

## UPF UK: Global Peace Summit at Pavilion Hall, St. Hilda's College, University of Oxford

Keith Best  
September 28, 2023



"Peace is like a delicate flower, struggling to blossom on the stony ground of violence," the Pope told the people of Mozambique in 2019 addressing both sides who had only then signed a cease-fire after a 15-year civil war that ended in 1992 and killed about a million people. At this Global Peace Summit I want to examine briefly what we mean by peace and what realistic prospect there is of achieving it at a global level.

As Nelson Mandela taught us "Peace is not just the absence of conflict; peace is the creation of an environment where all can flourish regardless of race, colour, creed, religion, gender, class, caste or any other social markers of difference." I would add that there can be no true peace if there remains persecution, resentment, violation of human rights, poverty and injustice. Peace has to start from within every human being - to be at ease with oneself. Moreover, as I said last Sunday in Belfast where I was speaking on the 25th anniversary of the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement, peace is a journey, not a destination. That Agreement serves as a global model for conflict resolution and reconciliation. It has been studied and admired by nations facing their own internal conflicts, offering hope that even the most entrenched disputes can be peacefully resolved through dialogue and compromise. It stands as a testament to the power of diplomacy, compromise, and the human spirit's capacity for positive change.

True peace cannot be achieved without reconciliation as the recent history of South Africa and the inspirational leadership of Nelson Mandela has shown us. Their Truth and Reconciliation Commission is being replicated by the Northern Ireland Troubles (Legacy and Reconciliation) Act 2022-2023, for which Royal Assent is imminent. It will leave many dissatisfied ending, as it does, any further legal proceedings concerning Troubles-related conduct and providing conditional immunity from prosecution for those who cooperate with investigations conducted by the newly to be established Independent Commission for Reconciliation and Information Recovery. Amnesty International has commented that "The UK government are letting people get away with murder and blocking victims in the UK from getting justice. The law - known as the Troubles Act - is deeply damaging and will cause untold distress to victims." Yet without attempting reconciliation the wounds still fester and are the cause of enduring enmity. We must always look forwards and not backwards to achieve cohesion in any society.

Violence begets violence and searchers for peace must endure great personal sacrifice to achieve their aims. We have no better historic example than that of Gandhi Ji who, armed only with a loin-cloth and an iron determination, mobilised millions and defeated the largest empire the world had seen.

What are the lessons we can learn in the quest for global peace? We are confronted with war in Europe in which the atrocities of former conflicts are still replicated despite the panoply of international treaties such as the Geneva Conventions and their prohibition and probable prosecution of such crimes through the International Criminal Court. War has broken out yet again in Armenia and Azerbaijan where I was only last June. The situation in the South China Seas is fraught, Afghanistan remains an unstable platform of potential great power conflict and there are many other examples of crises which could easily escalate

into armed conflict. When I was last in Mirpur I could hear the Indian guns firing into Pakistan occupied Kashmir.

The road map to peace is not easy and it is not a straight line - it must suffer halts and detours but it is a journey worth pursuing. We must start with the international community and end the power of the use or threat of use of the veto by the Permanent Five at the UN Security Council which has rendered that body impotent to act in the way the UN Charter requires to identify and then act on a threat to peace. It is at least encouraging that last year the UN General Assembly passed a resolution requiring any one of the five permanent members seeking to exercise the veto to publish its reasons in advance and to have these debated.



Most conflicts have been caused by failed settlements or treaties from their predecessors and by boundaries arbitrarily drawn by victors or former colonial powers which often cut across tribal, linguistic and cultural homogeneity. The Treaty of Versailles at the end of the First World War is well recognised as being one of the causes of the rise of the Nazi party and the second great global war. I need not remind this audience of the partition of India which, to this day, leaves a disputed line of control and unease between India and Pakistan as well as the secession of East Pakistan into Bangladesh apart from causing the greatest migration in human history of up to 18 million and some 1 million dead: the legacy is felt to this day. Wherever there is war or conflict today you can find an historic cause along these lines - just as we watch Putin seek to recreate the lost Russian empire through a belief that Ukraine never legitimately left it.

Of course, I am not advocating a mass upheaval of international boundaries to overcome these tensions - that would be impossible. But what is both possible and desirable is that arguments over boundaries should be settled not by force of arms but by adjudication of consenting parties before the International Court of Justice. At present states will only be bound by a judgement if they have consented to the case being referred. We need an internationally agreed mandatory jurisdiction of the International Court of Justice so that all states are bound to observe its determination. All well and good, you say, but what of those countries that will not adhere to that, what of the autocracies that harbour greater global ambitions or even the world's super-power the USA which, to many, seems to want to impose its will on the rest of the world?

Above all there has to be dialogue for without that how can we understand another's intentions or sensibilities? Dialogue, moreover, means not just listening but hearing or, in other words, seeking to understand the message and motivation behind the words. Not all dialogue will be genuine and honest - a profession to abstain from action can easily be acted against on the flimsiest of pretext - but it is always worth an attempt. We may loathe the Taliban for what they are doing in Afghanistan and the denial of women's rights but they will be influenced not by megaphone diplomacy but by quiet engagement. I mentioned Northern Ireland and the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement: there would not have been any agreement at all had it not been for dialogue behind the scenes. While publicly stating that there could be no discussion with terrorists we know that John Major's Government was, indeed, talking to the IRA for months before it became public in November 1993.

Through dialogue there has to be an understanding of what constitutes self-interest and the realism that without compromise and leaving both parties capable of claiming some victory there will be no settlement. The victor takes all mentality which has been the hallmark of the results of conflict throughout

history has been shown to have failed. Do not get me wrong: I am not advocating capitulation to an alien creed or action that leaves further trouble in store. I believe that it is a correct interpretation that if Russia is allowed to succeed in Ukraine then that will be only an encouragement for further encroachment - the similarities with the last century should teach us that. Yet, if that war ends with the total humiliation of Russia then we are also sowing the seeds of further conflict. The West missed an opportunity in 1991 when it observed with a sense of schadenfreude the collapse of the Soviet Union. It was then that we should have extended more the hand of friendship and support and it may be that had this been done Russia would not now be quite the gangster state that it is today. When Putin is gone we must respect the dignity that its citizens feel for Mother Russia and bring them into the fold as legitimate participants in global affairs. It has been said that "A good compromise is when both parties are dissatisfied."



Finally, we need functioning global institutions. I mentioned reform of the UN Security Council and mandatory jurisdiction for the International Court of Justice. The International Criminal Court, in the creation of which at the end of the 1990s my organisation the World Federalist Movement - Institute for Global Policy played a leading role was a landmark advance as, for the first time in history, the responsibility for atrocities lies not just with states but with individuals who, once indicted, can be arrested by other states and prosecuted as we have seen. We need to be inclusive of states even if we dislike their systems and the way in which they operate. We may be wary of the control of China by the Chinese Communist Party and its apparatchiks, we may condemn the treatment of the Uyghur which many regard as genocide but we still need to engage with the Chinese if we are to have any influence.

These issues are controversial and not easy. Their pursuit can be wearying and disappointing. Sometimes, in the quest for global peace we may feel that we have gone two steps forward and one step backwards. The war in Ukraine and the war crimes and crimes against humanity committed there as well as the feeling that we could be on the brink of a greater conflagration may make us feel that we are on a backwards trend. Yet we should remember those advances since the last global conflict: the creation of the UN and its agencies, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other human rights instruments that have been accepted so widely, the creation of the International Criminal Court and many others. We must march on seeking incremental gain wherever and whenever it can be achieved and in that endeavour we can learn from the example of the Mahatma that in all things you succeed only with the utmost perseverance.

END