities, movements and initiatives working to create a culture of peace through active nonviolence.

In this peace-building, it is clear that diverse faiths and spirituality traditions provide inspirational sources of values and principles that guide action and transformation from a culture of violence to a culture of peace. However, such values and principles may often need to be re-awakened as peoples and believers are entrapped by a culture of competitive materialism and egocentric attachments whether it be attachment to

compassion; promoting human rights and responsibilities; building inter-cultural respect, reconciliation and solidarity; living in harmony with the Earth and cultivating inner peace.

Today, no matter where we may be, mainstream media inevitably bombards us with endless stories of violence, conflicts, and suffering. New wars; old wars that drag on; millions of refugees; the ongoing hunger, homelessness and poverty of billions; the resurgence of older diseases and newer ones like HIV/AIDS; and natural disasters. In the face of such “gloom and doom” news, it can be easy to feel great despair, and for some people, hopelessness or indifference.”

But it is not all ‘bad’ news”. Amidst the pain, suffering and hardships endured by billions of human beings on planet Earth today, countless voices can still be heard and many inspiring actions witnessed that collectively reflect a global yearning for peace. For example, ordinary peoples have courageously established zones of peace free from armed conflicts between the Government and armed insurgent groups. Many rural and urban poor people have organized themselves to promote alternative, reliant, just and sustainable, while women are struggling worldwide for their human rights and for development that overcomes gendered inequities. Furthermore, teachers, parents, citizens and students in North and South contexts have been implementing programs of conflict resolution and peer mediation to build school environments free from violence. Indigenous peoples have also succeeded through active nonviolence to realize their rights to self-determination and cultural survival in the face of development aggression. Last but not least, North and South citizens have joined hands to promote just and sustainable people-centred development policies rather than the current world order dominated by powerful elites, organizations and structures.

These exemplars clearly show that the human spirit remains undiminished in the face of multiple conflicts and challenges steeped in all forms of violence and peacelessness. Despite the ending of the “Cold War”, and the opportunities provided by the so-called “peace dividend”, there is widespread consensus that we are still living within a deep-rooted culture of violence. It was therefore very meaningful and vital that the United Nations declared 2000 as the International Year for the Culture of Peace, followed by the International Decade for a Culture of Peace and Nonviolence for the Children of the World. We still have another six years left of this International Decade, and so much more needs to be done to fulfill the vision and goals of the Decade.

Besides the numerous UNESCO-initiated conference and forums and efforts by some governments to implement National Culture of Peace programmes, there have been inspiring demonstrations of how a culture of peace is being weaved slowly but surely all over the world. For example, at the 1999 Hague Appeal for Peace in the Netherlands, over 7000 peoples representing groups, movements, communities, institutions and agencies, including the UN Secretary-General, several Nobel Peace laureates, and NGOs from every sector of advocacy, shared ideas, strategies, lessons, and hopes for building a more peaceful, just, sustainable and compassionate world. Most recently, another 8000 participants from diverse faiths and spirituality traditions gathered in Barcelona at the Parliament of the World’s Religions to share many common values and principles which are vital to the building of peaceful individuals, communities,

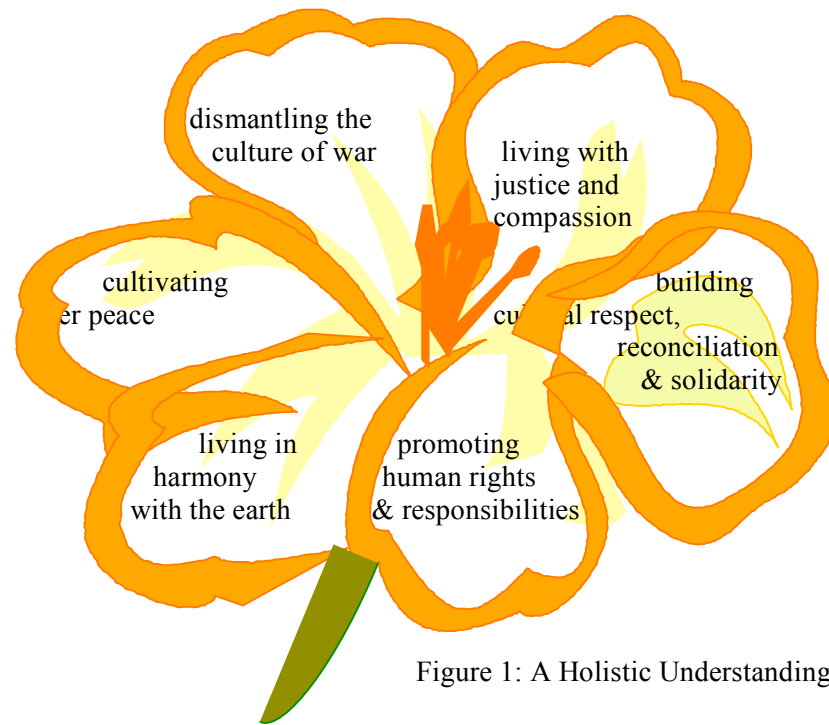


Figure 1: A Holistic Understanding of a Culture of Peace

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The Role of Peace Education

Thirdly, may I affirm strongly that education plays a most vital role in both inter-faith dialogue as well as

How can education simultaneously cultivate values and attitudes that move individuals, families, communities, nations and the world to translate their critical understanding into personal and social action for building peaceful persons, families, communities, societies and world?

Communities, institutions, civil society organizations, and international/global agencies including UNESCO, have therefore been implementing educational projects and programs that seek to address the root causes of violence and conflicts, and to build societies and ultimately a world based on principles and values of active non-violence, local/global justice, human rights, inter-cultural respect and reconciliation, ecological sustainability and inner peace. As the UNESCO Medium Term Strategy (2002-2007) (31C/4) stated, it is vital for education to promote universally shared values for the development of peaceful, democratic and pluralistic societies, including values such as human rights, democracy, tolerance, non-violence, solidarity, intercultural understanding and dialogue among cultures and civilizations.

Finally, in a concluding session, it is necessary to focus on a number of key pedagogical principles will be suggested in order to enhance the effectiveness of multi-faith education toward a culture of peace. How we educate for peace or the educational process, just as how we conduct inter-faith dialogue, is as important as the content (“what”, “why”) of educating for peace. It is now appropriate to turn to specific themes of interfaith dialogue in weaving a culture of peace, and to draw out implications and challenges for educational institutions and educators. A Global Yearning for Peace

Dismantling the Culture of War

Despite the ending of the Cold war and reduced tensions and nuclear arms race between the former two superpowers, the world today is still experiencing tragic symptoms of a culture of war yielding untold suffering, hardships, pain, and death. Millions, notably civilians and children, have died in conflicts or become refugees and/or internally displaced persons. Wars, acts of terrorism followed by deadly responses of state-sponsored counter-terrorism violence, armed intervention and military occupation, are grim reminders of the willingness by which nations and groups resort to armed violence to “settle” conflicts and disputes.

In the field of nuclear arms, we also saw how some countries have been spending precious national resources on racing to build up their nuclear weapons. Horizontal proliferation in nuclear weapons, as well as other weapons of mass destruction (mostly chemical and biological) is now a major problem to be resolved nonviolently. In the meantime, the United States’ abandonment of key disarmament accords and its plan to install a new anti-missile shield threatens to re-escalate the arms race which could lead to an intensified militarization of space.

Clearly, in the face of these ongoing manifestations of a culture of war, there is a great need for peace education that focuses on nonviolent resolution of armed conflicts and disputes. As successive generations

Another specific dimension of such disarmament education and advocacy lies in the campaign to abolish the arms trade that fuels the engines of wars while diverting scarce national resources into weapons instead into meeting basic human needs. The historic treaty banning land mines also crystallizes how ordinary citizens can mobilize together with state agencies to enhance the safety of innumerable peoples worldwide.

Furthermore, the culture of war not only persists in such “macro” contexts, but also in the more “micro” spheres of life in all societies. Domestic violence and physically harmful practices at interpersonal, familial, institutional and community levels have also been challenged by non-formal and formal educational campaigns and programs, as has the proliferation of gun ownership and a deepening vigilante mentality in many societies. The role of media, other cultural and social agencies (e.g. entertainment, sports) and even the toy industry likewise are demystified for their explicit or indirect support of a culture of war and physical violence. Through public and school-based critical literacy, adults and children are empowered to not consume media violence or war toys, while pressuring governmental and private sectors to enforce relevant policies and regulations.

There has also been increasing concern, especially in North countries, over attitudes, conduct, and relationships within schools which sanction a culture of violence (e.g., bullying, assaults, corporal punishment, “gang” fighting, and teacher victimization). Consequently, in many formal schooling systems, the integration of nonviolence principles in policies, programs, curricula, and teaching-learning environments has expanded in recent decades. These programs essentially promote values and practices of conflict resolution and violence-prevention to overcome a culture of violence in schools and communities. When children grow up learning values, habits and ways of resolving their daily conflicts through nonviolent resolution and mediation, we are more likely to have a next generation of adult citizens who approach conflicts constructively and peacefully.

When we turn to inter-faith dialogue, this theme of education to dismantle a culture of war in all its macro and micro expressions clearly resonates well with core values and principles found in diverse faiths and spirituality traditions. The teachings of many faiths call on their believers to build peace in their daily lives and communities, and to resolve conflicts through negotiation and mediation nonviolently rather than the use of force and coercion. A number of traditions explicitly endorse ahimsa or non-killing, and therefore encourage active non-violence as a way of life. There are now many inspiring exemplars of local initiatives in which different faiths are collaborating to overcome long-standing armed conflicts, such as the Bishops-Ulama Forum in Mindanao. Local Christian-Muslim communities have been able to establish zones or spaces for peace free from guns and committed to grassroots development projects that benefit everyone regardless of culture or faith. In the Middle East, many Muslim, Jewish and Christian faith leaders have continued, despite the ongoing spiral of violence and counter-violence, to work for a peaceful and just settlement. Recently, a gathering of faith and peace-building advocates in South Korea wrote a joint letter to President Bush after his re-election, and encouraged the U.S. Government to pursue policies that will help to resolve the tension on the Korean peninsula using negotiation rather than military confrontation.

Though inter-faith dialogue, many faith leaders and followers have also contributed to campaigns for

difficult, but from the perspective of educating for a culture of peace, its complexity should not slow down the urgent task of promoting the active non-violence dimension found in each faith. In this way, all faiths are educating and guiding their followers to tirelessly seek nonviolent resolution or transformation of conflicts.

Living with Justice and Compassion

Since the beginning of the modern era propelled by the industrial, technological and lately the information revolution, the dominant voices about human “progress” have envisioned and implemented the concept of “development” in very specific ways. This modernization paradigm of “development” embraces some basic uninterrupted assumptions and themes including the faith that economic growth especially via the “free-market” system is central to development, producing wealth that will “trickle down” to all citizens; and that the North can help the South catch up through aid, trade and investments which collectively integrate the South in the growth-centred global economy, marketplace and political order. In recent years, these modernization themes have been boosted even more vigorously by the forces of “globalization from above” and liberalization controlled by the powerful nation-states, transnational corporations and international agencies or regimes (e.g. IMF, World Bank, WTO, APEC, NAFTA).

Yet, as the countless voices of ordinary peoples in marginalized contexts worldwide have passionately revealed, such modernization and globalization have accentuated structural violence against the poor majorities. It is estimated that some 1.2 billion human beings live on less than \$1 a day. More than 30,000 children die daily from preventable causes. More than 1 billion people live in inadequate housing, while many millions are homeless worldwide. There are over 250 million child labourers suffering exploitation and poverty. In the area of health, apart from continual and even worsening symptoms of preventable diseases, the HIV/AIDS pandemic has afflicted millions of human beings with tragic long-term social legacies.

A number of modernization “successes”, especially the so-called NICs, may be cited, though even these have now suffered major setbacks and economic crisis. But within most societies, the income-wealth gaps have worsened between the elites and the marginalized sectors. Structural injustices and economic exploitation have combined with political systems to undermine entitlements and opportunities for the majorities to meet even their basic needs. These structures and relationships of internal inequities within the South (and increasingly North as well) are interconnected simultaneously with international and global injustices whereby the North disproportionately benefit from regimes of trade, investment, debt, structural adjustment and even aid. The income gap between the richest and poorest countries has increased from 35 to 1 in 1950, 44 to 1 in 1973, and 72 to 1 in 1992. Over 1980-97, the total debt of the poorest nations grew from US\$568 billion to over \$2 trillion; yet in that same period, these same nations repaid \$2.9 trillion in principal and interest rates.

We must therefore face the challenges of world poverty and recognize that the root causes are inequalities

alternative thinking and strategies for a development paradigm that one acronym PEACE refers to as *participatory, equitable, appropriate* (in values and technology), *critically empowering* and *ecologically sustainable*. Education for such more peaceful development that meets as its central priority the basic needs of all citizens and rethinks the goals of high consumerist technologically advanced “progress” is clearly a major pillar of peace. From rural to urban contexts, the poor and solidarity groups are empowering themselves through self-reliant, equity-led and sustainable projects. Worldwide, there is an intensifying campaign to persuade states and banks to cancel the crippling debts of South nations.

In a holistic framework of peace education, it is therefore important to relate the principle of justice with the ethics of compassion. In many civilizations and faiths, compassion is an ethical principle for guiding all inter-relationships from micro to macro levels of life. Unlike pity, compassion means being able to express authentic feelings for the suffering of others and then being moved by one’s conscience and spirituality to help transform the conditions that lead to such suffering, such as unjust relationships and structures. Also, the “giver” needs to look self-critically at himself/herself and ask if he/she may be directly or indirectly responsible for the suffering of the recipients. In contrast, compassion requires a willingness to acknowledge responsibility for conditions of structural violence (e.g., corporate and state policies of one’s nation) and to express solidarity with the marginalized through personal and social actions for local/global justice.

In many North societies, a whole spectrum of aid and development NGOs has grown over the decades to promote links of solidarity with South peoples, NGOs and POs engaged in grassroots development; to advocate for alternative aid, trade and other foreign policies of their Governments that would reverse North-South inequities; and to challenge those activities of global organizations and globalization that further marginalize poor and vulnerable majorities. Hence, there is a great need for education which develops a spirit of compassion and justice among the affluent peoples and sectors in both North and South nations.

Promoting Human Rights and Responsibilities

For over fifty years, much effort has been undertaken to realize the vision embodied in the Universal Declaration on Human Rights and numerous successive covenants, conventions, treaties and other international instruments. Whether civil, political, economic, social or cultural in focus and application, human rights legislation, policies and practices have reminded us that all people have inalienable rights that must be promoted at individual, community, national and international levels of life. While acknowledging the progress that has been made in promoting human rights, still it is essential to be reminded that a wide gap still exist between theory and practice. In so many societies, human rights violations continue to cause great suffering, pain and indignities to countless men, women and children

The enormous challenges of promoting and respecting human rights can be likened to trying to keep alight candles in the midst of a storm, where the candles refer to the inherent dignities that all human beings

numerous international conventions and instruments emphasize, cultural beliefs and practices cannot be used as a rationale to violate human rights. For example, in some cultures and communities, women can be subject to physical or other violence in their homes. Such domestic violence cannot be justified as a cultural norm or practice.

We must recognize the indivisibility and inter-relatedness of all rights, thereby avoiding the earlier emphasis on individual civil and political rights to the neglect of social, economic, cultural, group, peoples and solidarity right. We must legitimize the role of NGOs and peoples organizations in promoting human rights, and to address root causes rather than symptoms of human rights violations. Finally, in promoting human rights, we must also equally promote human responsibilities.

More specifically, a culture of peace is very attentive to the vital realm of women's and children's human rights. Women's contribution not only to their own peace but to their entire communities and societies is acknowledged as indispensable hitherto gender-biased development models are reshaped to equitably benefit women. Mobilizing around the historic Convention on the Rights of the Child, NGOs have engaged in critical education and to defend children against exploitation, marginalization and violence (economic, sexual, cultural, social, domestic).

In formal educational institutions, advocates have worked hard to integrate human rights education into teaching and learning. Teachers, parents, students and human rights NGOs like Amnesty International and the People's Decade for Human Rights Education have designed various curricula for promoting student awareness of local, national and global realities of human rights, and empowered action to protect and respect human rights in their societies or abroad. From the role-modeling of human rights in their own school institution to advocating for release of political prisoners, abolition of the death penalty and improved rights of marginalized sectors, students will hopefully embrace a culture of human rights which in turn positively contributes to a culture of peace. In this regard, it needs to be emphasized that educating for human rights also entails developing a sense and practice of responsibilities.

At international and global levels, there is emerging a critical mass of human rights workers and organizations that are collaborating in public education across regions and continents for a fuller implementation of human rights provisions that many Governments have formally ratified, and demanding the human rights accountability of international development and global economic agencies. The recent positive steps forward in establishing the International Criminal Court, and tribunals for war crimes and other crimes against humanity, reflect the possibilities for peacefully bringing to justice those guilty of committing human rights violations.

In connecting this theme of promoting human rights and responsibilities with inter-faith dialogue, it is hopeful to see an increasing engagement of faith leaders with human rights advocates. While the concept of "human rights" is not necessarily explicitly found in faith doctrines, the spirit underlying human rights norms is reflected in the principle of dignity and in values and norms of good conduct and human relationships taught by faith prophets and founders. As faith institutions join the human rights community

(e.g. on issues of gender, children, sexuality, conscience, individual vis-à-vis group rights etc). In the dialogue among civilizations promoted by the UN and other agencies, there also need to be

Building Intercultural Respect, Reconciliation and Solidarity

Conflicts between peoples of different cultures, ethnic/“racial” identities, while not new in human history, are posing major problems of peacelessness and tragic violence in the context of a militarized and structurally violent world. Often, it is not the cultural differences alone that result in conflict. Rather we have to look at a broad range of root causes and factors such as the contest for resources and territories. There are also often historical injustices which are the underlying causes of such conflicts, as in the colonization of indigenous or aboriginal peoples. As earlier noted, the dominant modernization paradigm is further marginalizing indigenous or aboriginal peoples who are portrayed as standing in the way of “progress” as forests are logged, energy infrastructures constructed, mining proliferate to meet industrialization and consumerism, and agri-businesses expand into the hinterlands.

In societies which have traditionally been culturally diverse, or have become more multicultural through immigration, such as Canada and Australia, there is a need to promote values and attitudes as well as cultural policies based on mutual respect, understanding, non-discrimination, and non-racism on the basis of ethnicity, faith, and other cultural characteristics. In recent decades, the growth of ethnic and religious intolerance and prejudices have led to tragic conflict including physical violence in different parts of the Asia Pacific region. Since 9/11 and subsequent “war on terrorism”, peoples of Arab and/or Muslim heritage have also suffered racist attacks and profiling, which need to be challenged and overcome.

Another pathway towards building a culture of peace is therefore promoting active harmony between cultural groups within nations and between nations. A peaceful world is not feasible without the ability and willingness of all groups to live nonviolently in unity amidst diversity. In this regard, the thesis being promulgated by some thinkers and political leaders that world security is being threatened by a “clash of civilizations” urgently needs demystification. This simplistic argument overlooks the complexities of “civilizations”, and also dangerously pits one civilization or culture against another despite the historical evidence of cooperation and solidarity even when conflicts or even wars have occurred.

In many multicultural societies, formal school curricula and institutional environments have been integrating principles, values and strategies of intercultural and multicultural education. It means that when we look at the history of a nation, it must be inclusive of the histories of all groups and cultures. We need to raise our consciousness and sensitivity of different cultures. All groups deserve to receive equitable respect and non-discrimination. We need skills training to reconcile existing intercultural conflicts nonviolently. Peace educators however are also critical of versions of multicultural education that merely “celebrate” cultural differences in superficial ways without promoting critical understanding of and solidarity in resolving root causes of intercultural disharmony (e.g. racism, discrimination, structural injustices, historical oppression). In this regard, indigenous peoples would not view intercultural education as valid if

respect can come a process of reconciliation and healing of bitterness, enmity and distrust. At local, national and international levels, faith and inter-faith organizations and networks such as the World Conference on Religions and Peace or the World Parliament of Religions are providing educational and empowering spaces for diverse faith leaders and followers to work for nonviolent and just interfaith and intercultural relationships. Through dialogue, members of diverse faiths are recognizing that they all have many common values and ethical principles for guiding relationships among all peoples and cultures. In turn, this sense of common humanity will hopefully lead to collaborative action among all faiths to resolve common societal and global problems (e.g., injustice, violence, human rights violations, discrimination, racism, and ecological destruction). Importantly, peace educators focusing on intercultural harmony are also acknowledging the vital role of indigenous or traditional social-cultural ways of resolving conflicts.

Furthermore, in educating toward a culture of peace, building cultural respect and reconciliation, will not suffice. Also urgently needed is cultural solidarity. This is because in situations of unequal power relations and injustices, cultural groups that are already economically and politically advantaged have a social responsibility to be in solidarity with marginalized groups and communities. This is especially clear in the struggles of indigenous peoples for their right to self determination and to challenge globalization from above. Non-indigenous peoples need to express solidarity with their indigenous sisters and brothers and with other minority groups to challenge and dismantle prejudices, discrimination, and racism. Hence, in promoting inter-faith dialogue for peace through the Griffith University Multi-Faith Centre, we have focused on themes such as reconciliation with indigenous peoples, compassion for refugees, and social justice for the marginalized worldwide.

Living in Harmony with the Earth

In every region and corner of the world, the effects of environmental destruction are being increasingly felt, whether it be pollution of land, air, and water; soil degradation, depletion of non-renewable resources; exhaustion of fisheries; deforestation; and global warming. This deepening ecological crisis reflects the violence that humanity is inflicting on the earth, which demands a truly determined effort to protect the environment from further destruction and to design alternative relationships between human beings and planets based on principles of sustainability.

Clearly a root cause of environmental destruction stems from an unsustainable paradigm of development based on unlimited economic growth that prioritizes profit maximization and aggressive competition for resources. As Wackernagel and Rees and other environmentalists have estimated, the ecological footprint of industrialized North societies is many times heavier than that of South countries. Each person, country, and society has a responsibility to lighten their ecological footprint by, among other remedies, rejecting over-consumerism and shifting towards renewable sources of energy (e.g., solar, wind, hydrogen, etc.).

Even before the Rio Conference on Environment and Development, the impact of the environmental movement on individual citizens, institutions and governments was clearly noticeable. The world has been

A growing number of governments and even corporations are also adding their voices on behalf of environmental protection in response to the deepening problems of global warming, ozone layer destruction, and other symptoms of the ecological crisis. Yet, as the Rio Conference outcomes and the recent World Summit on Sustainable Development in South Africa indicated, determined action by governments and private sector agencies to promote ecologically sustainable “development” remain limited by the overriding principles of growth-centred globalization. While encouraging some efforts by business to contribute to sustainability in policies and practices, there is regrettably growing evidence of a kind of corporate ‘green-washing’ that is being challenged by civil society groups worldwide.

A forth crucial pathway towards building a culture of peace is therefore , educating for saving the environment. But “sustainable development” needs to go beyond individual and state action to recycle, limit greenhouse gases emission, efficient energy use, or save species from extinction.. Unless human beings relate to the natural environment according to the ethic of inter-generational responsibility, future generations will not be able to survive. Peace-oriented environmental education hence raises basic questions of over-materialist and over-consumerist lifestyles. Secondly, it must talk about green justice, so that environmentalist agendas and North-South relationships simultaneously enable peoples to met their basic needs and rights free from structural violence.

Peace-oriented environmental education hence raises basic questions of over-materialist lifestyles and consumerist ideology propagated by the dominant modernization paradigm. Secondly, it must talk about green justice, so that environmentalist agendas and North-South relationships simultaneously enable peoples to meet their basic needs and rights free from structural violence. If “sustainable development” is conditioned to serve the unchanged goals of growth-centred globalization, the roots of the ecological crisis will remain unshaken.

In formal educational systems, environmental education has become a regular theme in school curricula and pedagogy. While initial emphasis has been placed on educating children to be personally and socially green and for schools to be environmentally friendly (e.g. recycle, reuse, reduce, save animal and plant species), there is a recognition that a holistic perspective to environmental education must dig deep into the roots of the crisis. Hence, personal earth-caring must integrate principles of structural justice and rights between groups and nations, challenge modernization ideals of growth and consumerism, advocate voluntary simplicity in lifestyle and promote the concept of earth rights.

Turning to inter-faith dialogue, there is clearly a growth of awareness and commitment among many faith leaders, believers and institutions on the theme of living in harmony with the earth. The values and principles of eco-spirituality or “green theology” can be found or discerned in the holy texts and doctrines of diverse faiths. Christian environmentalists like Thomas Berry and Sean McDonagh emphasize that “stewardship” is a more authentic expression of Christ’s message than “dominion”. The Holy Koran teaches us to care for all creatures, not just humanity. In Buddhism, all parts of the universe are interdependent, and hence loving-kindness and compassion needs to be extended to all beings and the earth. Many other faiths, including indigenous spirituality, call on their communities to practice their faith

spirituality traditions have counseled, each human being has a need and responsibility to cultivate a deep sense of inner peace. For thousands of years, many methods of meditation and contemplation have been shown to help develop inner equilibrium and tranquility. The patient growing of spirituality that accompanies this deepening of inner peace is seen as an intrinsic goal of living. There is also a basic assumption here that core values and root principles of diverse cultures and/or faiths provide guidance and inspiration for developing a culture of inner peace.

This is especially relevant in today's frantic pace of life, as more and more people find less and less time for quiet contemplation and equilibrium surrounded by excessive competition and consumerism. Serious symptoms of inner peacelessness are evident such as increasing diseases of addictions, depression and alienation, for which chemicals are prescribed as "cures".

As reflected in the holy texts, doctrines, oral wisdom, and body of practices across many faiths including indigenous spiritualities and "new age" conceptions, it is through a constant cultivation and renewal of such roots of inner peace that individuals can grow spiritually. In the Buddhist and other spiritual traditions, for example, we are reminded to overcome attachments to such negative elements as greed, power, fame and similar addictions that become the root causes of conflicts and even violence. Or as Lao Tze teaches us,

*Great trouble comes from not knowing what is enough
Great conflict comes from wanting too much
When we know when enough is enough
There will always be enough
Tao Te Ching (46)*

A similar message is given by the German Christian theologian, Bonhoeffer (1948) , who noted *that "earthly possessions dazzle our eyes and delude us into thinking that they can provide security and freedom from anxiety. Yet all the time they are the very source of all anxiety. If our hearts are set on them, our reward is an anxiety whose burden is intolerable"*.

At the same time, peace education cautions us against cultivating inner peace in a self-centred way. Can we, for example, be contented with a sense of inner peace while ignoring the multiple and pervasive realities of peacelessness in our societies and our world, or even more importantly, avoiding a self-critical assessment of our potential or actual complicity in generating outer conflict and violence? It is vital therefore for educators to link cultivation of inner peace with a strong responsibility to the building of outer peace.

Furthermore, there are many voices arguing that in cultivating inner peace, peoples from diverse traditions, faiths and cultures are better prepared ethically, emotionally, and spiritually to work for outer or societal peace. For example, in the grassroots Basic Christian or Ecclesial Communities that have emerged largely in South contexts under the inspiration of "liberation theology", members are motivated to deeply

In some programs of holistic peace education, the theme of inner peace is explored through exercises that challenge learners to examine meanings and implications of inner peace development across various levels of life: the very personal and interpersonal; one's work and institutional environment; and a citizen's place in society and world. This approach reminds learners that the "inner" and the "personal" is infused with the social and structural, and vice versa so that social action for peace draws deeply on inner peace values and spiritualities.

Education, Empowerment and Transformation

The journey along the six possible themes I have shared with you will not be easy, short or smooth. It will demand commitment, courage and above all patience. It calls for a process of education, which then empowers, and hopefully leads to transformation. Education and acting for a culture of peace, no matter which pathway you are walking on, is also not a simplistic process. There are four principles that are essential guides in educating for a culture of peace.

First, we have the principle of holism. We need to be holistic. A holistic framework always tries to clarify possible inter-relationships between and among different problems of peacelessness, conflict and violence in terms of root causes and resolutions. Holism also applies in not isolating various levels and modes of peace education (e.g. formal, non-formal, children to adults, social, economic and cultural groups) since they need to complement, sustain and support each other as being more superior or inferior. Secondly, educating for a culture of peace emphasizes the crucial role of values. The peace educator constantly encourages learners to surface innermost values that shape their understanding of realities and their actions in the world. Clearly, peace education needs to be very explicit about its preferred values, such as compassion, justice, equity; gender-fairness, caring for life, sharing, reconciliation, integrity, hope and active nonviolence. Commitment to nonviolence needs to be active, not passive, so that we are indeed moved to transform a culture of violence. Hope is vital to avoid being overwhelmed by the massive problems of conflicts into helplessness or powerlessness.

A third important pedagogical principle of peace education rests on the value and strategy of dialogue. It would be a contradiction if educating for peace becomes an exercise in "banking", as teachers assume the role of authoritarian "experts" and learners become passive recipients of peace knowledge. A dialogical strategy however cultivates a more horizontal teacher-learner relationship in which both educate and learn from each other. The realities and voices of learners yield essential inputs into the learning process and learners have opportunities for critical reflection leading to transformation.

A fourth vital principle for practicing peace education is critical empowerment or what the Brazilian adult educator Paulo Freire has called conscientization. While dialogical, participatory and non-banking pedagogies and methodologies are crucial, they are not sufficient. Peace education must move not just our minds but also our hearts and spirits into personal and social action for peace-building. In short, educating

experiences, obstacles and success stories. In recent years, I have had the opportunity to attend two such people-centred gatherings that reflect the themes and concerns raised in this paper. First, in April, 1999, I was deeply inspired and renewed by the convergence of over 7000 peacebuilders and educators, as well as some national and international agencies, from all corners of the world, meeting under the one roof at the Hague Appeal for Peace – a global assembly of unified yet creatively diverse local/global citizens committed to the vision and mission of a peaceful, just, democratic and sustainable world. Last year, in June, I participated in the Fourth Parliament of the World's Religions in Barcelona, where over 8000 representatives of multiple faiths and traditions openly and respectfully dialogue and committed themselves to simple and profound acts of building a world that transcends the innumerable sufferings of countless beings.

The spirit and essence of inter-faith dialogue is aptly and inspiringly reflected in the 1986 World Day of Prayer for Peace at Assisi, where leaders of diverse faiths gathered to join in saying the following words of hope and commitment.

Lead me from death to life, from falsehood to truth
Lead me from despair to hope, from fear to trust
Lead me from hate to love; from war to peace
Let peace fill our hearts, our world, our universe

As we are gathered in this Third Diversity Forum in a land of diverse cultures and faiths, may we also be inspired by these words of inspiration and peace.

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