

Reconciliation: A Dialogue for Modern Life

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Let me state at the outset the kind of world I want: I want a world that is human-centred and genuinely democratic – a world that builds and protects peace, equality, justice, and development. I want a world where human security, as envisioned in the principles of the U.N. Charter, replaces armaments, violent conflict, and wars. I want a world where everyone lives in a clean environment with a fair distribution of the earth's resources and where human rights are protected by a body of international law. In short, I want to live in a culture of peace.

I feel at home bringing my message to the Philia Dialogue Series on Citizenship, for the very essence of Philia – the force of caring that binds communities together – is at the heart of the Culture of Peace. Philia focuses on the universal values of hospitality, resilience, reciprocity, trust, civility, tolerance, respect, forgiveness, courage and love. We want to find these values in our government and market discourses; alas, they are too frequently lacking, and thus we look increasingly at a new force in world affairs – civil society – to propel public policies in a more human-centred way.

The “power of the people” is not just a slogan; it is a reality. Throughout history, most great social movements, from the abolition of slavery to women's equality, have begun not with governments or the marketplace but with ordinary people. Civil society activism in advancing social justice has reached a new level of involvement and is now empowering millions of people around the world in bringing forward their concerns. This was obvious in the highly visible global dialogue preceding the 2003 Iraq war, in which civil society questioned the very legitimacy of the war itself for nearly a year before it was actually waged.

When Philia asserts the need for dialogue within all sectors of society to “discover and enliven the social, spiritual and economic life of our communities,” you are strengthening the ability of civil society to be more determinative. When Philia affirms the participation of the disabled and those most vulnerable, you are reinforcing the inclusiveness that ought to be the hallmark of a human society. Absolute power, when wielded by the State and the market, excludes most of us, and certainly the vulnerable. Thus Philia and I are at one in seeking a world where our humanity is respected and reinforced.

We are not alone in this room today. Millions feel just like us. Indeed, the attributes of the human-centred world I set down at the outset was the actual agenda advanced by the People's Millennium Forum in 2000. Promoted by U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan, this five-day Forum at the U.N. was called an “NGO revolution.” It went far beyond protesting against the dark side of globalization; civil society, the Secretary-General said, can become the “new superpower” in building world wide campaigns to strengthen multilateral norms and develop legal regimes.

The idea that preoccupies Philia – how to make our society more inclusive as a condition for being more just – is also the idea that drives the Culture of Peace.

I would like to show you what I mean by a Culture of Peace and thus perhaps contribute to your ongoing dialogue.

About 15 years ago, UNESCO began to formulate a Culture of Peace as a set of ethical and aesthetic values, habits and customs, attitudes toward others, forms of behaviour and ways of life that draw on and express:

- Respect for life and for the dignity and human rights of individuals.
- Rejection of violence.
- Recognition of equal rights for men and women.
- Support for the principles of democracy, freedom, justice, solidarity, tolerance, the acceptance of differences, and
- Communication and understanding between nations and countries and between ethnic, religious, cultural, and social groups.

A Culture of Peace is an approach to life that seeks to transform the cultural roots of war and violence into a culture where dialogue, respect, and fairness govern social relations. In this way, violence can be prevented through a more tolerant common global ethic. The Culture of Peace uses education as an essential tool in fostering attitudes supportive of nonviolence, cooperation and social justice. It promotes sustainable development for all, free human rights, and equality between men and women. It requires genuine democracy and the free flow of information. It leads to disarmament.

The Culture of Peace is, at its core, an ethical approach to life. It recognizes that the world is experiencing a fundamental crisis. Though this crisis is often expressed in economic, ecological or political terms, it is fundamentally a crisis of the human spirit. It is a crisis of all humanity which, in the journey through time, has reached the point where we are capable of destroying all life on earth just at the moment when the recognition of the inherent human rights of everyone is beginning to take hold. A choice in how we will live, which path we will follow, is illuminated. The culture of peace offers the vision of a global ethic toward life in full vibrancy; the culture of war offers the prospect of misery and annihilation.

In 2001, the U.N. launched an [International Decade for the Culture of Peace](#) with a program of many events around the world. A group of Nobel Peace Laureates set out a set of guidelines translated into more than 50 languages:

- **Respect all life:** Respect the life and dignity of each human being without discrimination or prejudice;
- **Reject violence:** Practice active non-violence, rejecting violence in all its forms: physical, sexual, psychological, economical and social, in particular towards the most deprived and vulnerable such as children and adolescents;

- **Share with others:** Share my time and material resources in a spirit of generosity to put an end to exclusion, injustice and political and economic oppression;
- **Listen to understand:** Defend freedom of expression and cultural diversity, giving preference always to dialogue and listening without engaging in fanaticism, defamation and the rejection of others;
- **Preserve the planet:** Promote consumer behaviour that is responsible and development practices that respect all forms of life and preserve the balance of nature on the planet;
- **Rediscover solidarity:** Contribute to the development of my community, with the full participation of women and respect for democratic principles, in order to create together new forms of solidarity.

The high point of the media campaign was the simultaneous launch of the International Year in more than 100 countries. The signatures of more than 74 million individuals in every region of the world, including 37 million in India, 15 million in Brazil, 11 million in Colombia, and more than one million in Japan, Kenya, Nepal and the Republic of Korea, supporting the manifesto, were presented to the President of the U.N. General Assembly. The NGO-UNESCO Liaison Committee promoted partnership agreements with 180 international organizations, which carried out wide-ranging projects, workshops, shows, sporting events, festivals, and Internet websites to promote the Year. Schools joined in, and teacher training programs were developed.

This burgeoning work was soon overshadowed. The terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001 traumatized the public in virtually all the Western countries; a resurgence of militarism led to the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq.

In this environment, the Culture of Peace can hardly be heard, let alone obtain the political attention and government funding to make an impression on electorates. In addition to being fearful, many are cynical about peace ever being achieved in such a turbulent world. The arms manufacturers, who mount such powerful lobbies in the legislative halls of Western countries, discount the elements of peace as so much naiveté. To challenge militarist thinking is to run the risk of being considered unpatriotic. The fences enclosing creative thinking are indeed high.

But the machinery of war has not in the past built the kind of world in which people everywhere can achieve human security. Why can it be expected to do so in the new conditions? Rather, it is the slow, painstaking construction of a new Culture of Peace that offers hope for a better future. The values of such a culture are well worth the time it takes to develop them. The momentum of history, buttressed by new life enhancing technologies, is on the side of the culture of peace.

Somewhat lost in the media's fixation on terrorism and war was an important contribution to the Culture of Peace made by UNESCO, which organized a dialogue that was incorporated into a book, [*Crossing the Divide: Dialogue Among Civilizations*](#). This book is particularly appropriate in Philia's concentration on the values of dialogue. The book makes the point that humanity has shared a set of common values over centuries and those who communicate across the cultural divides are more likely to see diversity as a strength and celebrate it as a gift.

The participants in this unique exercise said that reconciliation is the highest form of dialogue. It includes the capacity to listen, the capacity not only to convince but also to be convinced and, most of all, the capacity to extend forgiveness. Reconciliation cannot be dealt with only at the institutional level; it is a challenge to the hearts and minds of individuals. Reconciliation demands that we seek peace with ourselves first.

Reconciliation after warfare is a colossal undertaking. Do our institutions have the capacity to appeal to the heart and soul of those who have to take the first step towards reconciliation? Denial of reconciliation may lead us unconsciously into a perpetual state of hatred, if not a perpetual state of war.

Reconciliation is dangerous; charismatic leaders have been assassinated because they tried to cross the divide. Nonetheless, reconciliation, and the refusal to believe that vengeance is justice, may well be the cutting edge of a social ethic yet to come. The greatest courage is not to kill the one who stands across the divide, but to look for another way, one that perhaps we have never tried before. The so-called "courage of might" clearly may hide a weakness of mind, and we must look for new leaders unafraid to be in the vanguard of reconciliation. Reconciliation is not for the weak of heart, but rather for those who are prepared to search for it. Reconciliation, the Dialogue participants suggest, is the route towards establishing a global ethic.

A global ethic for institutions and civil society, for leaders and for followers, requires a longing and striving for peace, longing and striving for justice, longing and striving for partnerships, longing and striving for truth. These might be the four pillars of a system of a global ethic that reconciliation, as the new answer to the vicious circle of endless hatred, is going to provide us.

The terrorism of September 11 makes this Dialogue all the more necessary. Those who dismiss it as either irrelevant or a luxury or a form of appeasement should think again. The vulnerability of everyone to murder because each is "different" from the murderer means we must find ways to apply justice in a non-violent manner. The Dialogue among Civilizations sends a signal that diversity is not a threat: it is a wealth the world society has yet to fully discover. The terrorists, the irresponsible politicians, the bigots may well be active and vociferous, but they are a minority. They are prominent because their strong suit is to destroy, which takes little time and marginal courage. To build, to discover, to strive for achievements that will benefit all human being takes more courage and more time.

“Whether we are moving towards a clash of civilizations, or towards greater human solidarity against those who murder innocents only because they are different, is really up to each of us.” We can let the small minority take over and throw us into continuous conflict at all levels; or we can enlarge the coalition of those who respect each other’s dignity and common humanity, who value the life of our family members as well as the life of our fellow human beings on the other side of the planet.

I urge Philia to broaden the bases of the dialogue you seek, knowing that by expanding the circles of concern you are at the same time making our society more inclusive. By “pushing outward” in our thinking, we “draw inward” all the elements of society. The oneness of humanity thus moves from an abstract idea to an issue of pressing daily political concern. The resources of religion and education ought to be prominently used in this twenty-first-century struggle of humanity to find ways to live together in one world.

When we fully understand the meaning of the photo of the Earth sent back by astronauts, in which we see this beautiful, fragile sphere as a whole, an attitudinal change occurs. Though we continue to live on the streets of our own community, the image of the entire planet lifts up our thinking. Who are the people on the other side of the globe? What are they doing? What is their daily life like?

This awakening to the concerns of others leads us into the sources of vast amounts of information now available on food, water, health, jobs and other human problems faced by those in different societies. This information, available from a vast network of United Nations sources, leads us further into the zones of intolerance, discrimination, conflicts and wars. Questions follow. Why is there so much starvation when there is so much food in the world? Why do we tolerate the existence of nuclear weapons, which threaten to destroy the processes of life? Why are we polluting the atmosphere and waters when we have the technology to avoid this? Why do we have the United Nations and then refuse to empower it to stop wars and end starvation?

The first sign of real knowledge is to examine the quality of the questions it evokes. In previous centuries, we were not able to frame questions large enough to address fully the nature of the human condition. While there have always been visionaries, many of whom made the scientific and technological breakthroughs that led to the ability of the astronauts to take the photo of the Earth, the public as a whole did not share in visionary thinking. The ordinary person has always been caught up in the mundane tasks of daily existence. What concerns our family and our business this week has monopolized our attention, not the state of the global community twenty-five years from now.

But now the flow of information, electronically conveyed, opens up new vistas for everyone. Many still live within the confines of their own “world,” but many more now extend their thinking about the world to places far beyond their neighbourhood. The

questions posed by this larger view held by growing numbers of the public are a sign of the change in attitudes that is actually occurring. It is this new attitude that is the first requisite of a Culture of Peace.

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