

Valuing The Culture of Peace Conference

Victoria, B.C.
August 9th-11th, 2000

Hosted By
B.C. Teachers for Peace and Global Education
PSA of the B.C. Teachers Federation
United Nations Victoria Association

SIGNPOSTS, MILESTONES TO A CULTURE OF PEACE

Jennifer Allen Simons, Ph.D.

The subject I have been asked to address is one of optimism - "**Signs** that we are on the road to a culture of peace". It is one that I can't, with integrity, address entirely in that frame. Instead I would like to speak in terms of **signposts, milestones and paving stones** on the road to a culture of peace because it seems to me that for every sign of peace there is a counter sign of war, of conflict, of human violations.

Actually, the state of affairs is more dismal than merely counter signs to peace. I think if I had to broadly define Western Culture, I could, without hesitation, say that we live in a war culture despite the fact that the majority of the members of civil society are not interested in being warriors. In the twentieth century alone, in the neighbourhood of "two hundred million people have been killed, directly or indirectly, in wars" - over twenty million directly in wars - in man-made violence. We live in a world where, at present, there are about fifty small wars taking place - a situation that is likely to multiply as populations expand, resources shrink, or are destroyed. Even though, western culture has a history of democracy originating with the Greeks, war has always played a defining part. However, I am not suggesting that violence or aggression are innate in humans, but violence and aggression may be culturally determined. (Bookchin, 110, Weeramantry, 11)

I am not a war historian - but it seems to me that beginning in the nineteenth century war, the number of deaths, - and deaths on a massive scale - and threats to civilian populations has progressively grown. I would suggest that the cause of this phenomenon coincides with the birth of the industrial epoch and its expansionist goals and is perhaps the root from which the **unprecedented scale** of violence emerges. The situation has been further exacerbated - and perhaps even caused - not only the **development** of technology but by the death of God defined as the "universal communion of man" and its replacement by **worship** of technology. There is little faith in resolving situations between people peacefully. The faith has been transferred to technology - peace kept by terror - a nuclear armed missile named "peacemaker," for example; the concept of safety under the "nuclear umbrella"; protection enforced by Stars Wars, National Missile Defence System, the weaponization of space; and so on.

We live in warrior culture in which we human beings are engaged in a struggle to maintain our human dignity and to live in a peaceful and just society.

Occasionally, individuals who epitomize this struggle, emerge, and as a consequence of their principled stands focus our attention on - and raise our awareness of - the forces of domination and destruction - knowledge and understanding that often has disappeared into individual and collective amnesia, in pursuing the day-to-day functions of everyday life. Individuals like Mahatma Gandhi, Vaclav Havel, Aung San Suu Kyi, and Nelson Mandela remind us of our humanity and our responsibility to maintain human dignity and to provide us with the energy and hope to continue on our road - or roads to a Culture of Peace:

For there are two roads to be travelled concurrently. The first is a tough road - to fight against a system seemingly determined to annihilate us as it accumulates arsenals of weapons of mass

destruction and maintains policies that could bring about their use; the second is peace-building - building a road to peace. The first is about survival, the second is about peace.

The first road to be travelled is in the active pursuit of the elimination of nuclear weapons, and the mobilization of political will to ban the weaponization of space. At the moment, we have the ability to destroy ourselves and the planet in an afternoon. As well, we are already facing 21st Century weapons of mass destruction which bode ill for humankind and have the potential for destruction greater than nuclear war.

Bill Joy, Co-founder and Chief Scientist of Sun Microsystems wrote to me about the new technological weapons and asked me "to raise the issues of these technologies and support efforts to contain these new dangers". Mr. Joy is concerned, first of all, because they "may empower nearly *anyone* to [commit] massively destructive acts," and secondly, because these technologies could cause an arms race similar to that of nuclear weapons. These weapons - genetics, nanotechnology and robotics - are capable of runaway self-replication and destruction on such a scale that, in the case of nanotechnology the biosphere could be destroyed within half an hour. "This is the first moment in the history of our planet," writes Carl Sagan in "Pale Blue Dot" when any species, by its own voluntary actions, has become a danger to itself- as well as to vast numbers of others." (Joy letter; quoted in Joy)

Nuclear war, or war utilizing these technologies, is not war in the traditional sense. Nuclear weapons are not weapons in a conventional sense that can be used in a war where one side becomes the victor and the other the defeated. Hans Morgenthau asserts that the concepts nuclear "**weapons**" and nuclear "**war**" are euphemisms. A nuclear **weapon** is "an instrument of unlimited, universal destruction." Nuclear **war** is suicide and genocide. The control and abolition of nuclear weapons and these 21st Century technologies is essential if we are not to pass along, generation after generation, the intolerable threat of nuclear holocaust, or destruction from these new technologies, and if we are continue to exist in history.

The second and concurrent road on which we must travel - and one we must travel in the shadow of extinction - We "*walk through the valley of the shadow of death*" (Psalm 23) - is the call to action and action itself, in its many forms, to work for global security, common security, human security in order to create a sustained world peace in which all people can live in their diverse cultures to their full potential. This entails an end to "unrestricted and undirected growth through science and technology", an end to "perpetual economic growth." - mindless production and consumption. (Japanese people have recently been criticized by their government for not consuming enough).

One of the primary keys to peace is the amelioration of suffering in the developing world, the elimination of poverty, hunger, famine, environmental degradation, illness with AIDS emerging as a major threat. These issues can perhaps be attributed, in part, to the legacy of colonialism, playing some part in the root causes of the tribal, ethnic and civil strife. It is no secret that the countries of the developing world are of interest to the major world powers - the G-8 (and before them the colonial powers) **only** in relation to their own economic gain. It is only where their financial interests are at stake will the powerful nations intervene - a prime example is the Gulf War when the oil supplies were endangered by Iraq's invasion of Kuwait.

We recently celebrated the 100th Anniversary of the 1899 Hague Appeal for Peace Conference. The 1899 Conference is perhaps an appropriate defining point to measure how far we have come on the road to peace; to look for significant milestones that suggest we may be having some success in our struggle for a culture of peace; and signposts that will provide us with direction on the path to a peaceful future.

By the time of the first Hague Conference there were over four hundred peace societies - the growth, development, sophistication of which, since then, I see as the most significant and most important progression on the road to peace. One hundred years later Cora Weiss, President of 1999 Hague Appeal for Peace managed to bring to The Hague, over 10,000 people from around the globe, representing many different organizations concerned with the need, and working in different areas, for peace. This is the **future** of civil society.

The 1899 Hague Peace Conference emerged at the end - and because of - a war-torn century - at that time the worst in history. There are several views on the reason for the meeting in The Hague in 1899 and I think two of them, inconsistent though they are, provide a telling argument for the complexities in which we find ourselves, with regard to the peoples-of-the-world's longing for peace.

One view, expressed by Judge Weeramantry, a highly regarded former judge, and Vice-President, of the International Court of Justice, is that the world was sickened by the fact that during the 19th Century, the horrors of war had caused human suffering on a scale at that time unprecedented in history: new levels of efficiency had been achieved "in the regimentation of resources for the slaughter of enemy populations." In response to the outcry and call for peace, the Czar of Russia, according to Judge Weeramantry, took the initiative, and the Great Powers met in The Hague and (I'll quote him) "made plans to lead humanity to a golden future free of the scourge of war [and] went further along the path to establishing a machinery for global justice than any other conference in recorded history." However, we have to acknowledge the abysmal failure of this dream with over eight-and-a-half million people killed less than twenty years later. (Weeramantry, 10)

Another view, and equally valid, voiced by Geoffrey Robertson, a well respected international lawyer and Queen's Counsel, specializing in human rights, is that the Great Powers met in The Hague in 1899 and 1907, and prior to that in St. Petersburg, with the aim of reducing "the cost of killing soldiers in wars." The major powers, he says, met out of concern about the cost of new weaponry, and agreed on limits "on the development of poison gases and explosive 'dum-dum bullets.'" According to him, these rules "came to be dressed up in the language of humanity... due to the influence of the International Committee of the Red Cross". However, the intention of the founder of the Red Cross, who was "horrified by the carnage left on the European battlefields", according to Robertson, was, not to end war, but merely "to make these wars more humane for injured soldiers and prisoners." (Robertson, 15).

This marked the emergence of International Humanitarian Law which is one of the milestones on the road to a culture of peace. Humanitarian law, though, is war law - it imposes legal restraints on the warrior, the methods of killing. The modern rules governing the conduct of

warriors which include rules on who and what can be targeted, "are now collected in the four Geneva Conventions." However, according to Robertson "after a century of arms control efforts, commencing in 1899 with a peace conference in The Hague at which twenty-six nations debated whether to use dum-dum bullets, ends with 50 million Kalashnikov rifles in circulation and with no international rule preventing the use - let alone the development - of nuclear weapons." (Robertson, 173, 167).

The development of International Law, even though **still** in its formative stages and relying "upon equity, ethics, and the moral sense of mankind to nourish its developing principles," can be considered a series of milestones or perhaps paving stones - because they create a legal ground, a code of conduct - on the road to peace. However, the problem with International Law is that it develops after the fact, after the atrocity, after the war, and we are reaching the point where such retrospective remedies become increasingly futile. (Weeramantry, 5)

Most - if not all (perhaps all) - of the decisive actions and the creation of major global institutions concerned with freedom, justice and human dignity - peace - have arisen - like the phoenix - from the ashes of war, of death, of abominable acts of destruction. The League of Nations and the International Court of Justice emerged as a response to the horrors of the First World War. These two institutions, however, did not concern themselves with human dignity per se, for the League of Nations was created for developing and keeping peace between states. The International Court of Justice has jurisdiction only over consenting **states** party to the Statute of the ICJ. Individuals had to wait for another war before their interests, the interests of the members of civil society were taken into account.

Their time came with the birth of the United Nations - the response to the carnage of the Second World War and it is important to state, the evils, the genocide perpetrated by the Nazis. This was in the minds of the drafters - and resonates in - the UN Charter and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. This is tremendous victory - another milestone - for human dignity, for global security, for a culture of peace. One of the Charter's primary purposes - "respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms" - owes its prominent position to "last-minute pressure" from American non-governmental organizations on the American officials at the meetings in San Francisco in June, 1945. (Robertson, 32)

Unfortunately for peace and human security, the power in the United Nations was - and is - vested in the victors of World War Two who became the five permanent members of the Security Council - the P-5 they are called - each with the power of veto. They are also the nuclear powers, and regrettably, hold the world in some kind of hostage.

Another development from the Second World War - is The Nuremberg Charter, the response to the absolute horror at the unbelievably evil crimes of Hitler. This was another momentous step forward - another milestone - on the road to peace. Though there were earlier laws, piracy and anti-slavery which could be considered "crimes against humanity", Nuremberg was **the** huge step forward for International Law. It changed, clarified and developed the concept of "crimes against humanity." For the first time individual rights took precedence over sovereign rights and individuals who committed crimes against humanity on behalf of the states they represented were deemed responsible for the crime. Moreover, these states themselves were

under a continuing obligation to institute legal proceedings and punish them for their crimes. If they failed to do so another state or the international community had the right to bring them to justice.

Following the Nuremberg Judgements - almost fifty years later, however - two Criminal Courts were established on an *ad hoc* basis to punish crimes against humanity: the Hague Tribunal to prosecute the crimes against humanity in the former Yugoslavia and the Arusha Tribunal for crimes committed in Rwanda. And recently, in Rome, a treaty was drafted and up for ratification which will establish a permanent International Criminal Court. These must be seen as victories for peace - as milestones. However, it must be emphasized that crimes against humanity have been selectively punished according to the will of the United Nations Security Council. None of the victors have been put on trial for the razing, the carpet bombing, of Dresden and Berlin; for the firebombing of Tokyo, for the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, to say nothing of crimes against humanity committed in Vietnam.

Moreover, the Rwanda massacre and the East Timor devastation could have been prevented but for UN Security Council's -and above all the United States' refusal to act. You will recall Stephen Lewis's piercing indictment of U.S. Secretary of State, Madeline Albright). My dream is that someday justice will be elevated to a realm above state interest, because to the detriment of justice, International Law is subservient to states parties to the Treaty; and the United Nations is a convenient tool, governed by the power relations in the Security Council.

The latest victory for justice and human dignity was the Pinochet judgement which brought the crimes against humanity **out of the zone of war** and into the **realm of "peace"** - "peace" in the sense that it was not conflict between states. This would never have happened if, according to Robertson, Pinochet had decided to take tea with Henry Kissinger rather than Margaret Thatcher because the United States, which is a friend of Chile, would have issued Pinochet with a "suggestion for immunity". In Robertston's view credit it due to the British Government which allowed the law to take its course and to the English judges who, to quote him, "with an almost touching naiveté, took the Torture Convention to mean what it said." ["With uncanny, uncynical decency, they proceeded to hoist the old torturer on his own petard"] (Robertson, 396,397)

These are some of the milestones and signposts on the road to peace. But it seems to me that is atrocious and unjust that human beings are forced to carve their steps for peace out of, in reaction to acts of war and violence. There has to be some way to plant the seeds of a humane, just world in healthy soil rather than in the killing fields.

Many or most of the actions to create a just world order, a culture of peace - and this is my most important point - a signpost - have come about because of the involvement and actions of civil society, of dedicated individual and groups.

One of the most hopeful signs towards a culture of peace is the rapid growth of civil movements, of people and groups who are determined - to paraphrase a section of an Amnesty International call to action - to not "be part of the killing silence." And another, for which we give thanks, is the accelerated development and expansion of communications technology,

creating global networks which link non-governmental organizations around the world. Amnesty International, for example, has over one million members world-wide and there are 900 other non-governmental organizations defending and promoting human rights and hundreds and hundreds of others focusing in others facets of peace and justice, nuclear abolition, anti-war, health, education, environment, development and so on.

A system parallel to the United Nations has grown up outside, alongside and synchronous with it - and often slightly ahead because these non-governmental organizations are not governed by power and politics. Their concern is respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. It is this moral force, which perhaps idealistically and naively, takes seriously the moral and ethical imperatives of the United Nations Charter and brings pressure to bear on the member states to act in the spirit of the Charter and to live up to their obligations under the various treaties, signed by them under the auspices of the United Nations.

These non-governmental organizations are host to a wealth of knowledge, expertise, experience, energy and a principled value-oriented, ethical commitment. Their members come from many walks of life - some are lawyers, medical doctors, academic experts, former military officials, diplomats, weapons scientists and arms control negotiators; and religious and spiritual leaders who remind us of the dignity of the human, and of our responsibility for all life.

Non-governmental organizations have created powerful global networks for information gathering and dissemination which have proven to be valuable to governments. Civil society has always played an important role in fact-finding, in the verification of information through the intelligence networks they have built. Citizen's groups also focus attention on the issues and mobilize public opinion.

When we look to past successes in our struggle for a humane world, the actions of members of civil society have played an immense role in the development of International Law. One of the most significant was the abolition of slavery; another was the concern articulated by the founder of the International Red Cross and supported by the outcry from the four hundred peace societies referred to earlier, which gave birth humanitarian law, albeit for war; there were the American non-governmental organizations (American Jewish Congress and the NAACP) whose pressure attained the primacy of "respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms" in the UN Charter. And Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch can take credit for most of the achievements in human rights law.

The most significant action taken by civil society - in that it broke new ground by achieving its goal by linking with government - is the World Court Project. This project was initiated by a small group of individuals, who addressed themselves to the question of how to have the International Court of Justice, whose jurisdiction is based on consent, give an opinion on whether or not nuclear weapons, or the threat of nuclear weapons constitute a threat to humanity, a crime against humanity. This became a world-wide citizen movement which sought partnership with the World Health Organization and then because the Court refused the World Health Organization jurisdiction, with the government of Costa Rica.

Building on a global coalition of citizens, the Canadian government, in 1997, forged a civil society/government partnership, to ban landmines which resulted in the Ottawa Process, a Landmines Treaty which the US, China and Russia, all UN Security Council members have, so far, refused to sign.

The recent Treaty to establish an International Criminal Court is another important success-story for civil society and a step towards a culture of peace. Pressure from citizen groups, concerned with human rights, on their governments around the world resulted in its creation in Rome in 1998.

Citizens protests against globalization at the World Trade Organization meetings in Seattle and again recently in Washington at the World Bank/International Monetary Fund meetings are perhaps harbingers of change to address the global economic disparities caused by the unregulated activity of multinational corporations and the global currency markets.

The nuclear abolition movement is undergoing a renaissance now that the Cold War is over, a Second Nuclear Age has set in, and new nuclear dangers are threatening the peace and security of the people of the world. The Canadian government, reacting to pressure from citizens' groups, has in a small way attempted to create a civil society government partnership by establishing annual NGO/government consultations on the nuclear issue. It also included two NGO representatives on its delegation to the 2000 NPT Review Conference. At the conference Canada proposed the participation of accredited NGOs expert in this field. However, this was not acceptable to the majority of states. All that came out of the proposal was agreement that one formal meeting will be held between delegates and NGOs at which NGOs would make presentations to the delegates. This was mere formalization of a process that was already taking place.

The United Nations conferences - Habitat, The Earth Summit, Women's Conference in Beijing - which though excluding citizens from decision-making forum, gave the people the opportunity to mass in large numbers, network, create coalitions, bring the issues to the attention of the world's public and create the ground for change in the interest of human beings. If Kofi Annan's proposal for a Conference on Nuclear Dangers becomes a reality, then we will have the opportunity again to carve out a path towards a global peace.

To me, the growth of civil movements, and evidence that they are going on the offensive, that their power is growing and they are demanding action and enforcement, is the most significant process, the most significant signpost directing us to the future - in the movement towards a culture for peace.

We, the people, have to accept that we are responsible for all life, to create a world worth living in. We cannot trust our destiny to government nor can we trust diplomatic solutions. They are not just - they are all about sovereign power relations, statecraft. International Law is dependent on the will of states and subservient to States interests. An example of this is one I spoke about with regard to Pinochet's bad decision to travel to England for his health problems, rather than the United States which would not have allowed the law to take its course. It is

some comfort that the courts of Chile have stripped him of his immunity. Future perpetrators of crimes against humanity will perhaps hesitate, and current ones will perhaps tremble a little.

I was outraged when I read that the US signed the 1977 Geneva Protocols on Genocide with a reservation that this did not apply to nuclear weapons; I feel angry that US will not sign the Landmines Treaty because it wants to continue to use them and their cluster bombs; and that China will not sign the Treaty to the International Criminal Court because of, it is suspected, its massacre in Tianamen Square. The U.S. will not sign it because it fears that its soldiers will be indicted. Recently, France, in an outright violation of justice for humanity, signed the International Criminal Court Convention with a reservation which will allow it to commit nuclear genocide with impunity.

The U.S. prepares itself for a Third World War with tremendous investments in high-technological super weapons and the weaponization of space, and threatens world peace and stability with its proposed National Missile Defence System and potential abrogation of the ABM Treaty, its failure to ratify the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty, the resurgence of its nuclear doctrine as strategic to its defence policy and to NATO policy which has caused Russia to give new importance to nuclear weapons. All these actions have the potential to start a new arms race.

There are some countersigns at the political and diplomatic levels – in the service of peace - for example, there is more emphasis on preventative diplomacy and conflict resolution; the UN has a peacekeeping force which, however, is merely operative to keep the peace once the mechanisms are established. Some governments, to name Canada for one, in the person of its Minister for Foreign Affairs, Lloyd Axworthy, are attempting to affect a transformation from the military security concept to one of human security and to concern themselves with issues of the effects of war on children, on women and children in armed conflict, child soldiers, landmines and so on. However, I do not think that they are attempting to ameliorate, in a real way, global economic disparities, poverty, famine, health, education, environmental degradation which perhaps would address the root causes of war.

The real signs for peace come from civil society, to the thousands of activities undertaken in the striving for peace - the paving stones – of hundreds of thousands of individuals around the world. In political circles these would be called Track II activities - you, the teachers of global education, for example, imparting tools for a sustainable future, peace education, conflict resolution and so on - grounding our young people in ethically based knowledge and practices. There is also a minor revolution taking place in alternate technologies, small scale economic and development activities, though these are in no way a counterweight to the massive technological developments.

These activities are taking place in the shadow of death, because the peace we are attempting to create today is more the outcome of fear of our demise from either ecological devastation or from death from weapons of mass destruction. Peace comes to be a mandatory goal, the only possible route for the continued existence of the human species. These thousands of civil initiatives may be the ones that will help us turn back from the wrong road we have taken - to

recover an image of human good, of, borrowing from Murray Bookchin, "complementarity" in Nature, "complementarity" in relations between peoples, respect for "Other."

There are two events which haunt me and which I believe in the long run provide a key to a more humane, a more just, a peaceful world. The first one is Charter 77. Charter 77 was not only a document, but also a human rights movement, in communist Czechoslovakia. In 1975 Czechoslovakia signed the Helsinki Articles, two Covenants on Human Rights. The signatories - initially three, Vaclav Havel, Jan Patočka and Jiri Hajek - announced that they would **Live in Truth**, that is to say live as though the government of Czechoslovakia honoured the treaty it had signed. In actual fact the Treaty was specifically non-binding so that the United States could then sign it without Senate consent, and also because it suited Russia's purposes. Nevertheless, the signatories took this declaration at its **face value**, and acted as though the state of Czechoslovakia was honouring the treaty. Their action, though politically and physically dangerous (in Jan Patočka died after an extremely gruelling interrogation) proved to be extremely powerful in gaining international attention, in gathering international supporters, who pressured governments and ultimately pressure was applied on Czechoslovakia.

Fifteen years later, in 1992, Vaclav Havel as elected President of a democratic Czechoslovakia, in an address to the World Economic Forum, said that "Communism was not defeated by military force, but by life, by the human spirit, by conscience, by the resistance of Being and man to manipulation... This important message to the human race is coming at the 11th hour."

The other event I referred to earlier, was the British judges who **naively accepted that the Torture Convention meant what it said**.

It is the people who have the moral authority, the moral courage, and the naiveté perhaps, the idealism - us - who have the greatest chance of creating a culture of peace. **To quote Mahatma Gandhi: "We must be the change we wish to see in the world."**

Thank you very much.

Jennifer Allen Simons, Ph.D.
President,
The Simons Foundation

August 11th, 2000

Works referred to:

Murray Bookchin, *The Modern Crisis*, New Society Publishers, 1986

Geoffrey Robertson, *Crimes Against Humanity: A Struggle for Global Justice*, Penguin, 2000

C.G. Weeramantry, *The Lord's Prayer: Bridge to a Better World*, Ligouri/Triumph, 1998