

THE CASE FOR IDEALISM

*More than eighty thousand
scholars, religious leaders,
diplomats, and men and
women of conscience
have been named as
Ambassadors for Peace*

*by the Universal Peace Federation in an initiative to
deploy the diverse resources of civil society for the
welfare of humankind.*

The cause of peace can seem quixotic in a world overwhelmed by violence. News of renewed bloodshed between Israel and Hezbollah in Lebanon, the ongoing war in Iraq, escalating hostilities in the Horn of Africa, and deteriorating security in Afghanistan challenge any facile notions of lasting peace secured through conventional mechanisms. War is not a test of the endurance of human values as much as a measure of brute force; and history shows that cessation of war through conquest or negotiated settlement is often only a stay of violence, with the buried seeds of division germinating again when the new season for war comes.

The historian Thucydides (c. 455–400 BCE) witnessed the spectacle of the powerful commanding the fate of the weak during the Peloponnesian War. “For ourselves, we shall not trouble you with specious pretenses,” he wrote of Athenian demands to the besieged inhabitants of Melos, “since you know as well as we do that right, as the world goes, is only in question between equals in power, while the strong do what they can and the weak suffer what they must.” In the unequal contest that followed, notable only because it was preserved in Thucydides’ classic history, the Athenians

slaughtered all the men and enslaved the women and children.

During the twentieth century, two world wars witnessed a relentless escalation of abuses of power and victimization of the weak. But with the surrender of the Axis powers in 1945, Allied leaders, with the preeminent example of the United States and the leadership of President Franklin Roosevelt, turned from the long precedents of revenge and reprisal to pursue an agreement for the establishment of an international organization dedicated to peace.

The founding of the United Nations in 1945 was a milestone in international relations. Three years later, the moral terrain of governance changed forever when the UN General Assembly adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights without a single vote in opposition. Although the members of the Human Rights Commission acknowledged the imperfections of the declaration, they succeeded in

demonstrating that peoples with drastically opposed worldviews—powerful nations of hundreds of millions and vulnerable countries of hundreds of thousands—can agree upon a few basic



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standards of conduct. The Universal Declaration marked a new direction in human history and challenged the conventional wisdom that a sovereign state's treatment of its own citizens was a purely internal matter.

Yet, in the sixty years since the UN's birth, the shortcomings of those ideals have been plain for all to see. In his address at the founding of the Universal Peace Federation (UPF) in New York in September 2005, the Reverend Dr. Sun Myung Moon acknowledged that the UN had made important contributions to peace, but he also observed that representatives of member states "seem inherently unable to resolve conflicts and achieve peace." Made up of member states with vastly differing objectives, whose votes are dictated by national self-interest, and whose principles of governance undermine sacrificial accommodation to the public welfare, the United Nations has proved to be ineffective in responding to conflict.

A new paradigm

Calling for leadership from all walks of life to step forward and work collaboratively for the

welfare of humankind, Moon urged that a global network of Ambassadors for Peace undertake the critical work of peacebuilding as representatives of civil society. Ambassadors for Peace, he declared, should "speak not for the interests of a particular nation . . . [but] truly work for the welfare and peace of humanity from an interreligious and universal perspective."

Interestingly, Secretary-General Kofi Annan, addressing delegates of the General Assembly at the sixtieth anniversary of the UN founding, specifically called for mechanisms through which the UN could fully and systematically engage with civil society. "This hall has heard enough high-sounding declarations to last us for some decades to come," he said. "We all know what the problems are, and we all know what we have promised to achieve. What is needed now is not more declarations or promises, but action—action to fulfill the promises already made."

Further, at the 2005 Global Conference on the Role of Civil Society in the Prevention of Armed Conflict and Peace Building, Paul van Tongeren, executive director of the European

Ambassadors for Peace representing all faiths and races gather at the Dome of the Rock mosque in Jerusalem as part of the Universal Peace Federation's Middle East Peace Initiative. *Opposite:* A German newspaper reports on a pilgrimage to the Holy Land.



Two women Ambassadors for Peace from different religious backgrounds in a gesture of reconciliation.

Platform for Conflict Prevention, affirmed the need to establish a “global network of peace builders,” adding that “the time is right for civil society to organize itself and address such issues.”

Building upon such appeals, the first global civil-society conference on conflict prevention convened in September 2005 in New York. Clearly, stakeholders both inside and outside of government agree that civil society should be consistently represented to ensure that the voices and hopes of citizens are fully heard when decisions are made that profoundly affect the lives of billions of the world’s people.

Voices of faith

Political leaders and diplomats often consider religion to be a major cause of conflict and largely avoid the involvement of religious perspectives in peacemaking. Many nations in the Western world have come to the point of divorcing religion from the public arena. Though some have used religion to justify violence and extremism, the world’s faith traditions have historically inspired the transcendent moral and ethical ideals that have

elevated human civilizations. Faith gives people the power to love, to overcome barriers of fear, hatred, and ignorance. But faith, to be effective for peace, requires not only personal inspiration but also respect for diversity of beliefs, practical skills and methodologies, and resources if it is to effect real change for peace.

The UPF’s Ambassadors for Peace commission is an initiative to match ideals of peace to practical expertise that can be deployed to address conflict as well as conditions of underdevelopment, which so often are the soil of conflict. To date, some eighty thousand men and women from almost two hundred countries have been commissioned as Ambassadors for Peace by the UPF and affiliated organizations—neighborhood leaders and relief workers in developing countries; imams, rabbis, and clerics from the world’s religions; artists, academics, and business leaders; and legislative leaders and former heads of state, such as President Abdurrahman Wahid of Indonesia and Rodrigo Alberto Carazo of Costa Rica.

“There are many great things being done in this world by people of merit, people of goodwill, bright people,” says Phillip Sanchez, former U.S. ambassador to Honduras and a UPF Ambassador for Peace. “Many of these activities are not being recognized, and we need to look at how we can catalog these activities—in effect make an inventory. And then most important, we need to see how we can replicate them, continue them, strengthen them, and recognize them. And I think the Ambassadors for Peace program does all that.”

“Ambassadors for Peace have to challenge the existing structures of injustice and to insist that everyone deserves an opportunity, so the majority can be owners and stakeholders, not just workers for hire,” adds Antonio Betancourt, director of the Office of Government Relationships for the Universal Peace Federation. “The value system that has been passed down to us through the Scriptures is slipping away, going through deconstruction. So the world is becoming cynical and materialistic. Ambassadors for Peace are meant to be the conscience—in government, in academia, in the media, in business—to speak boldly in their respective fields about what is right and wrong.”

Idealism and realism

Ambassadors for Peace come from every religion, race, and nation, yet emphasize in their lives the principles that unify rather than divide us. For example, the Creator may be called by many names, but recognizing that God relates to all humankind with the heart of a parent, and that humans are essentially spiritual, engenders moral seriousness and empathy for others. Further, the institution of the family does not belong to any one race or religion but to all faiths and peoples. The family is the first and most important governing body; the school of love, character, and good citizenship; and the cornerstone for world peace. Protection of the family and of the welfare of children transcends national, racial, or religious differences.

Finally, the principle of living for the sake of others is universal to all faiths, and pursuing interreligious and international cooperation is critical to the task of achieving lasting peace. "It is not only responsible, but we are convinced that interreligious understanding and cooperation is a central prerequisite for durable peace," says Ambassador for Peace Zia Rizvi, director-general of the UN's Independent Bureau for Humanitarian Issues. "Any actions that promote disrespect, exaggerate misconceptions, or further prejudice, bigotry, and misunderstanding of any religion are regressive and undermine the work for peace so dearly won by many."

Out of such diversity Ambassadors for Peace can speak even more meaningfully to the complex and intractable causes of conflict. For example, Ambassadors for Peace from Asia, Africa, Europe, and North America gathered in Amman, Jordan, to lend support to His Majesty King Abdullah II and his efforts for peace in the Middle East. The Amman Proclamation of May 23, 2006, urged that children of the three Abrahamic faiths remember that "the Holy Land is so named because it has been blessed by God. . . . Each of its holy sites, though understood differently by each of the faiths, are the result of His efforts to sanctify a people. . . . Our devotion is not to structures of stone made by the hands of men, but to the traditions, the faith, and the values they enshrine, and the holy teachers whom they honor. These great faith traditions, when

practiced as taught, are true instruments of peace and our greatest hope for the future."

In Northeast Asia, the division of the Korean peninsula has separated loved ones for fifty years and enflamed international tensions. During the Korean War Dr. Moon was arrested for religious activities and served two years and eight months in the notorious concentration camp at Heung-Nam. Practicing his philosophy of forgiveness and reconciliation, Moon fulfilled a lifetime commitment in 1991 when he met and embraced North Korean leader Kim Il Sung, the very man who had imprisoned him. Now the UPF, with the support of worldwide Ambassadors for Peace, is pursuing person-to-person encounters, bringing humanitarian relief, and promoting cultural exchanges with the goal of reaffirming bonds of kinship and the peaceful reunification of the Korean people and nation.

"I decided to share very openly with my guide," said Lan Young Moon, president of the Korean Women's Federation for World Peace, a UPF affiliate, during a recent trip to North Korea. "I told her about my family, my work,

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Two recently commissioned Native American Ambassadors for Peace.

and my daily feelings. Gradually she began to open herself up to me too, so by the end of the week we became very close friends.”

Common ground among global civilizations

At the turn of the millennium, the United Nations proclaimed the year 2000 the International Year for the Culture of Peace and the period 2001–2010 as the International Decade for a Culture of Peace and Nonviolence for the Children of the World. A culture of peace implies diversity, interdependence, and, in an era of globalization, international collaboration.

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Yet the international community today is an amalgam of independent, often contradictory interests and motivations. Public policy in the international system is disproportionately set by a small group of the most powerful nations. Non-governmental organizations work to influence policy and intervene locally according to the specific mandate of the organization. The media also play a critical role in providing information and opinion to both policymakers and the public. When all of these principals act with a common purpose, history can be changed and a culture of peace can be envisioned. When these institutions are driven by self-interest or are divided, however, there is inertia and dysfunction.

Between April and June 1994, the world watched impotently as up to 800,000 Tutsis were slaughtered over a period of months in the Central African country of Rwanda. The leader of UNAMIR forces in Rwanda, Gen. Romeo Dallaire, concluded, “There is absolutely no way that we will find effective and lasting solutions to these conflicts if we work from different plans. Unless we move to one integrated plan of the political, the humanitarian, the military, the security, the economics, the nation building, the sustainable capabilities, with all these components working together with different emphases at different times depending

on the scenario, we will continue to be wrapped up in classic warfare and classic responses.”

How could there have been effective intervention in Rwanda or the Balkans, or in Darfur, where there is an ongoing humanitarian crisis? Surely the diverse resources of peace-making, not just governments and emergency relief agencies, need to be mobilized to answer such critical needs. Dr. Moon has proposed the formation of a “Peace Army” or “Peace Police,” having in mind a mechanism both to prevent or bring an end to conflict and to build stable societies and nations based on God-centered families. Neither possibility calls for the use of military force, but rather mobile teams of activists and volunteers who form a peace force that can be assigned to serve in troublespots around the world. Such a force will require the professional expertise found across civil society, yet deployed with the clear objectives and entrepreneurial vision that successful business brings to the public square.

Toward a culture of peace

The Middle East remains the greatest challenge facing the world today. Historic animosities involving religion, territorial claims, access to resources, and abuses of human rights have created stresses to peace that have affected the entire world. The UPF’s Middle East Peace Initiative (MEPI) has brought nineteen interfaith peace pilgrimages of Ambassadors for Peace to the Holy Land over the past three years.

Ambassadors for Peace see the crisis in the Middle East as a problem in the human family, to be resolved not simply through diplomatic offices, which in the best case may secure political accommodation, but ultimately through healing grounded in the logic of love. The courage and humility of these leaders far exceed the routine conventions of polite interfaith dialogue. Jewish, Christian, and Muslim Ambassadors for Peace have taken the dramatic and unprecedented step of publicly repenting to one another, then working side by side in service to the people of Israel, Jordan, and Gaza, even at the risk of their lives.

Imam Haitham Bundakji grew up in a Palestinian refugee camp, embittered against Jews

after witnessing massacres in local villages and losing his two brothers to the violence. “I never said the word *Jew* without an expletive before it,” he said in an earlier interview. “I prayed always to find ways to get back at the Jews. Whenever I heard an ambulance siren, I said a small prayer hoping the ambulance would be on its way to a Jew about to die. But the worst thing I did,” he said, “is that I tried to inject my own hatred of Jews into my children.”

Now Bundakji, president of the Islamic Society of Orange County in Garden Grove, California, has journeyed with delegations of Ambassadors for Peace into Gaza and the West Bank, as well as to the Israeli Knesset, to testify to his profound change of heart. “I cannot afford to be our prophet’s enemy until the day of judgment,” he said. “I still have political differences with Israel. I still want the liberation of Palestine. That will not change. But as to how to solve the differences, that has changed completely.” Looking forward, he said, “I would love to see my son marry a Jewish or Christian girl.”

Delegations of Native American chiefs with their own history of suffering have also assumed leadership and journeyed to the Holy Land to bring courage and perspective to the process of reconciliation. Welcomed by the Palestinian Islamic Sharia Court and received by parliamentarians in Israel and Jordan, the Native American leaders are Ambassadors for Peace with impeccable credentials. Their infusion of energy and will to bring peace have rekindled hope among many people embittered by a long history of conflict and suffering.

The road ahead

Such gestures of reconciliation cannot replace the political arts of compromise and negotiation. But can peace take root without genuine forgiveness as demonstrated by Martin Luther King, Anwar Sadat, or Nelson Mandela? Can peace bear fruit in lasting prosperity without a shared ethic of selfless service among citizens? Answers

to these questions are clearly required of the world’s people today.

To progress along the path of peace in the new millennium, our duties are clear: identify and promote common ground among religions and global civilizations; involve civil society in political decision-making, including at the United Nations; and build a more integrated, innovative, and responsive international community to address the multiple causes of conflict.

“I think that what’s bringing us together—and I hope I’m correct in this,” says U.S. Amba-

Ambassadors for Peace sign the Amman Proclamation in May 2006, urging the Abrahamic faiths to honor the traditions of peace they hold in common.



sador Sanchez, “is the human desire finally to come to a reckoning, finally to come to the realization that what we have done in the past is not right, is not enough. And that if we are to survive in this world we simply have to break down all the barriers that divide us, all of them. Break them all down and look for common denominators, look for solutions that bring us together rather than divide us. And I truly believe that the Ambassadors for Peace program can help bring that about.” ●

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