



CONFLICT RESOLUTION THROUGH CULTURE

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Introduction

My name is Ada Aharoni, I am a writer, poet and sociologist. I research and teach CR: Conflict Resolution at the Technion: Israel Institute of Technology, and am the Founder and President of IFLAC: The International Forum for the Literature and Culture of Peace.

- **What is Culture? How Can it help in the resolution of conflicts between people, and between states?**

Topics of Discussion

The main ideas I'll be talking about are:

- 1. The need of a revolution in Global Culture Today, from a Culture of Violence to a Culture of harmony, peace and creativity.**
- 2. The necessity for the creation of a powerful Peace Television and Radio Network over the Middle East, and the other conflicted areas in the world.**

3. The use of culture and literature for Conflict Resolution, Reconciliation and Coexistence

4. And Women and Peace.

■ **I would like to start my talk with the presentation of one of my poems, to illustrate some of the points which will be made during the lecture:**

The Bridge of Peace

- ***"They shall sit every man under his vine and under his fig tree, and none shall make them afraid" (The Bible, Micah 4. 4)***
- ***"He who walks in peace, walk with him." (The Koran, Sura 48)***
- ***My Muslim sister, daughter of Ishmael,
Let us build a sturdy bridge
From your olive world to mine,
From my orange world to yours,***

***Above the boiling pain
Of acid rain prejudice -
And hold human hands high
Full of free stars
Of twinkling peace***

***I do not want to be your oppressor
You do not want to be my oppressor,
Or your jailer, or my jailer,
We do not want to make each other afraid
Under our vines, and under our fig trees
Blossoming on a silvered horizon
Above the bruising and the bleeding
Of poisoned gases and scuds.***

***So, my Muslim sister,
Let us build a sturdy bridge of
Jasmine understanding
Where each shall sit with her baby
Under her vine and under her fig tree -
And none shall make them afraid
AND NONE SHALL MAKE THEM AFRAID.***

A CULTURE OF PEACE TO COUNTERACT THE CULTURE OF VIOLENCE

We need a world at peace so that it can function and flourish securely, and one of the basic requirements for attaining security and an effective and sustainable development of our world, is to discard the culture of violence, and to create a global and national "Culture of Peace System," as well as an objective, balanced and ethical media.

This new peace culture system and network, would counteract and replace the often prevalent culture of violence in our global village. Its major aims would be:

- 1. To address cultural and ethical root-causes of violence, conflicts, terror and war.**
- 2. To build harmonious bridges of culture, understanding, and respect among people and nations.**
- 3. To spread a culture of peace climate nationally and globally, and to make "peace news" and "peace culture" developments newsworthy.**

Elie Wiesel, the Nobel Peace Prize Laureate, was certainly right when he stated: “We are the stories that we heard and the stories we tell.”

A powerful and influential new peace culture system, with the aid of a responsible media, could diffuse required harmonious values, ideas and ethics, through arts, literature, education and entertainment, which would reach the various sectors of society and the masses. What people watch, hear, and read, and the kind of culture, films, literature, and art they are exposed to and absorb, influence their thoughts, feelings and ethics. It is therefore of crucial importance, that those communications and stories we watch on television and in films, and which we listen to on the radio, should be forwarded by programs that create and build and do not destroy.

Culture is a powerful constituent and vehicle at the core of possible transformations, given that it mediates and transfers ideas, values and intellectual refinement, between generations and between civilizations. It is both a preserving and a reproductive force, by transmitting the cultural patterns of the past and the present, to the future, and an important innovative influence, by its power to inculcate new attitudes, thoughts, values and norms.



Richard Gere came to Israel for 4 days, he was invited by IFLAC and the international movement of "The Spirit of Peace," to give support to peacemaking in the region. He participated in an Israeli and Arab Women Meeting for Peace, in Furadis (July 3, 2003), and he talked to Jewish, Arab and Druze women, in the Youth Center of the village. He said: "Such wonderful peace meetings by women should be covered by CNN and the BBC, and not

A reformed peace culture, communications and educational system, can make it possible for the creative voices of the many lands around the globe yearning for peace, to be heard and to be listened to. The writers, film-makers, dramatists and poets, encouraged by a culture of peace, would give voice to the craving of the preponderant majority of the global community to build a world beyond war, terror, and violence. There is therefore, a crucial need for reform at an international scale, concerning culture, literature and the arts, that can undermine and replace the culture of violence terror and crime.

2. Terror, Suicide Bombings and the Culture of Peace

All wars and conflicts have at their roots ethnic and cultural causes. The atrocious tragedy of the terrorist attack on the Twin Towers in New York City and the Pentagon, was a tantalizing warning that the war of cultures is underway. The whole phenomenon of having young men whose minds have been fed on fanatic fundamentalism by extreme Islamic terrorist groups, ready to sacrifice their lives in abominable suicide attacks - should be thoroughly addressed and researched. Possible preventive methods and solutions in the framework of a peace culture system should be also explored, and constructive results should be applied.

The solution to the phenomenon of suicide bombers probably lies in getting to the minds of the suicidal volunteers, with powerful and influential contents of a culture of peace, before their minds are poisoned. Research can help in exploring ways how to reach the roots of their identity, to profoundly understand what their grievances are, and examining and suggesting directions how these grievances can be addressed. The differences in cultures should also be examined, as well as what all national cultures have in common. The results should be presented in powerful and convincing ways that could influence volunteers for suicide bombings to change their decisions and behavior.

They should be made to understand that their lives and that of other innocent people is more precious than all, and that they are not sacrificial heroes "*shahid*" but barbarians of the worst kind, when they murder themselves as well as innocent others.

The wave of terror and suicide bombers that has infested our world, proves that the colossal task of building a global "Culture of Peace System", should be considered one of the major goals of humankind and of world governments today.

When a virus attacks our computers it is clear to us that we have to clean it or to delete it, and we use appropriate tools to deal with it in an effective manner. However, when our world is infested by a culture of violence and terror, it is still not clear to many of us, including our governments, that we have to use the same methods as with our infested computers.

THE TENT OF PEACE



**Bedouin Amin,
Director of the
Tent of Peace, with
Jewish Laura,
Moslem Nora, and
Christian Daniella**



**Ada with the
Conductors of
the Peace
Train: Laura
from Boston,
Daniella from
Germany, and
Nora from
Lebanon**



THE RECONSTRUCTION OF CULTURE

The feelings of distrust and hatred by certain nations and ethnic groups of different cultures toward each other, leading to terror and suicide bombers, cannot be overcome by guns or bombs, but only by a basic and resourceful peace culture system, that thoroughly penetrates the deep roots of the conflict, uses effective conflict resolution methods, and builds confidence, understanding and respect of each nation's identity, ethnicity and culture. This new peace culture system should be initiated, organized and applied both nationally and globally, by various international institutions.

Governments, city councils, the UN institutions, universities and research institutes, as well as peace NGO's, and writers' and artists' associations, should closely cooperate to set up this needed new global and national pluralistic and multicultural peace culture system. Various international and national peace culture programs and networks could be set up, as part of the new framework, making use of the best research internationally, and not only political and sociological, but also cultural and literary research that can influence the cultural climate of the world, and change it from one of violence to one of peace.

It is likewise vital to set up a powerful and effective Media and Network System that would promote and spread the new peace culture and would help to counteract violence, terrorism and suicide bombers. Governments, and national and educational institutions around the world should make it a priority to fund and create this suggested peace culture and communications system. It could be made part of existing ministries of culture in the various countries, or separate and independent influential new administrations.



Iflac Council in the Bedouin Tent of Peace in Ussfiya

What Should be done?

The suggested innovative peace culture system, to counteract violence, war and terrorism would replace the culture of violence rampant in many places around the world, and would shed new lights and point out new directions. It is suggested that it would consist of, among other various factors and elements:

- 1. The foundation and organization of a wide, powerful and resourceful "Peace Media and Telecommunications Network," that would function regionally and globally, to support the global culture of peace system. A Peace Satellite, Television and Radio, in the Middle East, and other conflicted areas, such as Cyprus, for example, could help to counteract the fear, hatred and misunderstanding rampant in the region.**

2. The peace culture system assisted by the peace media network, would develop and promote basic and thorough presentations of culture, literature, and the arts. The foundation of a global interconnected "Peace Internet Satellites Network," could render available: films and programs for peace and interviews that could diffuse national and global peace developments about the work of NGO's for peace, nationally and globally.

3. Peace studies should be introduced as a required subject at all levels of education: kinder gardens, schools colleges, and universities, just as for instance, the teaching of languages or mathematics. The new "Peace Satellite and Television Network," would help cover and spread the teaching of peace culture at all levels, including peace studies for teachers and parents, through popular open wavelength universities, and online Internet Programs. It could likewise encourage entertainment based on peace literature, drama and poetry.

4. A wide network of Peace Museums should be founded, as for instance they have in Japan, where more than sixty peace museums have already been established. These museums should be organized as a functional platform for the presentation of peace art with lively peace activities, and cultural presentations of drama, films, videos, poetry readings and story telling by famous international poets and writers, for all ages.

5. The presentation and promotion of the peace research, projects and works of the UN, UNESCO, The World Bank, and various peace culture NGO's, such as that of IFLAC: The International Forum for the Literature and Culture of Peace, and IPRA: The International Peace Research Association, should be widely presented and promoted. The global and regional "Multicultural Peace Culture Research Institutes and Networks", should be substantially funded, at least as well as war research institutes.

6. The Roman saying: "*If you want peace— prepare for war,*" should be replaced today by: "*If you want peace—prepare for peace.*" The new pluralistic peace culture system delineated above, could spread into various new directions, and it could generate a climate of peace, that would have a preventive influence on terrorism and the phenomenon of suicide bombers, as well as on impending danger of wars.

Finally, is humankind able today to self-organize politically, culturally, morally and legally, in such a way that it can generate the banishing of wars, terror, and mass destruction? If the above recommendations are implemented, the seeds for a "World Beyond War," would be duly planted, and it would give a fair chance for the many "Voices and Cultures of the Earth" and their great yearning for global peace, to be heard and acted upon.

CONCLUSION

The major underlying ideas exposed in this essay, as we have seen are:

- 1) That culture is a key factor in avoiding and resolving conflicts.
- 2) It is also a main factor in promoting genuine peace.

If a peace culture system instills recognition of the "other", respect for his or her identity and culture, as well as a commitment to solving conflicts and differences by peaceful means, then the chances for peace will be greatly enhanced. By contrast, if the cultural and educational system instill self-centeredness, rejection and hatred of the "other's" identity or culture, and calls for and justifies the resort to violence to solve conflict - then life sustainability in our fragile world may be endangered.

NOTES

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