

Peace in Action, Part 2: 'Feeding' Peace

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Sitting on a little piece of valuable Manhattan property, midtown on the East River, the United Nations buildings provide a home for world peace efforts. While down the street and across the world violence and war is the most talked about topic, this little piece of the earth is devoted to discuss peace. The shooting that happened in the Navy Yard is a terror that many people around the globe live with frequently. A culture of violence thrives in our world, perhaps because it is fed with so much attention. Fortunately, there is a space for activity to nourish humanity's potential for peace. During September 2013, in the midst of worries over potential global war, a dose of peace building efforts finds sunlight through the shadows of threats.

While in parts of the New York United Nations building, representatives were addressing the crisis in Syria, in the Trustee Council Chamber proactive peace builders discussed, planned and demonstrated the process of building the Culture of Peace for all humanity. The United Nations High Level Forum on the Culture of Peace convened for the second year five days before the world remembered the September 11 tragedy and new tragedies grabbed headlines. The Culture of Peace activities exist worldwide outside of the lenses of media cameras and news reports. The International Day of Peace occurs globally this Saturday, September 21st. May peace building precede and prevail despite the terrorism and conflict occurring around the world.

With fewer spotlights than violent crisis get, some world politicians place their efforts into steering humanity toward stability. "What humanity needs is not just the absence of war, but the fully formed Culture of Peace" Deputy Secretary of UN, H.E. Mr. Jan Eliasson clarified in his opening comments of the UN Nations High Level Forum on the Culture of Peace affirming the UN role in facilitating this culture, "The goal of the Culture of Peace permeates the UN Charter." The active formation of a peace tradition through affirming equal dignity, worth and rights to all men and women, and maintaining secure environments for humans to progress to higher standards of life are the core concepts of the preamble to the UN Charter. Those attributes are the fibers of a worldwide culture of peace for humanity. "In the process of deciding how to approach peace, make peace sustainable and establish human security, we have always approached peace by a 'hardware approach'. We send peacekeeper missions, mediators and people to bring conflict leaders to the table. Yet we have not reached the most important thing in human beings, their minds," explains UN Ambassador Anwarul K Chowdhury of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, former chair of the UN General Assembly drafting committee for the UN Declaration and Programme of Action on Culture of Peace.

Policy maker's declarations are the words of good intentions, yet reality is built thorough our mindful actions. "The efforts of politicians alone will not be sufficient in order to meet the challenges of today. We need interactions between business, politics and civil society" Alexander Likhotev, president of Green Cross International, a global peace organization founded by Mikhail Gorbachev, spoke out last April at the UN in Geneva. Getting from where we are today, dealing with violent conflict crisis in parts of the world, to a safe global environment where all people are respected is the challenge each one of us as global citizens share. The adjustment from war culture to peace culture is a grassroots shift.

When asked how to create a grass roots culture of peace Chowdhury responds without hesitation that educating children is foremost important. The components of a liberated world start with the individual. Beginning as young children, people must learn respect, tolerance and the appreciation of differences. "The more children know that the world is not just us; it's a bigger world, then they will feel more compassionate, more understanding, and more a part of the larger world," Chowdhury clarifies, and continues to explain that gender equality is similarly significant in creating the Culture of Peace. Each individual should be given the full dignity as a human being, not categorized as male or female, belonging to a race, clan or family name. As Chowdhury speaks of gender equality, I hear resonance of Martin Luther King's plea to be judged by content of character. Deeper than the bouquet of differences in language, traditions and languages, the culture of peace regards each human being with equal potential, respect and dignity.

A big vision is housed in a relatively small building compared to the real estate of many corporations. The Culture of Peace vision resonates within the core of every human being, and therefore has roots deep in the soil of this earth, because each human seeks dignity, respect and freedom. When we demonstrate and teach our children to respect one another, as fellow human beings despite differences, the roots are watered. While shootings, potential war and political discouragement make headlines; a Culture of Peace is quietly nurtured through our grassroots effort. As world diplomats, scholars and NGOs collaborate in programs like the UN High Level Forum for the Culture of Peace the new human culture gestates. Headlines are not the only news. We all make news everyday — new thoughts and actions that either feed a culture of war or Culture of Peace.