



**Cadmus**

*Promoting Leadership in Thought that Leads to Action*

Available online at <http://cadmusjournal.org/>

Volume 4, Issue 5 - November 2021



## **Moving from the Pandemic to a Global Culture of Peace**

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### **Abstract**

*The COVID-19 pandemic has not only affected people's health and livelihood around the world, it has caused social upheaval in many nations and is creating a lasting impact on relations between individuals, communities and nations. The need for a culture of peace has never been greater. The Inter-Parliamentary Coalition for Global Ethics (IPCGE) calls for mandatory education for the implementation of the culture of peace and SDGs, as well as the Development of a "Ministry of Peace" in UN member states. to achieve this goal. The Council of Europe has issued a written document to support this initiative. A parallel initiative calls for the UN to declare a "Global Day of Giving" to promote individual acts of volunteering to fill in the gaps in areas where the government cannot fulfil all of societies' needs as experienced by all nations during the pandemic. The recent global chaos in the social, health and economic arenas brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic has further highlighted the crucial need for initiatives to help society recover from this trauma.*

Throughout the years since the founding of the United Nations in 1945, many multinational treaties on issues such as human rights, terrorism, international crime, refugees, disarmament, protection of the environment, business ethics, and social justice have been enacted through the efforts of the United Nations to achieve sustainable global peace and stability. The U.N. organs, agencies, programs and bodies work tirelessly to implement the goals of the United Nations as specified in the U.N. Charter including: keeping peace throughout the world; developing friendly relations among nations; helping nations work together to improve the lives of poor people; encourage respect for each other's rights and freedoms; serving as a center for harmonizing the actions of nations to achieve these goals. The recent United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) encompass many of these goals for the next decade. Towards these ends, the General Assembly has passed a series of resolutions towards the creation of a global Culture of Peace, a concept introduced to the United Nations by the former Director General of UNESCO H.E. Prof. Federico Mayor. These resolutions form the foundation for a Culture of Peace, especially necessary in areas of conflict as well as in all societies and nations torn by internal conflict and violence. Goal 16 of the UN SDGs aims to develop peaceful and inclusive societies in order to accomplish all the stated goals.

The Inter-Parliamentary Coalition for Global Ethics (IPCGE) has been established as a resource for parliamentarians, religious and civic leaders from all U.N. member states towards the goal to assure the implementation and legislation in member parliaments of

the universal values of “global ethics” which we share and to act together for prevention of international and national conflicts which pose a threat to freedom, human rights and environmental protection across the globe.

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*“Peace is not only a political problem defined by the absence of violence and war but is also characterized by the liberation of fear and includes political, cultural, economic, environmental, social and educational issues.”*

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The overall initiative calls for parliamentarians to commit to initiate legislation on mandatory education for the implementation of a culture of peace in their respective parliaments. Religious and spiritual leaders are called upon to teach their followers and supporters the values and concepts of a culture of peace as inherent in global ethics and the law of the land; educators are tasked with implementing education for a culture of peace in the educational system; civic leaders are invited to join the effort to imprint the values of a culture of peace in civil society. Through the energetic support of Spanish Senator Gutierrez, the Council of Europe has issued a written document to support this initiative. The recent global chaos in the social, health and economic arenas brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic has further highlighted the crucial need for our initiative to help society recover from this trauma.

In a 2019 webinar held in partnership with the World Academy of Art and Science, former Speaker of the parliament of Madagascar, H.E. Jean Max Rakotomamonjy, presented an additional view which has been adapted by the IPCGE as a supplement to the ongoing initiative to implement a culture of peace. In the words of His Excellency: “Today, we are actually facing one of the biggest world crises with the COVID-19 pandemic, it is time to show support for each other and bring down all barriers. Today, good health system and infrastructures are key conditions in order to better fight the pandemic. However, in all countries affected by war, conflicts and internal tensions, there is a lack of capacity to detect and slow down the spread of the virus.”

This explains why the UN first called on a Global cease fire on March 23, 2020. This could seem like a quest that would fall on the deaf ears of guerrillas, terrorists and belligerent governments across the globe. In addition, COVID-19 has also provoked a series of discriminatory acts across the continents, with different groups being targeted. If the profile of the victims varies from one country to another, there seems to be a common pattern in the discriminatory acts that occurred during the pandemic: most often, the target is generally “the other”, the foreigner, a person belonging to an ethnic or cultural minority. The COVID-19 pandemic has reinforced inequalities and exacerbated the problems faced by disadvantaged groups, including access to health care, social assistance, education and employment.

The main challenge is to take this as an opportunity for peace, dialogue and negotiations. In order to do so, we need to invest in peace in a sustainable way. Peace is not only a political problem defined by the absence of violence and war but is also characterized by the liberation of fear and includes political, cultural, economic, environmental, social and educational issues. It involves living together with our differences—whether of sex, language, religion or culture, by promoting universal respect for justice and human rights that such coexistence depends on.

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Since we believe that the environment is important, we have a Ministry of Environment. Since we believe that education is important, we have a Ministry of Education. Same for health and justice that have their own Ministries. What about peace? Why does it sound so unfamiliar to have a Ministry of peace? Because we do not have examples of success? The reality is that we do not want to learn from each other. Is it because we do not know what kind of mandate this Ministry could have? Once again, no it is not. This is not only a concept since we know our needs and many tasks could be attributed to this kind of Ministry. One such example is the Office of Secretariat of Peace created in Guatemala in the aftermath of the civil war in that country in 1997. Over the years, this Secretariat of Peace has succeeded in implementing the UN resolutions on the culture of peace among the indigenous populations and even created an online educational program on the culture of peace. The IPCGE hosted the previous Secretary of Peace at a unique High Level Panel summit at UN headquarters in January 2020 on the eve of the outbreak of the COVID pandemic.

Not enough detailed attention has been given by academics and peace activists as to how the peace perspective can be institutionalized within governments and even parliaments. The peace perspective will not suddenly emerge within government; it has to be worked at. Creating such Ministries and even parliamentary commissions is a very practical way of working for peace. We may already have peace institutes, national platforms working on a culture of peace or a national peace strategy, but we can have more impact, better coordination and mobilization of resources within a public administration fully dedicated to these missions. It would help direct government policy towards non-violent resolution of conflict prior to escalation to violence and seeking peace by peaceful means above all.

The pandemic has not only affected people’s health and livelihood around the world, but it has also caused social upheaval in many nations and is creating a lasting impact on relations between individuals, communities and nations. The need for a culture of peace has never been greater.

The IPCGE hopes to promote the Guatemala model presented at the UN High Level Panel summit as a model for all nations to secure a better more peaceful and just world. Another feature of the January 2020 High Level Panel was the notion that societies cannot function without the voluntary actions and contributions of ordinary civilians and citizens. This was most evident during the pandemic when it became clear in all affected nations that the government alone could not supply the sustainable needs of its citizens without the voluntary contribution of organizations and individuals. Towards that end the IPCGE in coordination with various NGOs is initiating a Global Day of Giving to be presented as a resolution to the UN General Assembly. We hope to gain global support for this most crucial endeavor. One immediate project will be the “Art of Giving” and “The Art of Peace” global art competitions for youth, an endeavor which hopefully will bring these messages to the youth and through them to the adults. We hope all these goals will be met successfully in partnership with the World Academy of Art and Science as they truly represent the values of the founders for the Academy to serve as “a forum for reflective scientists, artists, and scholars dedicated to addressing the pressing challenges confronting humanity today independent of political boundaries or limits”.

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