



Brief History of the Concept of a Culture of Peace

Origin of the concept at UNESCO: The concept of a Culture of Peace arose at the end of the Cold War. For the first time, the objective for which the United Nations was founded, the abolition of war, had become feasible. The United Nations Organization for Education, Science and Culture, UNESCO, had engaged in activities to promote a Culture of Peace from its beginnings, when it was founded in the aftermath of the Second World War to construct the defences of peace in the minds of men and women. The concept of a Culture of Peace was formulated by the International Congress on Peace in the Minds of Men that was held in Africa (Yamoussoukro, Côte d'Ivoire, 1989). In its final declaration, the Congress recommended UNESCO to "[...] help construct a new vision of peace by developing a peace culture based on the universal values of respect for life, liberty, justice, solidarity, tolerance, human rights and equality between men and women". The term *peace culture* was inspired by the 1986 educational initiative *Cultura de paz* in Peru and by the Seville Statement on Violence, elaborated in 1986 by scientists from around the world, which stated scientifically and categorically that war is not determined by genes, violent brains, human nature or instincts, but was rather a social invention. Therefore, "the same species that invented war is capable of inventing peace."

National programmes for a Culture of Peace: In 1992, UNESCO's Executive Board requested a specific programme for a Culture of Peace as a contribution to United Nations peacekeeping efforts. Reasoning that peacekeeping operations alone might assure the absence of war but could not by themselves bring a positive, dynamic peace, UNESCO argued in 1992 that this could be done best by engaging those who had been in conflict in common ventures of human development. Acting primarily in the fields of education, science, culture and communication, UNESCO offered its services in *post-conflict peace-building*. National programmes were undertaken in a number of countries of Central America and Africa, as well as in collaboration with the Government of the Philippines.

UNESCO's Medium Term Strategy: A major turning point came in 1995 when the General Conference of UNESCO dedicated the Organization's Medium-Term Strategy for the years 1996-2001 to a Culture of Peace. The General Conference stated that "the major challenge at the close of the twentieth century is to begin the transition from a culture of war to this culture of peace:

- a culture of social interaction and sharing, based on the principles of freedom, justice and democracy, tolerance and solidarity,
- a culture that rejects violence, endeavours to prevent conflicts by tackling their roots and to solve problems through dialogue and negotiation,
- a culture which guarantees everyone the full exercise of all rights and the means to participate fully in the endogenous development of their society."

Transdisciplinary project: UNESCO then established a transdisciplinary project in which its various sectors, including education, culture, communication and social science, contributed in a co-ordinated way to this challenge.

UN General Assembly: Recognizing the importance of the UNESCO experience with a Culture of Peace, the 52nd United Nations General Assembly meeting in the fall of 1997 established a separate agenda item entitled “Towards a Culture of Peace” and requested the Secretary-General, in co-ordination with the UNESCO Director-General, to submit a report on its transdisciplinary project along with a draft declaration and programme of action on a Culture of Peace. The General Assembly also responded to the recommendation of the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) and proclaimed the Year 2000 as the International Year for the Culture of Peace with UNESCO as the focal point.

The UNESCO Executive Board, meeting in Tashkent at the invitation of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan, during its 155th session in November 1998, adopted the Tashkent Declaration for the Culture of Peace and UNESCO’s Action in Member States. Aware of the “great responsibility that will devolve upon UNESCO during the International Year for the Culture of Peace” as well as the International Decade for a Culture of Peace and Non-violence for the Children of the World, the Executive Board issued an invitation to the Member States, the United Nations System and other intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations to celebrate the Year. It invited them to take “all necessary steps to ensure the success of the Year and thus to affirm the values of tolerance and mutual understanding and the values of combating poverty and exclusion, all of which are actions that will primarily be of benefit to women, young people and the least developed countries.”

Beyond the Year to a Decade: In the fall of 1998, the 53rd General Assembly approved an ECOSOC recommendation, based on a proposal coming from all of the Nobel Peace Prize Laureates, to proclaim the decade of 2001-2010 as the International Decade for a Culture of Peace and Non-violence for the Children of the World. Thus, the Year 2000 should be seen as a new departure towards a long-term process of transformation.

Declaration and Programme of Action: Following nine months of debate the UN General Assembly adopted on 13 September 1999 a “Declaration and Programme of Action on a Culture of Peace” (A/53/243). The first article of the declaration provides the most complete definition to date of the Culture of Peace: “A culture of peace is a set of values, attitudes, traditions and modes of behaviour and ways of life based on:

- (a) Respect for life, ending of violence and promotion and practice of non-violence through education, dialogue and cooperation;
- (b) Full respect for the principles of sovereignty, territorial integrity and political independence of States and non-intervention in matters which are essentially within the domestic jurisdiction of any State, in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations and international law;
- (c) Full respect for and promotion of all human rights and fundamental freedoms;
- (d) Commitment to peaceful settlement of conflicts;
- (e) Efforts to meet the developmental and environmental needs of present and future generations;
- (f) Respect for and promotion of the right to development;
- (g) Respect for and promotion of equal rights of and opportunities for women and men;

- (h) Respect for and promotion of the rights of everyone to freedom of expression, opinion and information;
- (i) Adherence to the principles of freedom, justice, democracy, tolerance, solidarity, cooperation, pluralism, cultural diversity, dialogue and understanding at all levels of society and among nations;
and fostered by an enabling national and international environment conducive to peace”.