DIGNITY: CORNERSTONE OF THE CULTURE OF PEACE

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Summary

This article explains the transformation necessary to usher in an era of lasting peace. It studies the role of global and local governance and the interface with civil society in the process. The role of dignity and its components are defined as well as the crucial importance of the family. By looking at the way women have at times risen to respond to the needs in their communities, we have evidence of the power of responsible love going beyond physical family ties. That is the key of its success. This quality can be developed and expanded based upon clear principles. There is a global momentum that reached a cresendo of hope at the moment of the 'Culture of Peace/MDG' that can be lost if not nurtured and supported from all angles. The responsibility lies with all humanity, but begins with those who have lived an experience of personal transformation and realization that a culture of peace is possible and it begins now with me.

1. Introduction

Aung San Suu Kyi said that it is the "lack of a sense of security that constitutes the most destabilizing factor in any society." The debate about security and the role of civil society has taken a sharp turn during the recent decades as the issue of 'human' security has come to the forefront. Security 'with' instead of security 'against' was one of the great insights at the close of the cold war. Multidisciplinary research confirmed the obvious- that peace is not measured by peace agreements, but by the state of peacefulness experienced in the lives of individuals. The human security approach emphasized mutual respect, empowerment and freedom in the transition to a state of peace and security. It is in the interface between the freedom from want and fear and the freedom of individuals to intervene responsibly on their own behalf and on behalf of others that the role of dignity in the process of peace-building is clarified.

2. Governance toward a Culture of Peace; a Vision?

Were the government's role to shift to prevention rather than reaction, it is argued, then the tremendous expenditures for 'military preparedness' could be channeled into an infrastructure better characterized by human development than by security from aggressors.

Government strategies would be geared toward empowering its citizens with the means and tools necessary to make informed and wise choices and lead dignified lives while implementing them."Dignity; the quality or state of being worthy, honored, or esteemed", becomes an index to measure the stability of peace and the sustainability of development and governments would be focused on finding creative and effective ways to offer that to their citizens.

Dignity, like peace, cannot just be bestowed upon another. It develops through participation. Living in dignity is not just a matter of having a good standard of living, but of being rich enough in character to be generous with what one has. How can governments help to support development in that direction? Tolerance of one another, while a big step beyond enmity, will never be the fabric of a Culture of Peace. That will only take root when the quality of relationships are deep enough that one can feel the respect and appreciation of others and can find the quality in oneself to make others feel respected and valued.

There are grassroots efforts in some countries that work to set up systems of community involvement In some cases, there have been remarkable results in lowering crime through the solidarity of parents to provide surveillance in the community with the result that it becomes more like an extended family.

Unlike imposed security systems, the community members perceive the daily benefit of their effort as their neighborhoods become safer. People are empowered as they are appreciated by their families and communities for their involvement in improving life in their surroundings. There is no doubt that governance is improved and promoting the same pattern of civic participation into national and international spheres could drastically change the nature of state security.

2.1 Ambassadors for Peace: Profession and Lifestyle

If defending oneself against the enemy called for a military solution and military strategists, then creating a peace culture would require leaders and policy makers who are skilled in the defense of the right to live and the love of life. The building blocks of all the political, economic, social and cultural systems would be the freedom, security and incentive to contribute wholeheartedly and responsibly as citizens. Ministries of Peace and their representatives, Ambassadors for Peace would replace the existing defense ministries. The debates within cabinet chambers, parliaments and social institutions would be turned toward the application of ethical values in all aspects of life-with the same core premise that it is better to empower than to impose. The role of leaders, said Emily Greene Balch, a early Nobel Laureate would be to defend the culture of life, to rescue the ethics of a culture of dignity for all citizens, arming them "with courage and hope and the readiness for hard work- and to hold on to the great and noble ideals".

In a culture of peace founded in dignity, men and women leaders would emanate this quality and would be in office because they had demonstrated their qualification as peace-makers and their ability to encourage constructive development. In our modern society where competition often implies against and it can easily lead to resentment and depression, there it would be healthy and invigorating. Competitors for public office or in sporting events alike would learn through experience that losing the race did not mean loss of value. They were investing their 100% best for the better good for all and there would be no place for remorse. Disagreements or other stumbling blocks to development that got out of hand would be noticed and responded to quickly. Early - warning mechanisms would be firmly in place in families and those that escaped that environment would be caught in the net of interaction throughout the society. This would progressively replace the phenomenal amount of resources spent on trying to keep or maintain peace (peacekeeping) or clean-up after violent conflict (post-conflict transformation).

3. What can the Family Contribute to the Culture of Peace?

Children would grow up in an environment where civic participation was the norm, and a source of satisfaction and pride. This reciprocity between individuals that felt their sense of value reinforced by the lives that they influenced constructively and the stimulation to then do more could bring rapid development. It would become clear that learning these skills at an early age in the family context was the most efficient, cost effective and enjoyable method to educate. Greater emphasis would be put on governments to support couples in their parental responsibilities through training and awareness raising programs. It is remarkable that education is available for so many pursuits, yet on of the most important periods of live has been left virtually without any systematic input. Reconciling differences without resorting to divorce, learning the best ways to pass on qualities like integrity, honesty and compassion to children; these things can be learned. Young couples are too often left on their own to work their way through the maze.

In Asian societies, the family is considered the natural and logical starting point for peace. The tendency is not to blame the family as an institution, but to recognize the failures of individuals to fulfill their roles-and of governments and social institutions to allot it the necessary security, financial stability and respect. It is clear that the experience and training that comes naturally in a culture of peace at the family level would benefit from trying to re-create the same thing on a broader scale. When children learn to value diversity, develop integrity and compassion for others, learn to solve conflicts peacefully, learn the joy and liberation of sharing at an early age, there is a much greater liklihood that they will continue to do so later. By the same token, it must be likewise said that the damage of mistreatment at such an early and vulnerable age by those closest to them causes wounds very difficult to heal.

Issues like development, not disarmament would take center stage. In fact disarmament should be one of the first steps in the pre-peace stage. It seems so simple, when two children are throwing stones at each other, parents intuitively know that the first step is to take away the stones, bring them face to face and try to discover the cause of the fight in order to try to mediate reconciliation of the disagreement. Parents wouldn't usually bring in bigger rocks for greater protection. Parents would always look to restore dignity. We seem to miss these points when working on a global scale.

4. The United Nations and the Culture of Peace Mandate

The Right to Development was declared a fundamental human right by the General Assembly Resolution 42/128 in 1986. Although, it had originally emerged as a right to economic development, its wider limits were soon being explored. Not only the many different fields of development, but the consideration of the 'complete' or comprehensive development of human beings, addressing the intellectual, emotional and even spiritual aspects of an individual's personal development became part of the discussion. Likewise there has been much debate about the direction and goals of development, i.e., "development towards what?" Ensuring sustainable improvements demands answers to these questions.

4.1 Dignity in Development

We associate many different notions with development; its not 'housing', but homes and not just 'incomes', but dignified livelihoods that will encourage the momentum of development and bring about a culture of peace. Hunger and poverty can never be eradicated with just food and money. 'Development with a human face' brought an essential element into the picture. People became the means and the ends of development. The real measure of development is the degree to which human beings, their families and communities move closer to a culture of peace by participating in enhancing the quality of their lives and that of those around them.

There are well over 1 billion people in the world living in abject poverty while unfathomable resources are being spent on weapons and methods of destruction. It is obvious that most of those who would be in a position to right that injustice have not really addressed the issue wholeheartedly. But, it is not and never was the responsibility of governments or international organizations alone to address these issues. Members of

civil society must also demonstrate their will for change, insisting their representatives make decisions in line with the mandate given them There are many great stories of local women with little or no public experience who were driven by longing to right injustices and corruption in their community.

They have at times brought remarkable changes, not because they were getting paid for it nor because they would receive any recognition or recompense other than knowing that they did something that needed to be done and their that families and communities would benefit. Many of these women have even lost their lives in the process.

4.2 The Strength of Global Consensus

In September of 2000, the member states of the United Nations adopted the Millennium Development Goals (MDG). It was considered ambitious, but feasible, that these eight goals could be achieved by the year 2015. Part of that optimism was drawn from the fact that all actors pledged their commitment.

It was perceived that the mutual effort to raise living standards in distant Least Developed Countries (LDC) would bring increased global security and eventual benefit to all. Unanimously, they deemed it worth the self-imposed belt- tightening sanctions that would insure it.

Approaching the one-third mark in our 2015 target for the MDG's, pockets of skepticism have settled in. It has always been easier to look around to see who is not fulfilling their pledge and loose incentive than study the successes and try to revitalize the momentum.

The reality is that there are many countries 'on target' and greater access to the reports of their success could lighten the work of governments whose task it is to convince its citizens of the viability and worth of their decisions. The role of NGO's has been crucial in most of those success stories, and the will of women behind the scenes, exemplary.

Human rights and development are interrelated and mutually reinforcing through the bridge of human responsibility. And human responsibility is a large part of human dignity. The United Nations can only fulfill its founding mission when it is able to convince the people of the nation states that make up its membership that it is to their benefit to give up something of their national identity for their global one.

It could be said that it is precisely that dynamic that allows the flourishing of a culture of dignity. It has to have a network in place that links families to their neighborhoods, communities to the nations and the nation states to each other.

Each entity needs to feel itself strengthened and caught up in circles of interaction that create deeper bonds of trust through the participation in a larger good. Governments can bind its citizens by threat of law, but then they must always set up complicated mechanisms to guarantee compliance, creating distance, mistrust and finally apathy. Missing are the incentives that link people to people, the core of social ethics and personal development.

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Biographical Sketch

Carolyn Handschin is the Deputy Director of the Office for United Nations Relations for Women's Federation for World Peace, International. She has represented that and several other NGO's at the Commission on Human Rights and it's Sub-Commission since 1994, making regular interventions in the area of education for peace , the role of governance and women's empowerment. As a very active member of the CONGO NGO Working Group on Peace at the United Nations in Geneva, she contributes regularly to the task force on Disarmament and Culture of Peace, the latter of which she chaired. She has organized conferences on the issues of Midde Eastern womens' role in peacemaking, global governance and sustainable peace and education for a culture of peace. The training programme for women's empowerment that she has been developing has been presented in several European countries. She has also worked as a youth counsellor and journalist and considers a large part of her capacity for lobbying for culture of peace to her daily efforts to build a peace-promoting family with her husband and 7 children.