



Enduring peace in the Anthropocene

A Report to The Club of Rome

May 2025

Message from the co-presidents*

The world is witnessing a devastating escalation of violence and suffering in the Middle East, as the conflict between Israel and Hamas has claimed more than 40,000 lives, injured thousands more, displaced hundreds of thousands of people and inflicted irreparable damage to the environment and infrastructure. As members of The Club of Rome, we are deeply concerned about the human and ecological costs of this war, and we urge all parties to cease hostilities and pursue a peaceful and just resolution.

We recognise that this conflict is not an isolated event, but a symptom of the deeper crises that afflict our global civilisation in the Anthropocene. The root causes of war are complex and intertwined, involving political, economic, social, cultural, and psychological factors, as well as the pressures of population growth, resource depletion, climate change and environmental degradation. These challenges require systemic and holistic responses, not military interventions that only exacerbate the problems and create new ones.

In the past year, we have engaged in ongoing conversations within our network to reflect on the role and responsibility of The Club of Rome in addressing the issues of peace and war. We have shared our diverse perspectives and experiences, and we have questioned the effectiveness and appropriateness of issuing statements on specific events, such as the one we made in response to the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2020. We have also explored the potential and limitations of our vision of enduring peace in the Anthropocene, which calls for a radical transformation of our values, institutions, and behaviours towards a culture of cooperation, compassion, and care for all life on Earth.

As a result of these discussions, we have decided to adopt a different approach for this publication. Instead of presenting a unified voice or a single statement, we have invited many of our members to express their own views and concerns on peace and war in their own words and styles. We believe that this diversity of voices reflects the richness and complexity of our global network, and that it can open up more space for dialogue and learning within and beyond The Club of Rome. We also hope that it can inspire and encourage more of our members to join the conversation and to take action for peace in their own contexts and capacities.

We invited members to share their thoughts in these essays as works in progress, and we welcome feedback and suggestions from our readers. In this respect, we plan a number of different activities in the coming months to facilitate further discussion and exchange on the prospects and challenges of peace in the Anthropocene and the dangers of growing conflict across the globe as we face future shocks and stresses from continued poly crises, and we welcome your participation.

We envision this publication as a step towards a more comprehensive and impactful report on planetary peace in the Anthropocene as part of our contribution to the global dialogue and action for a peaceful and sustainable future. We believe that The Club of Rome has a unique and vital role to play in this endeavour, as a network of independent thinkers and changemakers who are committed to the common good of humanity and the planet. We invite you to join us in this journey, and to share your ideas, experiences and hopes with us.



Paul Shrivastava and Sandrine Dixon-Declève
Co-presidents of The Club of Rome*

N.B. These essays have been written at different times over the past year during which time conditions have been evolving in the war in the Middle East, so some of the dates and damage tolls may not be current.

* Sandrine Dixon-Declève was co-president of The Club of Rome from 2018 until 2024.

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A hand holding a small white flag with a green peace symbol on a teal background with vertical stripes.

INTRODUCTION

Systemic actions for peace in Gaza and the world

by Paul Shrivastava, co-president of The Club of Rome and professor, The Pennsylvania State University.

April 2024

We have been watching in horror the Israel-Hamas war unfold, even as wars in Ukraine-Russia, Sudan, Somalia, and many other places continue. Conflicts among humans are escalating, as the conflict of humans with nature brings us collectively to a crisis of survival. Since the 7 October 2023 Hamas attack and Israel's military response, attention has turned to conditions on the ground in Gaza. Many members of The Club of Rome have expressed their deep concern for the intense suffering of victims. The background of each conflict is very different, but escalating violence on children and women, and extensive environmental damages are common to them. This is challenging our collective sense of what it means to be human, of human rights and human dignity. In our professional roles we do not have advantageous standing to intervene in the immediate hot decisions of wars. But as individuals we do have the ability to affect the second and third circles of influence that shape the broader context of wars.

I recognise that throughout history countries/peoples have had different reasons for and responses to wars. Cultural differences trigger misunderstandings and tensions. Conflicts are no longer regional affairs. They are global points of interest yet judged from people's own cultural/historical and mostly local lenses. Like climate change, armed conflicts are simultaneously global and local. There is an urgent need to discover and create global conditions, institutions and human consciousness that will create lasting peace. Our world needs physical, emotional, and spiritual health and wellbeing, and rejection of all wars. If we do not stop fighting, the currently regional Israel-Hamas conflict may bring us to the brink of another catastrophic world war. The time to make the right decisions and take the right actions is now.

It does not benefit the cause of peace to pass judgment on which side is right or wrong, or to focus on geopolitical analysis. What we need is imagining a more human approach to avoid wars all together, and stopping the spiral of violence that they beget. Human values connect us as humanity. A deep human response would be for humanity to return to a higher state of conscience and create viable fair ways of eliminating all wars and seeking peaceful sustainable development worldwide. For The Club of Rome, this is a foundational truth. Peace and development were a key concern of our founder Aurelio Peccei, who in December 1983 organised a conference on "Development in a World of Peace" in Bogota, Colombia. I believe that enduring peace requires internal peace within one's self, both emotional and intellectual, and peace with nature. I do not have a plan for eliminating all wars, but I cannot be indifferent to the human suffering of wars. The current situation in Gaza, Ukraine and so many other places call for reiterating our common values, and advocating for systemic humanitarian actions.

Values

The core values of human life, human dignity and human rights are well captured in the 1945 UN Charter, which in its preamble states:

"WE THE PEOPLES OF THE UNITED NATIONS DETERMINED to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war, which twice in our lifetime has brought untold sorrow to mankind, and to reaffirm faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person, in the equal rights of men and women and of nations large and small, and to establish conditions under which justice and respect for the obligations arising from treaties and other sources of international law can be maintained, and to promote social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom, ..."

With these values it is possible to have peace that is necessary for a just and sustainable world as imagined by the UN Agenda 2030. Sustainable Development Goal # 16 specifically seeks to promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all, and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels.

Peace as a fundamental human right. Positive peace is not just the absence of war, it is a regenerative practice in the service of life. Peace is the continuous task of arresting the disorder in communities, seeking to do positive good, and creating the conditions for health and life to flourish. Such regenerative peace requires an infrastructure that addresses both causes and consequences of wars, to eliminate all wars and their preconditions. We must strive to imagine a world without war.

Future wars will occur on an Earth already facing a series of unprecedented challenges, including risks of nuclear annihilation, emerging pandemics, and climate change. The Covid-19 pandemic caused 3 million excess deaths worldwide. Climate change is already causing five million excess deaths per year globally. The conflict along the India-China border threatens the delicate ecological balance of all of South Asia. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change has pointed out for the past thirty years that the planet is heating up and facing multiple tipping points. AI is upending many industries and public leaders have expressed concerns about it being an existential threat to humans. In the face of these challenges, we must reiterate the primacy of the value of human life and human rights.

We must also reject ideologies of hate and fascism that are gaining ground in many countries and underlie wars and social conflicts. We need to get beyond the narrow and parochial approaches of nation-states and regional alliances to build unified planetary solutions. We need to reject political leadership that caters to narrow local conditions and seeks short-term solutions in favour of long term planetary stability.

Actions

We must all denounce all wars, current and future, and call for the immediate cessation of the Israel-Hamas war, to stop the unfolding genocidal conditions that are being investigated by the International Court of Justice. It must be followed by the immediate release of hostages, and humanitarian aid to all victims on both sides, for reconstructing lives, dealing with trauma, and building an enduring infrastructure of peace. I also call for an end to the Ukraine-Russia war and the war in Sudan, and all others and to address the many different layers of violence. They are interconnected on a system level of poly crises. Wars are an obsolete and dangerous tool for resolving modern-day conflicts. Wars do not resolve problems. With devastating effectiveness modern weapons kill and maim unbearable numbers, creating an unacceptable burden upon the survivors, and perpetuating cycles of violence.

We need to fully understand the systems and culture of war and killing that we live in today. Key support for our war system comes from the global military-industrial network and global defence expenditures, which doubled from \$1.1 trillion in 2001 to \$2.2 trillion in 2022, accounting for 2.3% of the global GDP. Enabling these war expenditures are extractive fossil and mining economies, nationalist jingoistic politics, religious and linguistic rivalries, and patriarchic values. We need transdisciplinary actions that would help resolve international and intergroup conflicts without resorting to violence or oppression, including;

Economic peace. Aurelio Peccei, said - if people are free from want and fear, the world will be in peace. Therefore, a high priority is to cooperatively build economic peace that provides a decent living for everyone, especially those in the current conflict zones of Gaza-Israel, Ukraine-Russia, Africa, India, China and other parts of the world. Preconditions of peace are a stable economy, good governance, employment, education, trade, and entrepreneurship. When healthy societies flourish, the seeds of war do not sprout. Economic peace can foster the consciousness and institutions that are conducive to individual health and wellbeing, freedom, and human rights of all people.

Humanitarian logistics. Post war humanitarian efforts are rarely successful in restoring war torn communities. There are too few resources and aid infrastructures lack capacity. The faltering post-war humanitarian efforts need a stronger aid infrastructure, more major humanitarian groups, greater funding support and higher logistical efficiencies. Nations would be well served by establishing specific government agencies responsible for humanitarian relief actions. Humanitarian agencies such as the Red Cross, the Green Crescent, UNWRA and Médecins Sans Frontières, are key life support organisations with operational capacities that must be vastly expanded.

A just peace, memorialising victims, processing trauma. For peace to endure and be trusted, the peace infrastructure should include free and fair local, national and international judiciaries, courts of equity and arbitration, and expanded International Courts of Justice, modelled on a global constitution that protects human rights, while employing an independent, impartial judiciary. Memory and remembrance are a key aspect of long-term emotional and cognitive healing of victims. Nations need to build cultural institutions for memorialising peace, and war victims. South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission offers a model for enduring civic forgiveness. They could also infuse current institutions, museums, monuments, memorials and memory discourses, to reinsert values of peace into these concrete situations. Individuals and institutions can be encouraged to hold space for and give voice to victims.

Humans are living war traumas of past centuries. There are ways and tools for collective action to process the trauma of wars. We encourage establishing centres for healing from the trauma of war, and centres of reconciliation, where healthier norms can be established and learned, that could lead to improved understanding. Neither war nor oppression are acceptable in a civilised world, nor is retribution a meaningful, much less useful, response.

Peace as health. Peace can be advanced by understanding it as a health issue on multiple levels. Healthy people at peace with themselves, healthy neighbourhoods, healthy communities, healthy societies and healthy nations are the best antidote to war. Violence is a disease that must be stopped from spreading. War and violence are the end stages of imbalance and corruption of health at all these levels. Understanding war as an imbalance like a disease, allows us to treat it as malfunctioning of individuals and societies. This disease can be prevented from arising and spreading, by creating the conditions that enable personal and social health and balance to flourish. This will require the consciousness and institutions that conduce to individual and collective peaceful health and political and economic wellbeing, freedom, and human rights in all the nations.

Empowerment of women and youth. Men and war have a deep historical, cultural and emotional connection which is at the root of patriarchal systems undergirding our war culture. Building a peace infrastructure must start from the assumption that as humans most of us are inherently relational and responsive beings. The human condition is one of connectedness, of our interdependence with nature and with others. We need a different ethic of care that integrates across self and others and integrates reason with emotion. Eliminating war and building cultures of peace will require transformative empowerment of women and youth in all walks of life, that can foster deep ethics of care and regenerative relationships. Youth (under 30 years of age) that are already 50% of the world population, are disproportionately victims and actors in armed conflicts. The UN Security Council's peace and security agenda through its resolutions (2250, 2419, 2535) acknowledges youth's special role in peacebuilding processes.

Not yet a roadmap: a multiplicity of voices to start walking together. The existence of this publication and the intellectual reputation of The Club of Rome might lead to the expectation that this work would substantiate and take stock of a consolidated and rigorous perspective on how to make peace in the Anthropocene. We would love to provide a detailed vision for our way out of war and militarism, for the sake of humanity and the planet.

Though, it would be premature to say so. Our mission is to formulate questions illuminating blind spots and inquiring on the ongoing systemic evolution, as a first step to orchestrate the elaboration of rigorous, audacious and hopeful responses and to craft original concepts conveying the substance of such responses to inform public discourse and decision-making at different levels. This is what we did with *The Limits to Growth* (1972) and, more recently, with *Earth for All: A Survival Guide for Humanity* (2022).

Now, at a time of great uncertainty and even anxiety about the future due to a multiplicity of tensions and fractures of all kinds (economic, social, cultural, environmental, geopolitical, you name them), it is the moment to welcome the voices of members and partners of The Club of Rome in a way which is not merely analytical and rational. As you will see by reading the different essays, all dimensions of human perception and intelligence are present in them. In particular, the call to our own humanity and to combat injustice is ubiquitous in this publication, which is at least as emotional and political as it is analytic. Let us face reality: the topic of war and peace cannot be left in the hands of specialists only. The processes leading to war run too deep into the shadows of our souls to make a purely academic approach effective.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1989-1992, some voices anticipated the emergence of an era of planetary peace. 35 years later, we can see that this was an illusion, even a dangerous one, since it skipped two fundamental dimensions of our ongoing though misunderstood state of conflict: that the Global Majority does not perceive Western dominance as peaceful (and much less today, with ongoing wars in Gaza and all over the Middle East), and that we are waging a massive (and suicidal) war with nature, as UN Secretary General António Guterres put it so eloquently.

The holistic concept of “planetary peace” that we are just starting to propose in this publication addresses these oblivions of modernity as we know it. It calls for an improbable but indispensable reconciliation among humans and with life as a whole, by recognising first that it is just one reconciliation: we cannot make peace with ourselves and others without making peace with nature. In other words, the colonial, extractive and supremacist spirit that has shaped so much of our modernity is also responsible for the destruction of the ecosystems on which humanity depends for its survival.

All these considerations explain why this publication is a collection of essays written from the heart, often deeply moving, rather than a well-structured tour through a landscape of clearly established concepts for rational understanding and action plans. Even the concept of Anthropocene is too recent to have permeated the reflections and actions of the many existing organisations and initiatives promoting peace. The present publication does not yet provide all the responses, but it illuminates a big blind spot: planetary reconciliation cannot be conceived from the dominant worldview of modernity. It requires going deeper in learning new ways of becoming human. And hence the work we present here is a call to further reflection and action in company of others, as we outline in more detail in the closing essay,

I am deeply concerned about the continuing war in Gaza, the suffering of victims, and the destruction of the natural environment. I am also concerned about the potential of this war becoming a regional conflict. And I am particularly concerned by the lack of truly systemic approaches to address this and other wars in the wider context of the conflict between humanity and the Earth. I invite friends and partners to not take peace for granted, and actively engage in eliminating wars, and building a future of peace and wellbeing of all on a healthy planet.

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WE THE PEOPLES OF THE UNITED NATIONS

determined

to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war, which twice in our lifetime has brought untold sorrow to mankind, and

to reaffirm faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person, in the equal rights of men and women and of nations large and small, and

to establish conditions under which justice and respect for the obligations arising from treaties and other sources of international law can be maintained, and

to promote social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom,

and for these ends

to practice tolerance and live together in peace with one another as good neighbors, and

to unite our strength to maintain international peace and security, and

to ensure, by the acceptance of principles and the institution of methods, that armed force shall not be used, save in the common interest, and

to employ international machinery for the promotion of the economic and social advancement of all peoples,

*have resolved to combine our efforts
to accomplish these aims.*

accordingly, our respective Governments, through representatives assembled in the city of San Francisco, who have exhibited their full powers found to be in good and due form, have agreed to the present Charter of the United Nations and do hereby establish an international organization to be known as the United Nations.

U N I T E D N A T I O N S

PREAMBLE TO THE CHARTER OF THE UNITED NATIONS

ISSUED BY U. N. DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC INFORMATION



MAKING SENSE OF THE CHALLENGE

What hopes for peace in a troubled world? The role of Aurelio Peccei and The Club of Rome

by Ugo Bardi, member of The Club of Rome.

September 2024

The story of The Club of Rome and its efforts for world peace is linked to the events of the second half of the 20th century. The Second World War officially ended in 1945, but that year was not the end of armed conflicts. Ethnic cleansing and exterminations continued in Europe and Asia and, in 1950, the Korean War started. It rapidly went close to risking a new global conflict that, this time, could have involved nuclear weapons. However, the belligerent mood gradually faded. The Korean War ended in 1953 with an armistice. The idea that a nuclear war could be won was gradually abandoned and the confrontation between the two world blocks froze into the “cold war.” In 1953, President Eisenhower gave a speech titled “Atoms for Peace” at the UN General Assembly: a strong statement that the US was not considering its nuclear capabilities as a weapon for world domination.

The origins of this mood change can be found in the exceptional period of economic growth that started in the mid-1950s. With cheap energy from fossil fuels and high expectations from nuclear technologies (“energy too cheap to meter”), a view of a future of progress and prosperity appeared. High hopes for a lasting world peace were common. It was then that the peace movement took to the streets with slogans such as “Make love, not war.”

Among the people thinking along these lines, there was one who went beyond the simple enunciation of slogans and lofty principles. Aurelio Peccei (1908 – 1984) was an Italian intellectual and also a manager for the Fiat automotive company. His first foray into the global debate was with a speech he gave in Buenos Aires in 1965 at the ADELA organisation, an international consortium of bankers aimed at supporting industrialisation in Latin America. In his speech, Peccei noted that no long-lasting peace was possible without a global concerted action to end poverty and, in particular, to bring the poor countries to the same level of prosperity as the rich ones. The speech raised attention in both the West and the East and eventually led to the creation of “The Club of Rome,” in 1968, an international group of intellectuals and political leaders interested in putting Peccei’s ideas into practice.

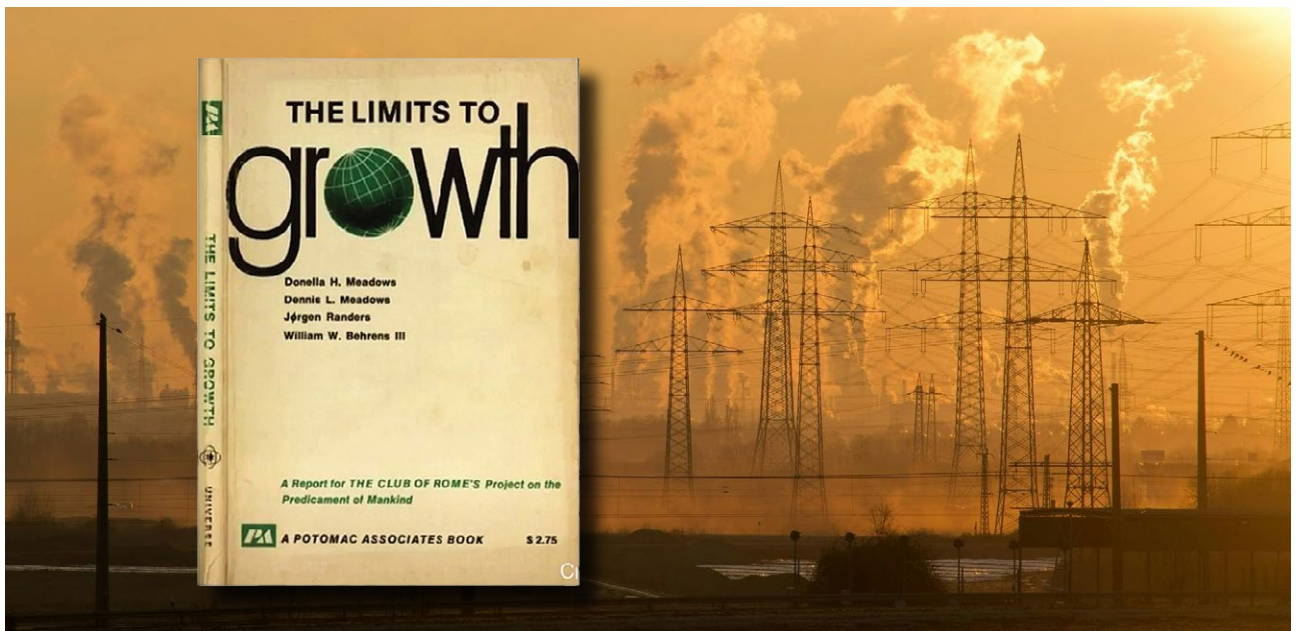
The process of creation of The Club of Rome was in itself an example of international opening across the geopolitical divides of the time. It was the consequence of a series of serendipitous encounters involving, among others, the US Secretary of State Dean Rusk and the Soviet scientist and philosopher Dzhermen Gvishiani, son-in-law of Premier Kosygin. The idea that people could debate, understand each other, and maybe converge on shared views despite the deep political differences of Cold War confrontation was at the core of the organisation’s identity from the beginning.

With the same spirit, in 1972 Aurelio Peccei and The Club of Rome contributed decisively to the foundation of the International Institute for Applied Systems Analysis (IIASA) in Vienna, a joint initiative by the USA, the Soviet Union, Italy, and several other countries across the East-West divide. By becoming, to this day, a global reference in systems analysis applied to human footprints, the resilience of natural and socioeconomic systems, and the conditions for sustainable development, IIASA has been providing a bridge for scientists all over the world and showcasing the possibility of a science-based understanding of humanity’s challenges, that The Club of Rome labelled as the “world problematique.”

The intellectual foundations of The Club of Rome were singular at the time and remain so today: it adopted a global, long-term perspective, recognising the complex interdependencies between all humans and nature. This ambitious take was influenced by the natural curiosity of Peccei for other cultures and worldviews, a characteristic that was certainly enhanced by his travels around the world as a young businessperson, and particularly by his commercial missions to China, which he started in 1935, when he was 27, and that allowed him to explore Eastern philosophies and traditions, radically different from what he had known at home.

Peccei had experience as an industrial manager, and he had learned how to approach problems in a practical and realistic way. If the world's resources were to be better distributed among the peoples of the world, the first task was quantifying their amount. During this phase of evaluation, in 1968, Peccei met a young professor from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Jay Wright Forrester. It is said that luck is what happens when chance meets preparedness, and this meeting was the start of a series of events that would change the intellectual landscape of the world. The main result was the study titled *The Limits to Growth* published in 1972 as a report to The Club of Rome. The study used the methods developed by Forrester to create a model that could extrapolate the trajectory of the world's economy up to the end of the 21st century.

For some members of The Club of Rome, and perhaps for Peccei himself, the results of the calculations were a surprise. Contrary to the optimistic mood of the time, the model showed that the nearly exponential growth of the world's economy was not going to last forever. In the "Business as Usual" scenario, resource depletion and pollution would eventually make it impossible for the economy to continue growing. A peak in the global economic activity would be reached at some moment during the first decades of the 21st century, followed by a rapid collapse. The global population would follow the same trajectory, reaching a peak and then declining. In simpler terms, the model showed that economic growth was creating its own doom.



Credit: pixabay.com

The Limits to Growth report was ignored, criticised, and demonised in all possible ways, but it couldn't be ignored, and, in the long run, the validity of the study was demonstrated. It was not the only study warning about a future economic collapse. Several 20th-century thinkers had noticed the resource scarcity and pollution problems. Later, a further problem was added, perhaps even more worrisome than the others: global warming, which would burst into the debate in the 1980s. Just like *The Limits to Growth*, these works were mostly ignored and often demonised. But they were leaving a trace in the intellectual atmosphere of the time.

These different views of the future generated a clash of absolutes. The mainstream view remained based on the standard economic models that downplayed the role of natural resources and ignored pollution. The optimistic view of technological progress implied by these models led Robert Solow, Nobel Prize in Economics, to state in 1974 that the economy could grow even without natural resources. If that were the case, the fair distribution problem was not so important. If the pie is large and it keeps getting larger, does it matter if your slice is smaller than someone else's? Translated into politics, this view implies that we just need to keep the economy growing. That will automatically solve all social, economic, and environmental problems, including global warming. And it will bring peace to the world, too!

But what if the pie can't keep growing or, worse, it shrinks while the number of eaters (the world's population) keeps increasing? At this point, the problem becomes political: how do we manage limited resources in such a way that everyone has their fair share? Alternatively, looking at the problem from a diametrically opposite political viewpoint, how do we get rid of the useless eaters? Of course, this second option was rarely, if ever, explicitly mentioned, but we cannot ignore the possibility that some political faction may be seriously considering it.

The need of a fair distribution of resources, always remained the focus of The Club of Rome and many others as it looked like the only possible way to avoid new wars and conflicts. But how exactly could it be obtained? The models developed for *The Limits to Growth* study showed that stopping growth could stave off collapse and stabilise climate. But who had the authority to impose such a drastic measure? The basic idea of the proposers involved a negotiated agreement where the nations of the world would freely agree on the project, but how could such an agreement be obtained in a world where inequality was rampant and where famines were still hitting low-income countries? Peccei explicitly rejected the idea of “zero growth” in a speech in New York in 1976, where he noted that it would have locked low-income countries forever in their subordinate condition.

We can learn from world modeling that trying to force a system to go in a certain direction usually leads to the opposite results (something that Jay Forrester noted first). Hence, managing the world's economy requires a more nuanced approach than the brutal concept of “zero growth.” After over fifty years of discussions, we do not lack detailed plans, some of them highly sophisticated. A good example is the *Earth for All* report to The Club of Rome published in 2022, which proposes a soft approach to improve equality and justice while reducing the climate threat and maintaining an economic activity level sufficient “for all.”

Nevertheless, proposing the idea that the world's economy can be planned remains unpopular, and putting the proposals into practice is extremely difficult. The concept smacks of the “five-year plans” of the Communist economies, and it is anathema to many people. Over more than 50 years of debate, it has never been possible to implement global measures that would seriously impact growth. The experience of the “Conferences of the Parties” (COPs) about climate shows how tangled the issue is and how good intentions are easily thwarted by national and economic particular interests.

Unfortunately, as a result, the other option, the one we could define “grab what you can, when you can,” appears to be gaining ground in the actions of the world's governments. Resource wars have been common in history, but now they are taking an especially severe aspect. The current war in Ukraine can be seen as part of a global strategic game to control oil and gas supply. The ongoing extermination of the Palestinians in Gaza is a result of the competition for limited land resources, but it is expanding to involve the oil-producing countries of the nearby regions. At the same time, all of the world's major countries are stepping up their military expenses. In short, most governments are doing exactly the opposite of what would be needed to ease the problems with resource depletion and pollution that *The Limits to Growth* highlighted more than 50 years ago. More than all, we seem to be losing the attitude of promoting peace, disappearing under the belligerent rhetoric that's becoming standard. The reaction of Western Governments to the ongoing wars and the extermination in Gaza has not been to promote peaceful settlements but to take sides and send weapons. The public in the West has not been able to put up a significant opposition to these choices.

To say that the situation is worrisome is an understatement. It is especially scary if we remember how the Second World War can be seen as resulting from a perception of scarcity on the part of the main actors involved. The Germans pushed the concept of lebensraum, “vital space,” that led them to exterminate their neighbours and even their fellow citizens who were considered to be unproductive and a burden for the state (*untermenschen*). In addition to the well-known extermination of the Jews, the Holocaust, the German government developed the *Ostplan* (plan for the East) to be put into practice after the expected defeat of the Soviet Union. It involved the extermination by starvation or other means of 10-20 million Slavs, while the survivors were to be kept as servants by the *Herrenvolk*, the “master race” that would rule the fertile lands of Eastern Europe. The Italian Fascist government may have been less aggressive in terms of extermination plans, but it still operated on a similar perception. A typical slogan was that Italy needed *un posto al sole*, “a place in the sun” for its growing population. The Japanese, then, thought that attacking the United States would secure their supply of oil and other vital minerals for their economy.

If the horrors of the past were the result of a perception of scarcity, what's going to happen today if this perception becomes common? Are we going to see a return of Nazi ideas on a large scale? How about returning to a "final solution" to get rid of the *untenmenschen*? Very unfortunately, if history teaches us something, it is that what happened in the past may happen again.

Yet, history only rhymes rather than exactly repeating. A factor that led European governments to make the atrocious mistakes that led to WW2 was the perception of the need of "vital space" created by the rapid population growth of the 1920s and 1930s. Today, population growth is slowing down; it may soon stabilise and then start declining. The reasons may be social, economic, or related to pollution, but it is certain that it is happening without being imposed by anyone. That may become a societal problem in the future, but at present, it eases the pressure on resources and reduces pollution. At the same time, new technologies have been developed that can produce low-cost and clean energy for everyone. No need for oil wars any longer!

Are solar panels and wind turbines weapons against fascism? We can't say for sure, but it is a strategy worth trying. And if renewable energy brings us back to a perception of abundance, we may return to the ideas of peace and harmony that Aurelio Peccei and The Club of Rome pioneered. The UN Conference of Parties on Biodiversity is taking place this year in Colombia, 41 years after Peccei organised there what happened to be his very last conference, which he decided to title "Development in a World of Peace." There is still hope for a future of peace in the world.

Endnotes

¹ Bardi, U. (2011). *The Limits to Growth Revisited*. Springer. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4419-9417-2>

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Moving towards a *Positive Peace*

by Sandrine Dixon-Declève, former co-president of The Club of Rome, global ambassador for The Club of Rome and executive chair of Earth4All.

September 2024

In honour of the disappeared, ruthlessly murdered and the next generation



Hole in the World¹

For Refaat Alareer

On the day you were murdered
I did many of the things
you would have done if alive—
woke up, kissed my daughter, went
to work, taught a few curious souls
a little about reading a poem—
then read the news in which
your name appeared without
you there anymore. Your assassins
were thorough.

On the day you were murdered
I was not. I came home and read
to my daughter and made her supper.
Whatever your killers could have
accused you of—being a poet,
being a teacher, being a lover
of the world and a hater
of those killers by the numbers—
that's me too. But I'm here
where the bombs began
their journey, not there
where they found their final
home. Therefore: I'm alive
while you are not.

Poems, I tell
the students, are made of
simple things yoked together
to make the unimaginable
exist. A new thing previously
unthinkable.

On the day you were
no more I wanted to be able
to hold my daughter in my arms
and tell her a story. I didn't
want to speak of your children
missing you forever I didn't want
to tell her we never met
and never will.

Where in this poem
where in this world
does the word *genocide* go?

If I must die
you wrote
let it bring hope
let it be a tale

I write this poem
and it makes nothing
happen. Nevertheless
the hole in the world
where you still should be
is real. Those left behind
to labor with words:

let us make some poems to fit
the form of your absence.

By Anthony Alessandrini

Refaat Alerer and so many unsung heroes should never have died at the hands of ruthless killers and deserve to be honoured. But when does poetry finally become the narrative of hope and human compassion that we all carry with us as we try to re build the Anthropocene from an era of hate, hypocrisy, destruction and self indulgence to an era of trust, hope, respect and deep appreciation for each other including all species?

Will poetry be enough to *fit the form* (as poetically addressed above) of the physical and spiritual absence of so many disappeared hearts and souls? Will apologies and repayment for our past destruction *fit the form* of the absence of all the innocent lives killed in wars and conflict undertaken by leaders obsessed with power and revenge? How do we get out of the hole we have dug for ourselves through our arrogance, pride, and institutionalised obsession with power? Can we achieve peace in the anthropocene if we absolve our past and present crimes, without hardwiring humanity back into everything we do including reminding ourselves that we are a tiny spec in the universe and part of a broader eco system?

Once we declare genocide and a cease fire what then? How do we not fall back into similar patterns of inhumanity as it is not only Gaza that symbolises that we have lost our way, it is countless previous wars and today's impossibility of finding peace in Ukraine, in Sudan and a lasting peace in the Middle East, all three have their own specificities but are built on years of distrust, power games and a well oiled war machine. As worrying as these wars are we should also be increasingly worried about the rise of oligarchs across the four corners of the globe from Russia, the US to Argentina to Hungary, Turkey and North Korea as they adopt radical political positioning that is anchored in individual power and breeds fear rather than trust, hate rather than love, destruction rather than a positive future starting with a *Positive Peace* approach for example, for generations to come.

Prior to the pandemic, the invasion of Ukraine, and the Gaza conflict, a dormant poly-crisis was permeating across our socio-economic and geo-political systems. Today's extractive economy has pushed the world far beyond planetary boundaries, due to the overexploitation of natural resources and skyrocketing emissions into the atmosphere, air, land and water. Today's economic system had become overfinancialised, even more than in the run up to the financial crisis of 2007-2008, and unable to service people's lives and livelihoods. Value chains have become, and still are, too fragile and dependent on single, often unreliable countries and sources of supply. Technological and knowledge systems have fallen short of accounting for human needs, and are so privately governed that they threaten the digital sovereignty of citizens and businesses. Social and political systems have fostered rising inequality, social fragmentation, and a deterioration of the political discourse, with citizens isolated into echo chambers to an extent that puts democracy at risk as we came so close to seeing in France and across Europe with the European elections. Geopolitical changes and fierce rivalry between geopolitical blocks has led to new disruptions and endanger the multilateral order in France, Germany and Romania.

These individual disruptions have occurred in one form or another throughout history, but have become increasingly unsustainable over the past decades. Importantly disruptions within one system quickly spill over into other systems, creating negative feedback loops - a major driver of the current poly-crisis world²; and leads to the imperative of "transformation in crisis", which my ESIR colleagues and I warned the European Commission about in our brief "[Transformation in the Poly-Crisis Age](#)".³

A *Positive Peace* is a potential way out of this destructive madness. It is essentially the creation of peace through positive actions, interactions, societies and institutions that promote and advocate for peace versus its opposite: Negative Peace. According to Norwegian sociologist, Johan Galtung, Negative Peace is the attempt to create peace through an absence of violence. While the concept of Negative Peace is still an attempt to achieve peace, it won't necessarily get rid of the root causes of conflict nor build resilience to future shocks and stresses linked to a state of perma crisis. Climate change, war and pandemics will only exacerbate existing tensions over access to depleting natural resources, the displacement of people and increasing migration, alongside a global trend of increasing poverty and inequality.

The beauty of a *Positive Peace* approach is that it is forward looking and moves beyond conflict and violence. It also enables better economic and societal outcomes. In addition to the absence of violence, *Positive Peace* is also associated with many other societal characteristics that are considered desirable, including better economic outcomes, measures of wellbeing, levels of gender equality and environmental performance all of

which reflect the desired outcomes of our proposed Giant Leap scenario in *Earth for All: A Survival Guide for Humanity*.⁴ By adopting the five key turnarounds on poverty, inequality, empowerment, food and energy we can shift from the current global perma crisis into greater wellbeing by staying within the planetary boundaries and ensuring better quality of life factors.

The Institute for Economics & Peace (IEP) defines *Positive Peace* as the “attitudes, institutions and structures which create and sustain peaceful societies” and revolve around a complex set of interdependent social dynamics that interact systemically. The combination of Earth4All’s theory of change with a *Positive Peace* approach offers the opportunity for structural shifts that could sustain peaceful societies.

In its *Positive Peace* approach the IEP provides a comprehensive taxonomy that breaks down into eight distinct but interdependent pillars, and serves to facilitate the work of policymakers. It does so by identifying what makes some countries more peaceful than others, thereby highlighting why certain countries experience higher levels of violence - or political instability more generally. *Positive Peace* can also be used to define the risk of future falls in peace, thereby providing better targeting for peacebuilding efforts.

Graphic 1: The 8 pillars of *Positive Peace*⁵

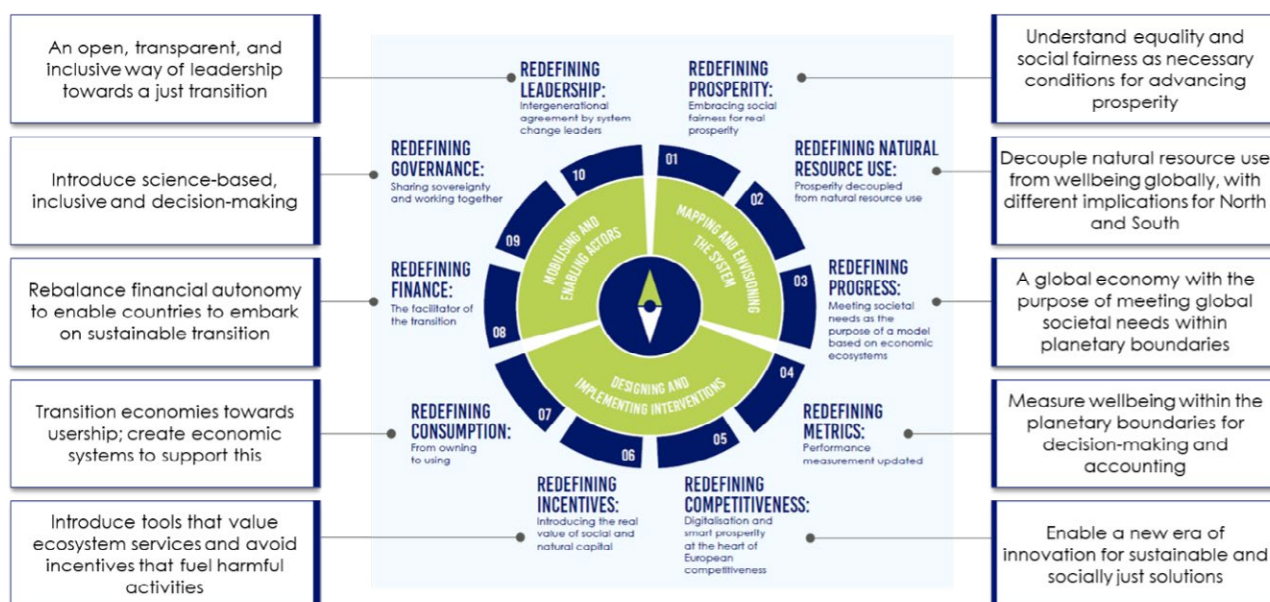


Positive Peace has been empirically derived by IEP via the statistical analysis of thousands of cross-country measures of economic and social progress to determine what factors have a statistically significant association with the absence of violence. It is measured by the *Positive Peace Index* (PPI) which consists of 24 qualitative and quantitative indicators that capture the eight factors of *Positive Peace*. Covering 162 countries, or 99.5% of the world’s population the PPI provides a baseline measure of the effectiveness of a country’s capabilities to build and maintain peace. It also represents a tangible metric for policymakers, researchers and corporations to use for effective monitoring and evaluation purposes. The [Positive Peace Report of 2024](#) shows however, that sadly *Positive Peace* improved by only 1 percent globally from 2013 to 2022, which is tiny. This is largely as a result of the sharp decline in investment in such an approach due to the pandemic and economic downturn. But interestingly, six out of the nine world regions did improve in *Positive Peace* from 2013 to 2022, with North America, South America and MENA being the exceptions. The improvements were mainly driven by the following *Positive Peace* Pillars: Free Flow of Information, Equitable Distribution of Resources, Acceptance of the Rights of Others, and High Levels of Human Capital. Whereas, the three Pillars of *Positive Peace* to record deteriorations since 2013 were Good Relations with Neighbours, Well-Functioning Government and Low Levels of Corruption.

The value of a *Positive Peace* approach is the empirical measurement of resilience to shocks and stresses and fragility linked to conflict, violence and instability. Due to its systemic nature, improvements in *Positive Peace* not only strengthen peace, but are also associated with many other desirable outcomes for society including greater well being and more harmonious societies.

This systemic approach is similar to the translation of systemic transformation into policy shifts and concrete recommendations to policymakers in the [International System Change Compass \(2022\)](#)⁶ published jointly by The Club of Rome, OSF and Systemiq. The *System Change Compass* identifies 10 principles that underly the explicit and implicit assumptions about a just and green future in Europe and beyond its borders. These 10 principles cover what is necessary to shift our economies, to redefine what we measure and value and to determine what good leadership and governance look like in a society that effectively balances people, planet and prosperity equitably. In doing so, the principles form the basis for specifying what interventions are required by which actors to move the needle on specific (eco)systems. Taken together, they help formulate a vision for the economy, financial architecture and infrastructure of tomorrow anchored in a renewed sense of value based responsibility that the EU can promote at home and beyond its borders.

Graphic II: International System Change Compass



By redefining prosperity, resource use and progress, the *System Change Compass* provides entry points for envisioning and redesigning an economic system compatible with a decarbonised, sustainable future – a system that nurtures the natural environment and strengthens human health and wellbeing for as many people as possible. It is an attempt to hardwire “humanity” and value based decision making at the core of governance.

Today’s challenges from conflict to climate change require both anticipatory governance, long-term systems thinking and adaptive, agile decision-making. We must understand the real nature and root causes of the major crises we are in, and realise that we are no longer in mono-crisis mode: rather, we live in a poly-crisis age, which has evolved into a perma crisis. Such global crises will exacerbate both existing conflict and war as well as spur new conflicts and wars thus adding on a further layer of instability to an existing perma crisis state. This leaves us with no choice but to promote a *Positive Peace* approach as the most stable future global goal even when recognising man’s innate thirst for power.

Yet against the backdrop of the war in Ukraine and the Gaza war, the temptation is once again to concede to *force majeure*, and continue to build up defense infrastructure and consolidate alliances that perpetuate current dependencies or even create new ones leaving behind both the transformative social and

environmental agenda needed but also the option to build new alliances for peace. At a time when financial resources and diplomatic efforts should be focused on what I refer to as the four P's: people, planet, prosperity and peace, resources both human and financial are being directed towards upping the war machine and defence spending. This is when on the contrary efforts should be focused on creating the necessary peace infrastructure and new equitable relationships between nation-states which address shifts in geo-political power and the need for new international institutions that foster social equity and economic development within planetary boundaries. Interestingly, when correlating such an approach with economic stability, the *Positive Peace Index* (PPI) shows that the per capita GDP of countries that improved in the PPI grew twice as fast as those that deteriorated. In essence the PPI shows that those countries that adopt such an approach have created an optimal environment under which human potential can flourish.

At issue is whether nation-states are ready to adopt such a holistic approach when focusing on short term responses to war and continuing to buy into the multi billion dollar war machine. How can the peace community get more countries to develop long term *Positive Peace* plans in the midst of a poly crisis? Can we get countries to re direct defense budgets into solving the poly crisis and in particular climate change and growing inequality such as called for by the [Global Peace Dividend](#)⁷ initiative.

Adopting a *Postive Peace* means building bridges between high-income and low-income countries and accepting today's new geo political and geo economic reality whilst dismantling old neo colonial relationships and institutional frameworks.

We have no choice but to reconcile the needs of today and exiting conflict and war with the call for enhanced preparedness and systemic transformation. We are increasingly aware of the extreme difficulty of keeping to a long-term vision of transformation in times of emergency, when the pressure for immediate responses to short-term needs becomes more salient especially when narrow notions of security are at stake. And indeed, the temptation to give up to short-termism will be strong. Just as sailors sometimes need to reach the nearest shore when a storm hits, many will suggest that the world's journey towards resilience, and sustainability may well need to take a detour until the Ukranian invasion and conflict in Gaza are over. This is an illusion, and a very risky one. The state of crisis, without systemic, adaptation-oriented transformation, will never be over. Worse, we risk collapsing under the weight of centripetal forces, of continued compound impacts and tipping points – political, socio-economic and environmental – that necessitate both short term levers for change and long term systems planning.

Without a deeper plan of action to avert these tipping points, a likely scenario, is indeed that the Anthropocene era is seen as a failure for not having understood the importance of building a *Positive Peace* agenda rather than just avoiding another war. That a *Positive Peace* agenda is the right transformative agenda for the 21st century and broadens the notion of security to building up the necessary resilience within our societies to future shocks and stresses. Essentially, a *Positive Peace* carefully constructed will never replace but at least honour those brutally murdered men, women and children who have been caught in the crossfire of conflict in Ukraine, Gaza, Sudan and so many other war torn regions and nations. It will also hardwire humanity back into relationships between nation-states and hopefully put the world back on the necessary transformation pathway that will avert future wars, climate and humanitarian disasters and build an Earth that is truly for all as an engine of hope and deep change rather than a continuation of todays war machine and destruction.

This Essay has been inspired by Anthony Andrenessi's Three poems for Gaza, by the IEP's work on a *Positive Peace*, and by my co-designed work on the *System Change Compass*, *Earth for All: A Survival Guide for Humanity* and the European Commission's Expert Group on the Economic and Societal Impacts of Research and Innovation (ESIR) Policy Briefs published over my tenure as Chair from 2020-2023. My thanks to so many visionary co-authors who have contributed to these works over the last 4 years and led to these further reflections.

Endnotes

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- ⁷ Global Peace Dividend. (2021). Coordinated by Carlo Rovelli, the initiative was signed by over 50 Nobel Laureates and leaders calling for a 2% annual reduction in global military spending for five years, with 50% of savings directed to a UN fund for pandemics, climate crisis, and poverty relief. Total global military spending in 2020 was \$1,981 billion, an increase of 2.6% (Stockholm International Peace Research Institute). Top spenders in 2023: US (\$296bn), Russia (\$83.6bn), Saudi Arabia (\$74.9bn). Note: This reference includes multiple data sources. For APA accuracy, individual citations to SIPRI and Global Peace Dividend websites/documents would be ideal. Let me know if you'd like help sourcing those for a formal APA entry.

We are one human race: War and conflicts as symptoms of our self-negation

by Mamphela Ramphele, honorary president of The Club of Rome and chair of the Archbishop Tutu Intellectual Property Trust.
April 2024

The world renowned Palestinian born, Professor Edward Said's words speak aptly to our world today, including to us as members of The Club of Rome:

“Nothing in my view is more reprehensible than those habits of the mind in the intellectual that induce avoidance, **that characteristic turning away from difficult and principled position, which you know to be the right one, but which you decide not to take.** You do not want to appear too political; you are afraid of seeming controversial; you want to keep a reputation for being balanced, objective, moderate; your hope is to be asked back, to consult, to be on a board or prestigious committee, and so to remain within reasonable mainstream ... Personally I have encountered them in **one of the toughest of all contemporary issues, Palestine**, where fear of speaking out about one of the greatest injustices in modern history has hobbled, blinkered, muzzled many who know the truth and are in a position to serve it.”¹

In 2023 The Club of Rome in its updated strategic framework renewed its Essence as to be at the leading edge of systems change. The world system around us is changing and in desperate need of leadership from that leading edge of systems change. The urgent question we face as The Club of Rome today is how do we show up as leaders at the leading edge of systems change not afraid to not only to leave questions on the table of human community conversations, but insist on not avoiding serious conversations that might upset the status quo?

The Israeli War on Palestine did not start after 7 October 2023. It was set in motion by the Balfour Declaration² signed in 1917 between British Foreign Secretary, James Balfour and Zionist Jewish leader, Lord Rothschild, to give to Jewish people land that did not belong to either the British or the Jewish people. The land belonged to Palestinian people, the descendants of Ismael, the son of Abraham. Occupation of Palestinian land is at the heart of this war and conflicts since the end of World War II.

It is curious that there was less controversy about making a statement about Russia's War on Ukraine than it has been Israel's War on Palestinians. The outrage of Russia's use of its muscle to humiliate and undermine Ukrainian sovereignty deserves the condemnation of freedom and human dignity revering people of the world. Russia deserved to be condemned, including by The Club of Rome. The State of Israel's disproportionate response to the outrageous attack by Hamas on 7 October 2023, has been met with unprecedented military support by America and European powers, and undignified silence by the majority of intellectuals, including shamefully, The Club of Rome. Why?

Some European leaders, including the President of the European Commission Ursula von der Leyen, proudly pronounced that Ukrainians must be supported because they are European. Many of us as democrats and freedom loving human beings believing in the dignity of all people, condemned, and continue to condemn Russian's attack on Ukraine as unjust and violating all the precepts of international law and the UN International Human Rights Conventions. We continue to stand with Ukraine in its assertion of its sovereignty and human right to freedom. Human beings are born to freedom, and strive always to assert and defend their freedom. To be human is to be free.

I am a citizen of a country and continent that have seen the worst of the horrors of slavery, colonial conquest and neo-colonialism. I am also a witness to, and participant in the unfolding of the power of self-liberation. Once the human spirit has been liberated from imposed identities and indignities of “othering” it becomes an unstoppable force for good imbuing those self-liberated with the infinite power to simply be. “Being” human becomes a more sacred asset than “having” all the material assets that the world can offer.

South Africans overcame a powerful apartheid/colonial machine despite the latter being supported by the Western powers who chose human rights abusers above those fighting for their rights to regain their human dignity and the lands of their ancestors, to secure sustainable futures for their children's children. Amazingly, Nelson Mandela's generation designated as terrorists by Western powers for decades, died as heroes for negotiating settlements that recognised that there be no peace without justice. This turn-around in fortune from terrorists to legitimate freedom fighters, was acknowledged by President Mandela as having been catalysed by the spirit of self-liberation of Black Consciousness Movement leaders who joined him on Robben Island.



Credit: Nelson Mandela. Av Ukjent. CC BY SA 3.0

Human beings are born to be free within interconnected, interdependent and mutually supportive relationships within the web of life. The emotional investments in human relationships at the personal, professional, and political levels are such that fractures extract a very heavy price from both sides of the broken relationship. Human beings are at their best when they are in supportive loving relationships. At the heart of the wars and conflicts in our world are acts that betray or violate the inalienable human rights to dignity, freedom, and basic essentials of life. Most of the most bitter wars and conflicts tend to be amongst those closely related where betrayal hurts the most.

The role of Britain, the USA, and Europe in supporting the original betrayal of Palestinian people by supporting occupation of their ancestral land by Jews who had long migrated from the region, is the original sin in the current Israeli/Palestinian struggle. The power of the Jewish lobby starting with Lord Rothschild, and continuing with the USA-based Jews, is what has initiated, sustained, and turned a blind eye to the violations of the rights of Palestinian people and their humiliation in the land of their ancestors. Humiliation of any people triggers the worst instincts in them, but also hurts the violators. Racists become lesser beings than non-racists; sexists and misogynists diminish their own humanity, because our humanity is defined by the quality of our relationships. The 7 October 2023 attack by Hamas was an outrageous act by people responding to the outrage of occupation and daily humiliation. The original sin has to be acknowledged and amends be made to restore the dignity of all.

Peace is only possible when we recognise that we are one human race. Science and our own instincts tell us that we are inextricably interconnected and interdependent within the web of life on the only planet – Mother Earth. Violation of one, violates us all. We have all the resources and capacity to create a world where we can all thrive together as a human race within a sustainable Mother Earth.

Endnotes

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Beyond patriarchal paradigms: Reimagining peace

by Petra Kuenkel, member of The Club of Rome and founder of the Collective Leadership Institute.

May 2024

This provocative thought-piece will depart from the current international debate on the ongoing atrocities happening in the Israel/Hamas conflict. It will take a feminist lens, and more specifically a bird's eye perspective on this conflict as one of the predictable processes of dehumanising human beings that is not only typical for patriarchal history, but at the core of patriarchal power pathologies.

Let us first describe the indescribable present: on 7 October 2023, male fighters of Hamas, an organisation stating in their charter that they aim to establish an Islamic Palestinian State in the place of Israel, hence deny the people of Israel their right to exist in the region, attacked an area of Israel bordering Gaza, killed around 1200 human beings, mostly Israeli civilians in an extremely dehumanising way. They also took 240 hostages. As a reaction, the state of Israel launched an ongoing military attack to wipe out Hamas as a terrorist organisation. In the course of these attacks about 35,000 human beings in Gaza have died, the majority of which are women and children, almost the entire population got displaced and or still live in an extremely dehumanising way. The 35000 people in Gaza and the 1200 people in Israel would have been entitled to benefit from the universal human rights declaration, passed by the UN in 1948, stating that the “recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world” . But none of them had a chance to be treated like a member of the human family.

If we could propel ourselves 200 years into the future and had the opportunity to read a feminist analysis of an historic account of what happened in the world during 2023 and 2024, in places that, at that time were named “Israel” and “The Gaza Strip”, we would see people shake their heads in despair and disbelief of another severe manifestation of the degeneration of humanity sliding in their actions into waves of unimaginable atrocities. People would learn from the analysis that, despite the lessons humankind thought to have learned in 1948 from two world wars and a holocaust of unthinkable extent, namely the industrialised killing of 6 million Jews in Germany and other areas in Europe; despite the amazing attempts to build a global space called ‘The United Nations’ with emphasis on the word ‘united’; despite the development of an International Law that would outlaw states committing crimes against humanity; despite the establishment of an International Court of Justice; and despite the achievement of a global commitment to sustainable development in 2015, in which peace stood as central Global Goal – there was too little collective power in the world to prevent the dehumanisation of human beings at scale. The feminist historic analysis would explain that, at the beginning of the 21st century, humankind still lived in a world in which the typical patriarchal pathologies were at work: individual, collective, organisational, institutional and state-led legitimisation of power abuse, in its logical culmination manifested as violence and warfare. The patterns of patriarchal power pathologies had been repeated over centuries. They were pervasive and persistent, but also known and researched. They drove the worlds development, caused climate change and military armament. They made billions of people suffer. The numerous and laudable attempts to shift the human evolutionary paradigm into collective responsibility for the future had not yet yielded the intended results.

Yet patriarchy, the dominance of men over women as a blueprint for any other forms of dominance of some people over others, is not as old as humankind. Ample research shows that it emerged as a societal arrangement about 6,000 to 7,000 years ago, experienced fierce resistance over millennia up until today, but ultimately became the dominant arrangement of societies that we have only overcome to some extent in some countries. It could only be introduced using mechanisms to institute patriarchal power pathologies as normalised societal arrangements.

The *first* and obvious mechanism to introduce and maintain a patriarchal order of societal living is **coercion**. There are as many forms of coercion as there are and have been attempts to establish or ascertain patriarchy as a dominance culture. Coercion requires a variety of dehumanising measures such as violence, murder and mass murder, rape, enslavement, detainment, forced work and genocide. We can see this pattern of power pathologies playing out in the Hamas murderous attacks and Israel's murderous response in Gaza.

The *second* mechanism to reinforce a patriarchal order of societal living is **institutionalisation**. Institutionalisation can be used for the common good and the implementation of human rights, but throughout human history it was also continuously abused. Today it is held in laws, regulatory measures and institutional structures, the military being one of them. The typical contemporary steps towards patriarchal backlash and a resurgence of patriarchal power pathologies are the undermining of the constitutional state, the eroding of democracies, the legitimisation of injustice, and increasing armament. The intention of Hamas to establish an Islamic State is institutionalised power abuse. We also need to remember that Israel as a democracy went through a long phase of unsuccessful people's resistance against a far-right government that increasingly began to undermine the achievements of a democratic constitutional state.

The *third* mechanism to reinforce a patriarchal order of societal living is **gaslighting**. The term 'gaslighting' describes how someone deliberately alters and ultimately shatters another person's self-perception or their perception of others. This happens through lies, attributions, distortions, fabricated allegations, manipulations and insinuations. Today, social media are the perfect technology for such a purpose. Gaslighting is the basis for manipulation, because it makes people insecure, timid and discouraged. If it happens on a collective scale, it becomes the ground on which narratives about perceived enemies or causes of evil are built. Anti-Semitism has always worked and is still working as such a narrative. It has led ordinary people to commit crimes against people or stay silent in the face of mass atrocities against Jewish people. Yet, justifying the mass killing of civilians based on the narrative that they are allegedly used as a 'human shield' by a terror organisation is another example for a dehumanising narrative.

The *fourth* mechanism is the well-known strategy of **divide and rule**. It has worked very well in the history of patriarchal establishment, resurgence and reinforcement, helped to maintain power and does so today. Of course, it is a mechanism that has been applied not only to women, but to all forms of hierarchy and oppression. The strategy is simple: the ruling group is sowing discord and disunity among those that should stay in a subordinate position. This creates divisions among the oppressed, causes different factions to emerge that then are pitted against each other. This prevents any forms of potentially dangerous unified uprising against the patriarchal authorities.

The four mechanisms are intertwined and they all played out in the past and present developments in Israel and Palestine (by far not only in this region). Patriarchal power pathologies, their maintenance, their legitimisation and their continuous enforcement on all sides are at the core of a situation that dehumanises the Israeli hostages to trading objects in power pathologies and dehumanises Palestinians in Gaza to prisoners that no country in the world welcomes as refugees.



Credit: Nathan Fertig, Unsplash.com

With the advent of the UN and the Declaration of Human Rights, there would have been a chance to depart from these pathological power patterns, which, if understood as inherently linked to patriarchal domination, could have helped to predict conflicts, wars and particularly dehumanising atrocities. But nobody bothered to listen to far-sighted strategic futurists. There is still no early warning system in place for patriarchal power pathologies. What history books at the beginning of the 21st century do not teach, is that men behind violent oppressive dominance and dehumanising acts are the product of sanctioned societal and mental structures that rank women, others and enemies as secondary objects, the life of people not important enough to not dehumanise and kill them, and territories a place to conquer. Power, in this androcratic mental structure, is always a necrophilic power. This means the death and dehumanising of other human beings boosts the perception of power of the violent actors, almost like an addiction. What we know from the psychology of oppression is that the act of humiliation, torture and violence works as a psychological transfer of power from the victim to the perpetrator. One could even say, those consumed by their own weaknesses seek to appropriate at any cost the victim's life spirit, its innate power. With each act of dehumanising, tortured confession, with every rape, every killing, every mass murder, the feeling of power shifts from the persecuted to the persecutors, fueling their growth and sustenance. Yet, in their quest to gain power by eliminating human spirit or human life, the perpetrators unwittingly obliterate the very knowledge that could carry us into a different future.

Most societies have failed to identify power pathologies as aberrations of human behavior. Too few people understand that these regressive societal trajectories ultimately culminate in warfare, the epitome of male pathology, stripping men and women of their humanity and reducing many women to mere objects that become victims of rape and mass atrocities.

It is heart-breaking that the conflict between Israel and Hamas fits the description of power pathologies of Hanna Ahrend, the political scientist and journalist who has lived from 1906 to 1975, and is one of the best-known critics of the conventional definitions of power as domination, manipulation and coercion. As a woman and a Jew, she grappled with the dehumanising realities of power dynamics, particularly amidst the unleashed terror of the Nazi regime, compelling her flight from Germany. These harrowing encounters deeply influenced her perspective, leading her to discern between power and violence. She posited that effective power necessitates resonance and relationality, signifying a shared understanding of its impact among individuals. Violence, in her view, emerges when such consensus dissolves, and instead, power is wielded solely for its own sake. This marks the genesis of power pathologies, encompassing domination, terror, institutionalised brutality, and the tyranny of fear-based totalitarian regimes. For her, power, when exercised within mutual understanding and relational contexts, need not veer into pathological territory. It is in its essence neutral, namely something that a person or a group does not simply possess, but rather something situational. She sees it as a potentiality that manifests through attribution, hence it arises from perception and action in the relationship between people. In her view, power corresponds to the human ability to join forces with others and to act in agreement with them. It is based on relationships and therefore requires communication processes. It must resonate with people in order to be effective. If it doesn't do that or no longer does that, it loses its potentiality. It dissolves or, as described above, mutates into tyranny. In her view, the perceived fear of losing power is an important component in the pathologisation of power into violence and domination.

The systems scientist Riane Eisler, born in Austria in 1931, similar to Hannah Arendt, fled the Nazi Regime as a child with her mother and lives today in the US. Growing up in the slums of Havana, she began to draw a connection early on between the structures that produce poverty and those that produce terror. In her case, too, the attempt to understand how such structures arise and reproduce themselves again and again led to interdisciplinary research that produced a holistic approach to addressing power issues. She published a bestseller on the future of humanity titled *The Chalice and the Blade*. The book is particularly relevant today, when sustainability challenges are mixed with populism and authoritarian forms of government. In her cultural transformation theory, she distinguishes between two fundamentally different narratives of power that shape societies and become the basic model of their organisation. One is the dominance narrative for which she chose the blade as a symbol. It thrives on enforcement, superiority and subordination, just as described in mechanisms of patriarchal enforcement above. Destruction of life and the living - in the form of nature as well as people - is to a certain extent sanctioned as normal in this narrative. The other is the partnership narrative, for which she chose the chalice as a symbol. It thrives on consensus, cooperation, commitment and diversity. Preservation of life and vitality are the focus here. Symmetrical relationships are the norm. She suggests that the partnership narrative of power must become mainstream, if humanity wants to survive.

The so deeply ingrained forms of inequality, the non-acceptance of diversity, the lack of respect and the dominance of some people over others, need to be seen as what they are – human pathologies that require treatment. Patriarchy is a mental infrastructure of the past. Time is of the essence. If we fail to abolish patriarchy, we will not be able to tackle the pressing problems of our time – be it climate change, exploitative economic structures, social inequalities or territorial expansions and wars. Because the central cause lies in the culture of dominance, be it of humans over nature, of men over women, of one region over others or of one skin color over another. Patriarchal mindsets permeate all of the global challenges of our time. The freedom of choice of women is a measure for the future-orientation and the collective wellbeing of societies. The freedom of women is a predecessor of peace, it is linked to political participation and participatory governance, be it in representative democracies or any other form of true people's representation. So, that one day we can change this trajectory, so that one day we will be able to break out of the inevitable dynamics of evolutionary destruction in combination with patriarchal retention of power.

With all due respect to the historic burdens, the actual development and the impossibilities to find solutions to the ongoing conflicts between Israel and Palestine and now in particular with Hamas, the patriarchal power pathology patterns clearly stand out, in different ways, from both sides. Both have strongly misogynist, patriarchal cultures with sanctioned male toxicity, have actors abusing religion as legitimisation and mobilisation to prepare people for atrocities, justifying dominance and the potential elimination of declared enemies. We do not know, if with enough international support, a two-state solution would have worked long ago or will work in the future without addressing patriarchal power pathologies; if the Israeli occupation could have been transformed into cooperation; if religious difference could have been a source of inspiration; if withdrawal from the territorial expansion of Israeli settlers would have opened pathways for peaceful solutions; or if structural collaboration would have led to honouring the possibilities for everybody to live in freedom instead of making Palestine a dependent and suppressed colony. But what we know, is that the addiction to patriarchal power pathologies including authoritarian political and institutional structures make solution finding difficult, if not obsolete. In addition, the surrounding countries suffer from similar patriarchal power pathologies, in which violent conflicts, human rights violations and wars are happening and can be further predicted. It is absolutely legitimate to use international law mechanisms and to bring what is happening to the International Court of Justice as South Africa did. These possibilities must be used, because such institutions exist for a good reason: not least the Holocaust was an important reason why the International Court of Justice was established. Yet, beyond legal processes and beyond serious diplomacy that is taking place at all levels, it is important to amplify how many people in Israel and Palestine (and abroad) pursue a different and peaceful vision. They see solutions on the horizon, want to engage in dialogue, fight for human rights, and want to live in peace. These initiatives look tiny in the current verbal and factual acts of violence, but they are the frontrunners of the future. You find them in music, in the arts and culture area, in education, in politics. They are many, but not enough to overcome the patriarchal power pathologies without global support.

If anything can be done in the form of global solidarity, then it is naming atrocities and patriarchal power pathologies, but not taking sides for any of these different version of patriarchal power pathologies in the form of dehumanising people. We do not need more dehumanising neither emotionally, verbally nor with military means. We need to support those that seek to overcome power pathologies. An immediate ceasefire would be the tiny little step on a long road back to the basic humanity that we need. So, that one day we can change this trajectory, so that one day we will be able to break out of the inevitable dynamics of evolutionary destruction in combination with patriarchal retention of power.

I summarise what we can do to increase the collective power to overcome patriarchal power pathologies and build peace in the Middle East.

- Name all atrocities as what they are - patriarchal power pathologies in the form of acts of dehumanising people who are part of the human family, no matter which side commits them. Scale counts, but every individual counts as well.
- Implement any possible diplomatic attempts that keep up and foster human rights, take a step in overcoming patriarchal power pathologies and base diplomacy on the feminist foreign policy principles of prioritising collaboration and cooperation over adversarial processes, championing and strengthening democracies, multilateralism, and a rules-based international system. Work by all means towards a ceasefire and take this as a reminder of the international importance of disarmament.
- Use legal mechanisms of the international (and national) rules-based system to bring to existing courts all cases of atrocities and dehumanisation.
- Implement gender-responsive humanitarian action and acknowledge women as powerful and to be supported agents of positive change rather than simply beneficiaries of assistance.
- Refrain from any emotional agitation to create win/lose situations that reduce the historic complexity of the situation to the simple identification of culprits, but name clearly what is happening, while it is happening and how it is happening. Do not become an amplifier of the conflict and take it to other regions by using verbal or physical violence.
- Show solidarity with dehumanised people in Gaza and in Israel, but avoid any kind of mobilising hatred, knowing that this only results in the continuation of patriarchal power pathologies: people being dehumanised by other people who have nothing to do with the direct conflict. Clearly distance yourself from anti-Semitic narratives and anti-Muslim narratives.
- Support every small and large initiatives towards peace and reconciliation between Israelis and Palestinians.
- Strengthen democracies everywhere in the world, prevent right-wing, militarist and authoritarian policies, and create an action plan of early warning systems for patriarchal backlash.

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With and beyond conflicts, wars and annihilation in the Anthropocene

Dharma Peace and the Sadhana and Struggles for a Planetary Lokasamgraha

by Ananta Kumar Giri, member The Club of Rome and Madras Institute of Development Studies and Vishwaneedam Center for Asian Blossoming.

August 2024

The preparation for war begins in the minds of the citizens. . . . Warlords always start by promoting war in the name of preserving peace.

By Boaventura de Sousa Santos

Watch the birds swirl around haphazardly
One by one, falling from the morose sky,
They fall on earth scorching hot like
A cremation pyre,
One little bird, its eye open
I offer water to it, thinking it's alive
Debilitated, immobile—how is it
Watching death with eyes wide open.
Which is worse, to see someone die or to
Die oneself?
While “all eyes are on Rafah,”
What ar Rafah’s eyes looking for?
Water? A morsel of food? A beloved?
The clean air devoid of white phosphorous,
The pungent smell from explosives?
The water has dried up, the beloved has
Been missing for weeks, and the child is buried indistinguishable
From the rubbles and the shrapnel.
A flash of lighting is seen in the sky:
To die before waking up.

By Deblina Dey¹

Escape, however high, redeems not life,
Life that is fallen behind on a fallen earth.
Escape cannot uplift the abandoned race
Or bring to it victory and the reign of God.
A greater power must come, a larger light [.]

By Sri Aurobindo²

Conflicts, violence, wars and processes of mutual annihilation abound in our contemporary global human condition. The Russian invasion of Ukraine, Hamas attack on and abduction of people from Israel, and the subsequent wars, and climate induced change and collapse are some of the most visible annihilations of our times. But these processes of conflicts and destructions abound in many places around the world. We need to walk and meditate with these conflicts and wars, go to their root as well as their most immediate causes and work for conflict transformation, reconciliation and peace. This calls for both structural peace and soulful peace as well as create circles of *lokasamgraha*—gathering of people and soul for the realisation of mutual wellbeing and flourishing—at local, national and planetary levels. As Paul Shrivastava writes in his introduction to our common meditation and striving for peace in *Enduring Peace in the Anthropocene*: “It does not benefit the cause of peace on which side is right or wrong [...] What we need is imagining a more humane approach to avoid wars all together, and stopping the spiral of violence that they beget [...] enduring peace requires internal peace within one’s self, both emotional and intellectual, and peace with nature”.³

Dharma peace in the face of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, Russia-Ukraine war, Hamas attack and the subsequent Israeli genocidal war

Dharma is a multi-dimensional vision and practice of leading a good, just, and peaceful life which emphasises right conduct and the right ways of thinking. Dharma as right conduct and right ways of thinking and being is related to our thoughts and actions to overcome unrest and conflict in self and society in transformative ways and to cultivate peace. This peacebuilding is not just the avoidance of conflict but also its transformation. It is also related to visions and practices of transformative reconciliation. Peace involves reconciliation, but this reconciliation is not just accommodative, but transformative as it tries to create links between peace and justice which is quite crucial in the case of conflicts and wars between Israel and Palestine as the state of Israel is built upon the occupation of land of Palestine without proper consent from the people of Palestine and justice for the Nakba or the Palestinian Holocaust that killed many innocent Palestinians and made them refugees.⁴ Transformative reconciliation also calls for what peace studies scholar Johan Galtung calls “structural peace,” as well as what I call soulful peace.

Dharma of peace building

Dharma as right conduct and right thinking calls for the realisation of peace at the levels of self and society. The meaning of *Dharma* is manifold—it refers to constitutive and nurturing ways that make life possible as well as specific *dharma*s pertaining to specific individuals and groups. Dharma of peace building calls for realisation of the mutual constitution of Palestinians and the Israelis as well as Russians and Ukrainians over histories especially in the last one hundred years. In this context, there is a need for the peaceful resolution of such conflicts in the direction of the dignity of individuals and groups beyond their existent and conventional hierarchical formulation which annihilates their sense of dignity.

Existing conflicts call for the realisation of peace which many a time is a long-drawn process, as seen in the 30-year religious war in Europe from 1610 to 1648, class conflicts in the modern world, and caste, race, and gender conflicts in the contemporary world. But the realisation of peace calls for the cultivation of Dharma as right thinking and right conduct. Right thinking and right conduct here are not part of the existing logic of hierarchical production of indignity and righteous justification; rather they challenge us to overcome the limits of “problematic justice”⁵ embodied in such hierarchical formations and realise our constitutive dharma of beauty, dignity, and dialogue for all. For the realisation of peace, we need critical, transformative, and transcending visions and practices of *dharma*.

Dharma is also part of Purusartha (meaning and end of life) in Indic traditions consisting of *Dharma* (Right Conduct and Thinking), *Artha* (Wealth and Meaning), *Kama* (Desire), and *Moksha* (Salvation). Dharma Peace is part of the vision and striving for peace in each of the related Purusartha of life and society such as *Artha*, *Kama*, and *Moksha*.



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We need to have peaceful economics and economic life for the realisation of peace. For example, today the production of arms and ammunition is part of the profit maximisation logic of the military-industrial complex where states and markets are involved in the production of weapons and selling them and even forcing this upon individuals and states. There is a vested war machinery and war economics responsible for the perpetuation of war in the case of both Israel-Palestine war as well as in the case of current wars between Russia and Ukraine. Even some of the so-called peace-loving nations of the world are involved in such armament industries. Dharma peace calls for the transformation of such an architecture of profit maximisation and wealth production. It calls for the transformation of the conventional means of production of wealth (*Artha*). *Artha* also means meaning in Sanskrit and it calls for a meaningful economic arrangement where we do not suffer from delusion and distraction of making profit by killing people but gain wellbeing by enriching each other and living meaningfully.⁶

Kama refers to desire, but there are two kinds of desire: desire which takes us down the path of self and mutual destruction and desire which helps us to grow and realise our potential of evolutionary realisation of beauty, dignity, and dialogue. For the realisation of peace, we need to have peaceful desire as a dynamic process of coming to terms with many conflict-mongering desires such as domination and having power over others and transforming these. We need to have *Kama Shanti*—desire peace as part of *Dharma Shanti*. The desire for peace is conspicuous by its absence in the war mongers such as the Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu as well as the Russian President Vladimir Putin as well as in the Hamas attackers as all of them are war criminals of humanity.

Realising peace helps us realise *Moksha* (salvation) as a state of dynamic peace in self and society. *Moksha* is not only otherworldly but is also realised in our everyday lives and our self and social relations. Realising peace is the highest state of self and society—the state of *Moksha*. We need to link peace to *Moksha* and cultivate the vision and practice of *Moksha* peace or peaceful *Moksha*. To realise *Moksha* or liberation, in heaven or on earth, we need to realise peace—soulful, relational, as well as structural.

Dharma Peace as part of *Purusartha* of Peace needs to work with the *Gun*as (qualities) of self and society which are called *Trigun*as or Three *Gun*as in Indic traditions—*Sattva* (Truth), *Rajas* (power) and *Tamas* (darkness). Conflicts and wars take place with the predominance of the qualities of *Rajas* (power) and *Tamas* (darkness) in self and society without the evolutionary movement towards *Sattva* (Truth), or the involutory penetrationⁱⁱ of *Sattva* (Truth) in our self, society, and the world. Dharma Peace calls for working with the dimensions and *Gun*as of *Rajas* and *Tamas* in self, society, and the world and making them relate to the flow of *Sattva*. In the ongoing war between Israel and Hamas, where Israel has killed now around 40,000 Palestinians, bombed schools and hospitals and have most recently assassinated Hamas political chief and peace negotiator Ismail Haniyeh and the way Russia and President Putin are killing and bombarding innocent people including the murder of Russian human rights activist and democracy fighter Alexei Navalny is a manifestation of *Rajas* (power) and *Tamas* (darkness) and calls for realisation of the limits of *Rajas* (power) and *Tamas* (darkness) and its transformation by the flow of *Sattva* (Truth) and *Shanti* (peace) including *Santa Rasa*—the emotional flow of peace. Indian spiritual seeker and aesthetic theorist Abhinavagupta has invited us to realise *Santa Rasa* as one of the *rasas* of life along with such *rasas* as compassion and disgust and we need to make *Santarasa* flow in our lives. In this context, initiatives

like peace orchestra nurtured by Israeli composer and musician Daniel Barenboim and the Palestinian freedom fighter, thinker and musician Edward Said is an effort to make santarasa flow in our lives.⁷ We need more peace music, dances, orchestras, festivals, art shows in our times of war, including museums of the Holocaust of both the Jews and Palestinians side by side. Here peace activist Muhammad Dajani has created a Holocaust museum in his own home in East Jerusalem to educate Palestinians about the Jewish Holocaust and we now need Israelis who would create a museum of Nakba in their homes. But for some like Mazin Qumsiyeh, the continued bombardment and killing of the Palestinians is a daily living spectacle for the viewers but a reality of death and destruction of people who live in Palestine whether it is Gaza or West Bank. But Israelis also need to bring this ongoing genocide as a part of their conversation in daily lives and other institutional circles so that there is generation of a feeling of co-suffering for both the historical Jewish holocaust and now the visible and deliberately created Palestinian Holocaust in front of which the whole world has been made to stand as silent and spineless spectators including all the recent and forthcoming American Presidents.

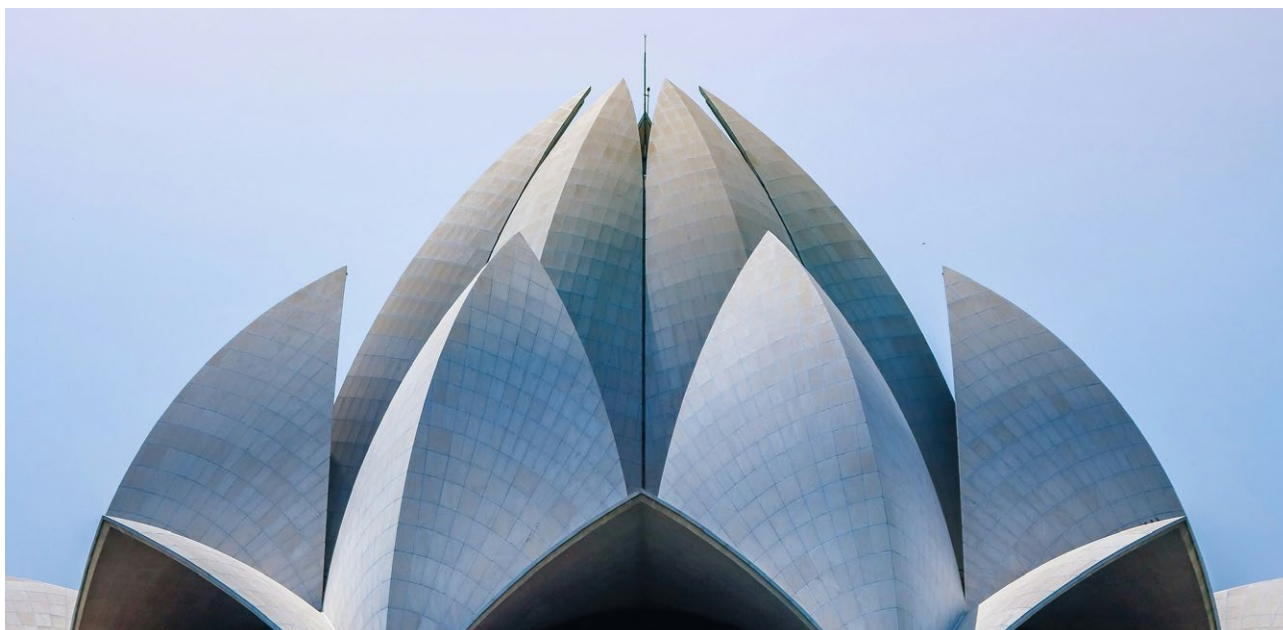
Dharma Peace as *Purusartha* of Peace working with *Sattva*, *Rajas*, and *Tamas* can draw on feminine creative energies of peace and nurturance of life—human and divine. Women play a key role in peace building and in places of historical and ongoing conflicts and wars such as Palestine, Israel, Manipur, Chile and Colombia. Women, especially mothers, have come forward to share the pain of loss and grief and move towards reconciliation. In the case of Israel-Palestine war, women from both sides especially mothers who have lost their children to violence have come together for peace while the patriarchal male leaders and fighters perpetuate war and violence on each other and on innocent women and children.⁸ As *Dharma* Peace builds upon insights from different religious and spiritual traditions of humanity, we can relate this to the vision and realisation of the Divine Mother which helps us realise peace. Sri Aurobindo⁹ presents to us his realisation of four aspects of the Divine Mother: *Maheswari* helping us with Wisdom, *Mahakali* helping us with strength, *Mahalaxmi* helping us with wealth, and *Mahasaraswati* helping us with the tenacity of striving for perfection. *Dharma* peace as a new mothering *Purusartha* can help us go beyond the patriarchal closure of *Purusartha*, *Dharma*, and peace which is still controlled by the socio-cultural and political reality of male domination which is conspicuous by its presence in the war mongering male leaders such as Nethanyu, Putin and the Hamas attackers. This can help us to create a new flow of shakti-energy, divine feminine, human feminine, and masculine feminine transmutations.

Dharma Peace works with the wisdom traditions of the world for envisioning and practicing peace, including the traditions of Sophia in Hebraic, Greek, and Christian traditions and Fathima in Islamic and Christian traditions. As religion is a dimension in Israeli Palestinian conflict, we need to make the wisdom tradition in Abrahamic religions active including reanimating wisdom peace traditions in both Judaism and Islam. Here the Jewish spiritual vision of *tikkum olam*—repairing the world is helpful as similar wisdom traditions of peace from Islam such as war is the last resort when pushed to annihilation and even while conducted, one should conduct it in a spirit of spiritual path always avoiding avoidable violence and harm.¹⁰ Similarly, *Dharma* peace can work with the flow of strength of *Mahakali*, the flow of Wealth of *Mahalaxmi*, and the strivings and tenacity of perfection in *Mahasaraswati*. For Sri Aurobindo¹¹, Mahasaraswati embodies patience and working for perfection, but she is not a perfectionist by categorising people as perfect and imperfect. We need the patience of Saraswati to realise peace because peace is a process and not a thing or a point and it calls for patient cultivation. Saraswati's patience also helps us to go beyond our one-track flows and make it join a confluence with accompanying conflicts, disjunctions, and contradictions as well as contingent and emergent interweaving, co-walking, commingling, and reconciliation. In the case of the current unequal war between Israel and Hamas where Israel is boasting the capacity to bombard and turn people and homes into rubbles and when Russia is doing the same destruction in Ukraine, we need Saraswati work of patience and synthesising rather than the predominant temptation and realisation of revenge and retaliation.

Dharma peace strives to work with the traditions of *Dharma* Yudha and holy wars and make them part of holy peace. Here we can briefly engage with the multi-dimensional vision, practice, and dynamics of *Jihad* in Islamic traditions. According to Prophet Muhammad (Peace Be Upon Him, from now onwards, PUBH), one can wage a war only in self-defense, and that too after making all efforts at peace building. But the greater *Jihad* is to conquer the destructive tendencies in oneself, for example, which makes us slaves of *Rajas* (power) and

Tamas (darkness), as discussed earlier. Maulana Wahiduddin Khan¹² and Ashgar Ali Engineer¹³ are spiritual and social practitioners of Islam as a path of peace and they help us realise the significance of this greater *Jihad*. Only when one follows this greater *Jihad* of waging war against one's lower self of selfishness, aggression, and destructiveness, can one take part in the needed Jihad of self-defence. This is an important challenge for Hamas as well as other Islamic groups who are using the name of Islam for self-defence of Palestine without practicing the path of self-restraint in causing harm to and killing the innocent. According to Muhammad Dajani who is a Palestinian Muslim and fighter for peace, this is the great challenge before Islamic groups fighting for liberation of Palestine. Self-Conquest is also an important part of *Dharma Yudh* in Bhagavad Gita and Jihad in Islam which has also its resonance in the Jewish vision and practice of *Tikkum Olam*—repairing and reconstructing our world.¹⁴

As many wars and conflicts are given legitimization in the name of religion, we also need to engage ourselves with sources of peace and reconciliation in religions. Here the work of Arvind Sharma is helpful, among others. He tells us how all religions have a dimension of closure and violence as well as peace and reconciliation.¹⁵ All religions show tendencies of exclusivism, inclusivism where they want to include other religions in their own given frameworks, and pluralism where they want to be open with others in a spirit of respect and dialogue. It is facilitated by acknowledging these streams in religious traditions and then focusing on the way they cultivate creative processes of pluralisation in our contemporary world which is different from pluralism as a static frame or process.¹⁶ For *Dharma Peace*, we need to build upon traditions, movements, hermeneutics, politics and spirituality of reconciliation in world religions. In the face of world Palestine-Israel conflicts, all world religions need to come together for the sake of peace as they have come together in the face of climate change and climate collapse.¹⁷



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Dharma Peace, Sahadharma and Lokasamgraha

The Bhagavad Gita talks about *swadharma* (dharma of the self) and the need to protect one's *swadharma* from *paradharma* (dharma of others). But what is *swadharma*, and what is *paradharma*? So far in conventional religion, politics, and interpretative exercise, these have been given a literal and group-linked categorical meaning. But *swadharma* is not only one's socially given religious identity; it is the dharma of one's being, the path of unfoldment and duty that one seeks and needs to follow. One needs to nurture and protect one's unique *dharma* and mode of self-realisation from those forces which are not intrinsically significant for one's self-realisation. As we realise the deeper spiritual meaning and the challenges of existing categories coming from our cultures and religions, we also need to create new categories of reality, living and realisation. In the

case of the existing discourse of self and other, *swadharma* and *paradharma*, which have been thrown up into antagonistic battles, we need to create a new category of *saha* (together) and *sahadharma* (dharma of togetherness).¹⁸ This is an integral part of the other important concern in the Bhagavad Gita, *loka-samgraha*, which means gathering of people not only in a political sense of rights and citizenship but also a spiritual gathering of mutual care and world nurturance and world maintenance.

We need a new culture, political theology and spiritual ecology which nurtures spaces of togetherness which help us in realising peace. Language and common natural resources constitute our arenas of *sahadharma* which includes both conflicts and co-operations, and it calls for a new politics and spirituality of *sadhana* and struggle, compassion and confrontation. Language and natural resources become practical domains of working for and with peace. In case of Israel-Palestine, the common natural ecosystem of river, land and the sea constituting the indispensable mothering base for both Israel and Palestine and the present genocidal war of Israel is destroying this common eco-system deliberately as well as emptying Palestinian land. But protecting the common homeland of both Jews and the Palestinians is a practical way of realising peace as it is done by the activists of the movement of Roots in the present-day Israel-Palestine nurtured and led by Ali Abu Awwad and Rabbin Hannah Schlesinger.¹⁹ Roots challenges all concerned to realise that, at present, Palestine is the common home of both the Jews and Palestinians and both should live in this land with dignity, security, equal rights, justice and peace. This way it reflects the vision and practice of the community of Neve Shalom, a community in Israel, where Jews and Palestinians live together as members of a community. The similarity between Hebrew and Arabic also needs to be acknowledged and cultivated which can be a dynamic inspiration for peace by cultivating Shalom-Salam together. The commonality between Russian and Ukrainian languages and their common ecosystem should be a reminder to the present day war mongers from both the sides not to destroy their common languages and natural and cultural ecosystems.

Lokasamgraha of Peace

Lokasamgraha is an important invitation for self, social and cosmic transformation from the Indic traditions and it appears briefly in Srimad Bhagbad Gita twice. It is usually translated as wellbeing of all, but it also refers to the process of gathering—gathering or collecting of *loka*—people.^v It is the creative and critical gathering of people and the accompanying process of mutual care that leads to wellbeing of people. As a process of gathering, it is not just confined to the public, the public sphere, or public political processes. It also involves in an integrally inter-linked manner, gathering of soul (*atmasamgraha*). *Lokasamgraha* and *atmasamgraha*—gathering of soul and people—lead to a creative gathering of society not just as a mechanical entity, but also as a living process of critique, creativity and transformation. It also leads to the creative regeneration of commons and a cosmic mobilisation of energy. In the case of Israeli Palestinian conflict, Sapir Handelman and his collaborators for peace from Mind for Peace program in Israel have created The Congress of the Israeli-Palestinian People where Israelis and Palestinians come together to join the people’s assemblies for negotiation of peace.²⁰ In case of American protests, there are Jewish Palestinian solidarity campaigns in which “younger North American Jews have been active and taken on leadership roles in Jewish Palestinian solidarity campaigns, making it harder to accuse these campaigns of anti-Semitism.”²¹

Lokasamgraha challenges us to realise wellbeing and happiness for all, but for this we are all invited to be creative in our strivings and struggles. This cannot be left to the others, society and state. At the heart of *Lokasamgraha* is care and responsibility which connects the vision and practice of *Lokasamgraha* in the Western political traditions, such as in the works of Hannah Arendt, and in the Chinese philosophy of *Tian-Xia*—All Under Heaven.²² In the case of the present day Russian Ukraine war, Carlos Álvarez Pereira challenge us to realise that Russians are also part of Europe and the world as Ukrainians and this basic indispensable common entanglement is required for moving towards peace from the current machinations of wars.

Lokasamgraha challenges us not only to maintain the world, but also to uphold it. This upholding is crucially dependent upon right living in self and society, which is facilitated by appropriate social policy and public actions as well as by the strivings and preparation of the soul. For Dharma Peace, we need multi-dimensional *Lokasamgraha*, gathering of people, as well as soul which then becomes *Lokasamgraha* of Peace.

Dharma Peace and the calling of a new civilisation of Ahimsa

Our civilisations are in crisis, and we need new initiatives to cultivate a new civilisation. Our dominant civilisations are entangled in multiple webs of domination and violence towards Nature, the Divine, Self, and society, as Walter Benjamin challenges us to realise: every document of civilisation is a document of barbarism. Sri Aurobindo²³ in his *Human Cycles* also challenges us to realise the physical and economic barbarism in modern civilisation, and Gandhi²⁴ challenges us to realise its Satanic dimension and transform it. There is a complex relationship between religion and civilisation and the deployment of the language of just war, *dharmayudha*, and crusades has contributed to the crises of civilisation and its entanglement with violence in societies and histories. Our contemporary dominant discourses and practices of civilisations have their roots in what Karl Jaspers²⁵ calls the rise of Axial Age civilisations. In the Axial period of human history from 800 BC to 200 BC, major world religions and philosophies such as Judaism, Buddhism, Confucianism, Taoism, and Christianity emerged, shaping the rise of these religion and philosophy-linked civilisations. While the earlier phase of the Axial Age was characterised by the search for self and wandering of the free spirit unhindered in the political condition of small states and the quest for transcendence, the later phase soon got ossified into “conscious despotism”²⁶ and imperial formations giving rise to violence and annihilation such as most of these religions being male priest based annihilating women priests, women, and Mother Goddesses. Given the nurturing role of women and mothering *Purusartha* for peace as discussed earlier, today’s transition to new civilisations calls for interrogation and transformation of the patriarchal violence in current civilisations and its root in the Axial Age civilisations. Karl Jaspers does not acknowledge this though he writes about the annihilation of the primal people of the world whom he calls “primitive” without feeling any pain and empathy. Here Dharma peace calls for feeling the pain of such civilisational annihilation and identifying with the suffering and the annihilated such as the indigenous people, Mother Goddesses and women including acts of resistance offered by women,²⁷ indigenous people and the violated many. War and violence in our contemporary world and different civilisational complexes continue the later violent phase of the Axial period of “conscious despotism” and imperial formation. It calls for contemporary renewal and regeneration of the early Axial period quest for self, consciousness, transcendence, smaller social and political units, and movement of wandering thinkers, philosophers, and human beings across borders.²⁸

There is not only an entanglement between civilisations and violence but between nation-state and violence. The nation-state of Israel was created with original violence of displacement and annihilation of the existing Palestinians as the annihilation of the Jews during the Holocaust was used as a justification for the creation of the nation-state of Israel. From the beginning there has been the two state theory adopted as a way to peace in this land though in the last thirty years or so, the rights of the Palestinians for an independent nation-state has been deliberately killed by the war mongering rulers of Israel. But as we move towards a Palestinian state for realisation of peace and justice, we need to transform the modernistic idea and organisation of nation-state and we need to create transformative transnational state for both Israel and Palestine where both the state of Israel and Palestine need to share sovereignties rather than be closed within themselves as machineries of war and hatred in a cult of killing and closed sovereignty. Keeping this in mind, Johnan Galtung had argued that for the realisation of two state solution, we need a six state solution that is mutual guarantee of six states of Israel-Palestine which inhabit the region.

The journey from violence to non-violence is part of manifold visions and practices of civilisational transitions in the face of our crises of civilisation. This transition involves moving from the one-dimensional civilisation of modernity to pluriversal civilisations of multiple modernities and our multiple worlds where we cultivate plural ways of being in relationships with humans, Nature, the Divine, society, and state.²⁹ In the context of destruction of indigenous people brought out by the rise of Axial Age civilisations, it is noteworthy that anthropologists devoting themselves to the significance the indigenous pluriversal words such as Arturo Escobar are telling us about the need for both civilisational transition and pluriversal development challenging us to move from the violence of modernistic paradigm of civilisation and development in multi-dimensional creative ways. This calls for movement from the political ontology of what Toynbee³⁰ calls idolatry of power which produces suffering³¹ including suffering of war and violence to acknowledgement of suffering in human condition and finding ways to

transform conditions of suffering through sharing of human and social vulnerability and sharing of sovereignties rather than continue to cling on to power as a slave and creating war and violence just for the sake of holding onto power—geopolitical and personal without any regard to bombardment of hospitals and killing of the innocent including women and children—as it is happening in Russia, Ukraine, Palestine, and Gaza at present. *Dharma* Peace here challenges transition from the civilisation of idolatry of power to a civilisation of shared suffering and shared *Ananda* (joy) in the process transforming the meaning, telos and practice of power from “power over” to “power with”.³²

Here *Dharma* Peace, peace with and among religions, can contribute to the needed civilisational transition where our major challenge is to move from structures and discourses of violence, violation, and disrespect towards multi-dimensional visions, discourses, practices, and institutions of *Ahimsa*—love and non-violence. Here what Habermas writes resonates with the spirit of Gandhi and is helpful:

Only when philosophy discovers in the dialectical course of history the trace of violence that deform repeated attempts at dialogue and recurrently closes off the path to undistorted communication does it further the process whose suspension it otherwise legitimates: mankind’s evolution towards autonomy and responsibility.³³

Endnotes:

¹ Dey, D. (2024). *Thinking of Gaza from Delhi* (p. 5).

Here what Dey writes shakes us from our slumbers: A bomb chars not only the skin but also the soul. The trauma in conflict zones has been a subject of academic and policy debates for many years. We live in hyperreal times (as the French sociologist, Jean Baudrillard, would argue), watching the destruction of Palestinian people and infrastructure on our mobile phones. On 26 May 2024, around the same time as I was experiencing the life-threatening heat in Delhi, the news of an air strike on a refugee camp

² Sri Aurobindo. (1993). *Savitri* (p. 448).

³ Shrivastava, P. (2024). Systemic actions for peace in Gaza and the world. In *Enduring peace in the Anthropocene*. The Club of Rome.

⁴ Ramphele, M. (2024). We are one human race. In *Enduring peace in the Anthropocene*. The Club of Rome.

⁵ Habermas, J 1990

⁶ Sachs 2011

⁷ Barenboim, D., & Said, E. W. (2002). *Parallels and paradoxes: Explorations in music and society*. Pantheon Books.

⁸ Kuenkel, P. (2024). Beyond patriarchal paradigms: Reimagining peace. In *Enduring peace in the Anthropocene*. The Club of Rome.

⁹ Sri Aurobindo. (1995). *The Mother*. Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram.

¹⁰ Soltes, O. Z. (2024). Seeking a solution to the problematic of religious othering in theory and action: From the first crusade to Hizmet and Seeds of Peace. In *Sri Aurobindo*.

¹¹ Sri Aurobindo. (1995). *The Mother*. Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram.

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¹³ Engineer, A. A. (2011). *A living faith: My quest for peace, harmony and social change*. Orient Blackswan.

¹⁴ Soltes, O. Z. (2024). Seeking a solution to the problematic of religious othering in theory and action: From the first crusade to Hizmet and Seeds of Peace. In *Sri Aurobindo*.

¹⁵ Sharma, A. (2019). *Religious tolerance: A history*. Noida: HarperCollins.

¹⁶ Connolly 1995; Giri 2013

¹⁷ The Center for the Study of World Religions at Harvard University had nurtured multi-volume projects on world religions led by theologians such as Mary Evelyn Tucker who is now at Yale University.

¹⁸ Krishna, D. (2006: 8). Rgveda: The mantra, the sukta and the mandala or the rsi, the devta, the chanda: The structure of the text and problems regarding it. *Journal of Indian Council of Philosophical Research*, 23(2), 1–13.

Sahadharma emerges from what Martin Heidegger calls “midpoint of relationships.” This is suggested in the concluding lines of Rigveda where there is a call for Samagadhwa, Sambadadhwa. For Daya Krishna, this path of togetherness is the call of the future and the God to come is a God of togetherness. In his words: Rta and Satya provide the cosmic foundation of the universe and may be apprehended by tapasa or disciplined “seeking” or sadhana and realized through them. The Sukta 10.191, the last Sukta of the Rgveda, suggests that this is not, and cannot be, something on the part of an individual alone, but is rather the “collective” enterprise of all “humankind” and names the “god” of this Sukta “Somjnanam” emphasizing the “Togetherness” of all “Being” and spelling it out as Sam Gachhadhwam, Sam Vadadyam, Sambho Manasi Jayatam, Deva Bhagam Jathapurve Sanjanatam Upasate

¹⁹ Giri, A. K. (2023). *The calling of global responsibility: New initiatives in justice, dialogues and planetary realizations*. Routledge.

²⁰ Handelman, S. (2023). The calling of global responsibility: Corona crisis, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and rays of hope. In A. K. Giri (Ed.), *The calling of global responsibility: New initiatives in justice, dialogues and planetary realizations* (pp. 213–217). Routledge.

²¹ Gusterson, H. (2024). Guest editorial, Gaza. *Anthropology Today*, 40(1).

²² Dallmayr, F. (2015).

²³ Sri Aurobindo. (1962). *The human cycles*. Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram.

²⁴ Gandhi, M. K. (1909). *Hind Swaraj*.

²⁵ Jaspers, K. (2021). *The origin and goal of history*. Routledge Classics.

²⁶ Jaspers, K. (2021). *The origin and goal of history*. Routledge Classics.

²⁷ Uberoi, J. P. S. (1996:124). *Religion, civil society and state: A study of Sikhism*. Oxford University Press.

Here what J.P.S. Uberoi writes about Antigone deserves our careful consideration:

I think that perhaps the world's first martyr of truth and non-violence was a Greek, Antigone, a European and a woman, best known to us as depicted by Sophocles, c.500 B.C. Antigone, who preceded both Socrates and Jesus, wanted the integration of religion and society to be upheld by her freedom of conscience and immemorial usage, the custom of civil society, while Creon, the King, wished his reasons of state to be separate from, and to override, both religion and society. I will not attempt to decide which of the two points of view is modern for Europe, but it is Antigone's that is closest to Sikhism and Indian modernity. She had established the truth that no power on earth can make the self do anything against its nature, except indirectly confer martyrdom on it, which is also the basis of Gandhism in politics (1996: 88).

If conventionally, martyrs have been linked to religious wars, but the real spirit martyrdom for Uberoi is to bear witness to God as an act of love and to transform dharmyudha to satyagraha: The martyr is one who must love his enemy in some sense since he or she is the perfect witness (saheed-ul-kamil) that God, who at this time takes an interest in history and politics, does not want his servant to suppose, as the dualist would, that Satanism has any true independent existence, and so dharmayudhya, the righteous war, can be transformed into satyagraha".

²⁸ Giri, A. K., Roy Choudhury, A., & Willis, D. B. (Eds.). (2024). *Towards a new art of border crossing*. London: Anthem Press.

²⁹ Dallmayr, F. (2002). Escobar, A. (2019). *Designing a pluriverse*. Duke University Press.

³⁰ Toynbee, A. J. (1956). *A historian's approach to religion*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

³¹ Toynbee, A. J. (1956). *A historian's approach to religion*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

"In human life, Suffering is the antitheses of Power, and it is also a more characteristic, and more fundamental element in Life than Power is. [...] Suffering is the essence of Life, because it is the inevitable product of an unresolvable tension between a living creature's essential impulse to try to make itself into the center of the Universe and its essential dependence on the rest of creation and on the Absolute Reality on which all creatures live and move and have their being. On the other hand, human power, in all its forms is limited and, in the last resort, illusory. Therefore any attitude towards Life that idolizes human power is bound to be a wrong attitude towards Suffering and, in consequence, a wrong attitude towards Life itself."

³² Giri, A. K. (Ed.). (2009). *The modern prince and the modern sage: Transforming power and freedom*. Sage.

³³ Habermas, J. (1971). *Knowledge and human interests* (p. 315). Boston: Beacon Press.

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EXPLORING THE CHASMS

Fundamentalism and extremism as fire accelerants

by Christian Berg, member of The Club of Rome and honorary professor, Clausthal University.

April 2024

Witnessing the terror, atrocities and suffering of innocent people and escalating violence in an entire world region is breathtaking. Helplessly and aghast we watch the unfolding of what seems inevitable in the logic of the parties involved.

The background of the current war in Gaza is complex and has a long history. Any analysis and evaluation will require intimate knowledge of the local conditions, cultures, internal logic of the parties involved, much more than I can claim to have.

What is the role of religion in this conflict, is it a conflict between Islam and Judaism? I do not think so. It is not a conflict between different religions. However, religious fundamentalism and political extremism play a crucial role; they act as fire accelerants. Fundamentalists become so obsessed with their worldview, with their particular interpretation of their belief system and their political goals that they disregard any other viewpoint and are insensitive to the suffering they cause.

In one way or another, the conflict in Gaza is aggravated by fundamentalists from the monotheistic religions of Judaism, Christianity and Islam – but fundamentalism also occurs in Hinduism and Buddhism, and it is often coupled with nationalism and populism. Despite their doctrinal differences fundamentalist currents in different creeds have surprising commonalities. Understanding those commonalities, the main characteristics of fundamentalism, we might be able to antagonise it or at least mitigate its harm. Fundamentalism is characterised by a binary logic, exclusive in its claims. It often exhibits rigid moral attitudes, intolerance against other belief or value systems, high esteem of strong leadership and an often questionable use of rationality, which does not accept general rules of reasoning. Furthermore, fundamentalists often have an extremist political agenda and sometimes use violence to reach their goals.

The terrorist attacks of Islamic fundamentalists have brought fear and loathing in many parts of the world in the recent decades. Of these the attacks of 11 September 2001 and 7 October 2024 were particularly hard-bitten and cruel. Murdering innocent people cannot be justified by any means. Never.

When a former US president responded to the terrorist attacks of 9/11 by saying “either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists”,¹ he evidenced the same kind of binary logic as his adversaries. When fundamentalist evangelicals in the US tolerate, or even support political leaders who bend and neglect the truth in a shocking and unprecedented way, it looks like a daunting backslide into pre-modern, if not pre-historic thinking. Public discourse must rest on a common ground, on the acceptance of solidly evidenced truths, on some kind of rational reasoning. However, in a fundamentalistic view even best-established scientific evidence is disregarded if it does not fit into their own worldview. This irrational moment, the neglect of basic facts, and the tendency to accept the nonsense of ‘alternative facts’ demonstrate underlying disruptive forces: When the very basis of reasoning, the most basic rules of rationality are not accepted anymore, we lose any ground for mitigating different points of view. On which grounds shall agreements between conflicting parties then be reached? On sheer power? Can this ever lead to a peaceful coexistence of human beings?

It is evident, that fundamentalism also exists in Judaism, like in extremist religious Zionism. Proponents proclaim Israel’s ‘exclusive and indisputable right to all parts of the Land of Israel’ – despite the fact that settlements for example in the West Bank, are violating international law.² Extremist politicians, even members of the Israeli government, provoked the Palestinian people by neglecting their sheer existence by saying there is ‘no such thing as a Palestinian people’.³

Why has fundamentalism become so attractive to many, and what can we do against it?

For most people in the world, life has dramatically changed in just a few generations. How we live, what we learn, whom we trust, what we aspire, what we consume – everything is different today compared to the times of our grandparents. We use technologies our grandparents would not even have dreamed of. Consumerism has become the prevailing paradigm, global brands dominate people's preferences, multinational corporations' value chains spread across the entire globe, automated algorithms at the stock markets shift property of the rich world within seconds, driving commodity prices and affecting the lives of billions of people. Lifestyles are changing, trust in long-established institutions is eroding, long-held convictions are being challenged, societies are no longer as uniform as they used to be. Life has become complex and difficult, causing feelings of insecurity, anxiety and fear of deprivation and loss. This is the perfect matrix for fundamentalism and populism, promising clear answers, guidance and stability. With an increasing number of people relying on social media as their prime source of information, no wonder that fundamentalist messages resonate in the respective echo chambers, fueling heated discussions and poking aggressions.

Fundamentalism is a reaction against the complexities of (post-)modernity.⁴ It offers simple solutions for complex problems. But that has never worked. It is creating division and tension where peaceful coexistence has been practiced for hundreds of years. Fundamentalism is a distortion, a perversion of religion. The old Latin phrase *corruptio optimi pessima* is true – the depravity of the best is the worst. Moreover, fundamentalism is often related to questions of power, those in power utilise religious fundamentalism for their own vested interests.

We urgently need to reflect on the question of how our own value and belief systems relate to those of others and how their peaceful co-existence in our world can be conceived. What can be done, what needs to be done to fight religious fundamentalism?

1. When there seem to be unbridgeable differences because both sides adhere to their rigid fundamentalist convictions, there needs to be a neutral field of rational reasoning and negotiation. This cannot be anything but observing basic human rights, respecting international law and international humanitarian law, and accepting the judgements of a neutral international law court.

2. Any religious believer, regardless of confession, should observe their own tradition and reveal and argue against fundamentalist convictions. This is even more important because bullheaded fundamentalists are more likely to listen to believers of their own tradition – even though they might consider them apostates. I doubt that any religious tradition justifies violence and cruelty against innocent civilians. Religious leaders, in particular, are called to study how their tradition can speak to the void which fundamentalists claim to fill. Rather than mindless repetition of phrases they should delve into the underlying truth of their historical tradition and seek to understand how that truth can be appropriated in today's world.

3. Prejudices and preconceived opinions about others thrive when people have never met personally. Social media bubbles reinforce separation in the physical world, boosting biases and hatred. It is in such bubbles that preconceived ideas can blossom. It is always easy to judge on the caricature of somebody else. Quite often, however, that judgement reveals more about the judge than about the person condemned.

Is it not a sad irony that this hard-fought region contains ‘holy land’ for all the three great monotheistic religions? How can fellow humans who confess to have parts of their heritage in common fight each other in such ways? Hatred will always give birth to more hatred. The spiral of hatred and violence must be broken. Responsible leaders on all sides must prevent any further escalation and seek humanitarian support and a humane solution for an enduring and peaceful coexistence of all people in this region immediately – anything else will be lose-lose for all of us.

How can today’s ‘holy land’ become the promised land to all people who have been living there for decades? How can a future be conceived, in which people can peacefully live together and in harmony with their neighbours? Is the war in the ‘holy land’, which is so densely populated, not also a symbol for the severely battled conflict of so many divergent interests on our shrinking planet with its limited resources? In sad and violent times like these, it is needed more than ever to uphold the vision of a peaceful co-existence of all people in this region. Maybe it is such a peaceful co-existence by which the holiness of the land will be enacted.

Those in fundamentalist circles usually highly esteem worship. However, worship cannot substitute justice and ritual cannot substitute moral. This was one of the key messages of Amos, one of ancient Israel’s prophets, almost 2,800 years ago. Venerated by both Jews and Christians as one of the early prophets of ancient Israel, Amos harshly condemned his contemporaries and the disconnect between their words of worship and their immoral, unfair practice of life. The neglect of the poor and the oppression of the needy is a recurring criticism raised by the Hebrew prophets. Any radical, extremist view in the Judeo-Christian tradition must be calibrated by this measure.

“Let justice roll on like a river, righteousness
like a never-failing stream!”⁵

I can only speak within my own tradition – but I’m convinced that religion can and must play a much more constructive role in these critical times of conflict. It is the joint responsibility of all humans and of believers in particular, regardless of their religion, to strive for such a constructive role and to put religious rabble-rousers into place.



Credit: LALS STOCK, Shutterstock.com

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Honouring multiple truths: An integrative pathway to peace in Israel/Palestine

by Jeremy Lent, member of The Club of Rome and founder of the Deep Transformation Network.

May 2024

A just resolution to the Israel/Palestine conflict requires acknowledging and honouring truths that are seemingly contradictory. Examples from other domains show how this can be accomplished and offer a potential pathway to an enduring, long-term peace.

Let us consider some facts of historical significance generally agreed to be unequivocally true:

In the sixth century BCE, a people who became known as the Jews were expelled from their homeland in Judah to exile in Babylon. After the Persians permitted their return, the Jews repopulated the region until being exiled again by the Romans in 69 CE. Since then, a powerful cohering tradition within the Jewish diaspora centered on the prospective return to Israel (Zion), a dream that was consummated by the United Nations declaration of Israel as a Jewish state in 1947. I can attest, as a Jewish child growing up in London, to hearing the solemn invocation “Next year in Jerusalem” uttered during the annual Passover Seder service—a supplication that had echoed through generations—and sensing its fruition through Israel’s existence.

Meanwhile, in the two millennia following their exile by the Romans, other populations, mostly Muslim and Arab, inhabited the region that became known as Palestine, calling it their home. After the fall of the Ottoman Empire in the aftermath of World War I, the British Empire took control of Palestine. The Balfour Declaration, a statement of British support for “the establishment of a national home for the Jewish people,” was proclaimed in 1917, in spite of the fact that 90 percent of Palestine’s inhabitants were non-Jews.¹

Who, one might ask, has the historic right to live there now: the Jews, for whom it represents an ancestral homeland, or the Arabs, for whom it also represents an ancestral homeland? Since both historical narratives speak the truth, the only pathway toward a just and enduring peace would be to honour them both. How might this be possible?

A similar set of antithetical narratives has arisen around other key aspects of the Israel/Palestine conflict. In the aftermath of the Holocaust—the systematic genocidal murder of six million Jews—the United Nations, driven by a sense of collective guilt, voted to partition the region into two independent states, one Palestinian Arab and one Jewish. The Arabs rejected this enforced expiation of a crime that was not theirs, declaring war on the newly formed state of Israel. Why should the inhabitants of Palestine be forced to make reparations for Europeans’ genocidal treatment of Jews? The birth of Israel, celebrated by Jews worldwide as a culmination of two millennia of collective longing, was correspondingly the initiation of the Nakba, the ongoing catastrophe that began by violently displacing 750,000 Palestinians from their homeland, imposing an exile that remains to this day.

The contradictory claims to moral righteousness and turpitude go on and on. While the Jews forcibly dispossessed Arabs in 1948, Arab nations expelled Jews who had lived in their lands for generations, frequently confiscating all their possessions. These Jews were welcomed by Israel, which declared a Law of Return allowing for the immigration of any Jewish family to Israel—a right of return that has been denied for the Palestinians driven out by the Israelis.

Since 7 October 2023, the conflicting moral interpretations have greatly intensified: the massacre by Hamas militants of over 1,100 people, mostly civilians, was the deadliest attack on Jews since the Holocaust. Israel’s ruthless response, resulting to date in the deaths of more than 34,000 Palestinians, around two-thirds of them women and children, is widely recognised as criminally disproportionate and has plausibly been prosecuted as genocide.

While these morally contrasting narratives both hold true, and their supporting evidence is readily available, most people engaging with this topic fervently repeat one set of shibboleths while refusing to acknowledge the other—as if adding to the decibels of one side will somehow drown the other into submission. Such a tactic might lead to short-term gains, but never to an enduring peace. For those who envision a long-term future where both Jews and Arabs can live together harmoniously in what both consider to be a Holy Land, what approach might offer a pathway forward? Let us begin to answer this question from a foundational perspective.

Holding and honouring conflicting truths

The dominant Western worldview arises from an ontology that takes an absolutist view of truth. If something is right, then it cannot be wrong. If it's black, then it can't be white. In ancient Greece, Parmenides first established the iron rule of systematic logic, which was further elaborated by the deductive reasoning of Aristotle to form a foundation for scientific thought. Alongside these developments, the religious absolutism of monotheism took root, claiming for the first time in the human experience that only one God existed, and all those who did not worship Him were sinners. Before the rise of monotheism, intolerance based on religious creed was virtually unknown.²

This ontology, however, is not the only one available. Even among the Greeks there were those, such as Heraclitus, who claimed that “We both are and are not.” While systematic logic won out in the West, other cultural complexes such as Buddhism, Taoism, and many Indigenous traditions developed equally sophisticated conceptions of the universe that were more fluid. For example, the Huayan school of Buddhism, which flourished in Tang dynasty China over a thousand years ago, understood reality as an all-embracing web of causal relations between things. The Huayan philosophy emphasised that the significance of any object depends on how it's approached, with the result that phenomena could be interpreted in multiple ways without one interpretation invalidating the other. In the words of an old, wise adage: “We don't see things as they are, we see them as we are.”³



Credit: Wilsan U, Unsplash.com

This approach, at odds with Aristotelian logic, re-emerged in Western thought in the twentieth century as physicists, grappling with the paradox of quantum mechanics, realised that subatomic entities may be either a wave or a particle depending on how they're measured. More generally, the wide array of modern systems sciences—including such fields as complexity theory, chaos theory, systems biology, and network theory—recognises that complex systems manifest multiple layers of interactivity. While certain principles may hold true throughout the system, different parts within the system may exhibit behaviours that appear contradictory to other parts, even while all are contributing to the integrity of the system as a whole. Accordingly, a healthy living system represents a state of integration which may be understood as unity incorporating manifold differentiation.⁴

The embrace of complexity has shown up more recently in therapeutic psychology, with the widespread adoption of parts work, based on the recognition that people hold different parts within themselves, some of which may contradict each other causing inner conflict. As Walt Whitman famously declared: “I am large, I contain multitudes.” In particular, Internal Family Systems (IFS) is a transformative therapy that helps people heal by accessing and honouring their inner parts, some of which are wounded, protective, aggressive, or defensive. Recognising that these parts are frequently at odds with each other, which causes internal suffering, IFS emphasises the importance of a core Self in a person which, if accessed skillfully, can attend with love to each part and encourage healing—not by rejecting those parts but by allowing them to feel acknowledged and become integrated into the greater whole.⁵

There is much that could be achieved by applying this wisdom to the political process. What kind of political discourse might arise with respect to Israel and Palestine if such an approach were taken?

An integrative pathway to peace

Comparable to the Self in IFS, there are overriding values shared by virtually all human beings that transcend the parochial in-group values dominating the current political debate. In the resounding words of the UN Declaration of Human Rights—proclaimed the year following Israel’s birth as a nation—“Recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world.” Acknowledging that “disregard and contempt for human rights have resulted in barbarous acts which have outraged the conscience of mankind,” the Declaration calls for “a world in which human beings shall enjoy freedom of speech and belief and freedom from fear and want ... as the highest aspiration of the common people.”⁶

Tragically, since 1948, Israeli forces have trampled on these rights of Palestinians, while many Arab nations and political groups have similarly flouted them. A few days after the 7 October massacre by Hamas and the initiation of Israel’s criminal collective punishment, author and social activist Naomi Klein called for a global response “rooted in values that side with the child over the gun every single time, no matter whose gun and no matter whose child.” This is the kind of deeply humanitarian orientation that is required for an integrative pathway to peace.⁷

We must recognise that a humane response to the enormity of the Holocaust did not have to lead to an Israeli ethno-state. As essayist Pankaj Mishra has demonstrated, many Jewish leaders surviving the Holocaust took the phrase “never again” to mean “Never again for any persecuted minority anywhere in the world” rather than “Never again for the Jews.” Nonetheless, we must appreciate that Israelis today continue to live under a constant existential threat with powerful enemies repeatedly calling for their annihilation. The Israeli political leadership, however, has thrived on weaponising fear, using it to motivate fervid allegiance to Zionism in many Jews around the world, and currently fomenting a worldwide conflation of anti-Zionist protests with anti-Semitism, in spite of the fact that many Jews join in the public outrage at Israel’s brutal campaign.⁸

When we engage in political discourse, we must choose our words carefully to avoid adding to the polarised grandstanding dominating the media. As journalist Judith Levine has pointed out, the mindless use of blanket terms such as “pro-Israel” or “pro-Palestinian” only serves to smother the deeper issues of human rights under a cacophony of tribal rivalry.⁹

We must call urgently for a ceasefire in Gaza and a return by Hamas of all hostages. At the same time, we must recognise the deep power imbalance currently existing between the state of Israel and the Palestinians living in the occupied territories, and demand the end of Israel’s abuse of its military superiority. We must call for an end to the illegal Jewish settlements in the West Bank, and to the fanatical Jewish paramilitary gangs currently terrorising Palestinian villagers with the tacit—and sometimes open—support of Israeli armed forces. And when the current hurricane of violence subsides, we must call for a Truth and Reconciliation Commission, modeled on exemplars from South Africa, Rwanda, and Canada, and employing principles of restorative justice, that could facilitate a new generation to face into and move on from the current round of anguish toward a healed society.¹⁰



Credit: Kalea Morgan, Unsplash.com

Above all, an integrative pathway to peace calls for the boldness to imagine a transformed future for this divided region and to support those groups, currently nearly drowned out by the polarised voices on both sides, taking the first courageous steps in that direction. The Standing Together movement, which mobilises Jewish and Palestinian citizens of Israel in pursuit of peace, equality, and justice, envisions building a shared home for all through rejecting hatred and choosing compassion. Combatants for Peace is a grassroots nonviolence movement based in Israel and Palestine—the only peace movement in the world founded by former fighters on both sides of an active conflict. The Holy Land Trust, a Palestinian organisation dedicated to fostering peace, justice, and understanding in the Holy Land, is committed to nonviolent activism, along with personal and spiritual transformation arising from honouring the dignity and equal rights of all peoples.¹¹

Beyond the horizon, an integrative path has the potential to lead to political solutions that are currently almost unimaginable. A movement of Israelis and Palestinians called A Land for All, acknowledging that both peoples belong to the same ancestral land, envisages a shared homeland encompassing two sovereign states. Their proposal calls for two democratic states based on pre-1967 borders, with citizens of both states given the right to move and live freely in all parts of the homeland. With Jerusalem as a shared capital, both states would be responsible for the security of their residents, would enter into a mutual defense treaty against external threats, and would share a Human Rights Court empowered to rule on alleged violations of rights by non-citizen residents of either country. While current political and cultural conditions render such an arrangement unworkable on many counts, this is the kind of integrative visionary thinking that will be required to enable an enduring long-term peace for a region that has suffered too much torment throughout its embattled history.¹²

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Towards an ethics of peace founded on justice

by Obiora F. Ike, president of the Nigerian Chapter of The Club of Rome, member of The Club of Rome and professor of Ethics and Intercultural Dialogue, Godfrey Okoye University, Nigeria.

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“Let us embark upon the steep and difficult path of peace, the only path that befits human dignity; the only path that leads to the true fulfillment of the human destiny; the only path to a future in which equity, justice, and solidarity are realities and not just distant dreams”

Pope John Paul II, in Hiroshima on 25 February 1981

We do owe ourselves some reckoning as humanity enters a key stage in its history. There is no shortage of pronouncements by many, that a world for everybody, reconciled and founded on justice and peace is an ambitious project. Some regard peace as an illusion, set between the realms of the ideal and the excruciating realities of daily life. In simple language and the views of many people, such a world of peace, founded on justice is not realisable.

The 20th and 21st centuries brought the most technological era in humanity's memorable history. It saw the development of the airplane and space travel. Mankind demonstrated its mastery of the external universe. We are witness to the manifold achievements that humanity was able to make in the past 100 years in the areas of the *sciences, art, engineering technology, humanities, literature, economy, political and social life, spacecraft, medicine, agriculture, education, information and communications technology*. The list is endless. The achievements of mankind in the 20th and 21st centuries have led to greater integration of peoples, economic exchanges, cultural influences, and technological advances, leading to the present understanding that the whole world has become a **'global village'**. It is presumed to be a world for all, even though only a privileged few have the key to the door of this global village. Others must wait outside, treated as aliens, without rights and basic human dignity.

However, the 20th and 21st centuries have become history's bloodiest, glorifying totalitarian regimes of all sorts, whether military, communist, nationalist, populist, or feudal forms of government, to the extent that the decay of democracy and the fall of plural, participatory styles of government with trillionaires and oligarchs owning a larger percentage of the wealth of nations, have caused global disorder.

Besides two world wars (1914 – 1918; and 1939 – 1945) with statistics staggering the imagination - 40 million prisoners of war, 110 million civilian casualties who died, 11 million soldiers killed, the establishment of concentration camps, over 200 million migrants, displaced persons and refugees abandoned to fate. Such excruciating realities of brutality are still current with multiple crises and the absence of peace in virtually all continents of the world. No country is safe and everywhere could be turned into a war front. This is not to mention the destruction of the environment, goods, and property with its consequences and the trauma on people's psychology, morality, and social harmony.

But what is Peace?

Peace has personal, familial, and communitarian aspects. Peace is an idea, but also a reality shared and understood in many cultures and traditions throughout history as the fruit of fundamental order, the expression of respect for every human being's right to life, truth, freedom, and love. Peace is basic for humans as individuals or communities. In the natural, cultural, national, and international order, peace is the prerequisite for any lasting development. Underlying the idea of peace is the understanding of justice as the condition

for peace. *“Si vis pacem cole iustitiam”* – *“If you want peace work for justice”*. On a world scale, justice is the foundation for peace, and peace is the pre-condition for any meaningful and lasting development. Therefore, peace, development, and justice go together as concepts that are logically interrelated.

Peace is not simply the absence of war, or as the ancient Romans would say: *“si vis pacem para bellum”* – *“if you want peace, prepare for war”*. Nor is peace the quiet of the graveyard. But how can there be peace if the social order and economic systems are based on falsehood and manipulations? How can peace reign when hatred, lies, dishonesty, and greed flourish? What does this mean for humanity at large, both in the northern and southern hemispheres and especially for vulnerable groups and the poor everywhere?

Peace needs an environment and ecology that is just and fair to mature, flourish, and grow. This is the ethical dimension. It is ethical because it deals with the *“ought”* and the *“right”* for human behaviour which is both rationally logical and morally compelling. It is rational because all humans desire peace in the search for happiness (Aristotle). Peace is the great gift we must proclaim to everyone. This mission of peace has never been more timely because all need peace of soul and body and environment. Peace is both a gift and a project – which is the challenge for humans to build communities of peace by living truthfully, fairly, and justly.

The ethics of peace accepts the universal and basic principle that all human beings are fundamentally equal with dignity, freedom, and integrity; that truth exists and that all can know and reach this truth from various points of view; that belief in a world founded on peace and tolerance are virtues possible for human beings within the multiplicity and diversity of cultures; and that imbued with an immortal soul, given freely by a Supreme Being or eternal Principle of all that is created, all human beings have rights and duties imposed upon them by their consciences. This is the challenge to the project for *“A world for everybody”*, aiming at enduring peace and founded on justice. All are called to be peacemakers. Those who do this work in faith will be blessed and called children of God (Mt 5:9). Peace is destined in every way for everyone, starting with ourselves. May we all live and be at peace with one another.



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Justice

Justice is a virtue of the highest human significance, the absence of which society would be thrown into continuous turmoil. Justice is considered in its relation to the others. No one would normally discuss peace or justice if they all lived on islands. The concepts emanate once we have to deal with others within a given community and society. Justice deals with the human dimension of interdependence and interrelationships. The great African scholar, St Augustine of Hippo far back in the 4th century asked the question concerning justice thus: *“Remota iustitia quid sunt regna nisi magna latrocinia?”* – *“Without justice are states not but a band of robbers enlarged”*?

Often known by its absence, namely injustice, justice is a much-misunderstood concept, and in practice very much neglected. Philosophers throughout the ages have had relative success in creating a consensus around the idea. Greek thinkers considered justice as *“suum cuique”*, namely *“to each his/her due”*. Greek thought and mythology conceived justice in two ways: as a supra mundane, eternal idea independent of man, although humans seek to know its nature and draw inspiration from it in their actions. On the other hand, as a man-made social ideal, completely dependent on man in its inception and practice.

The British philosopher David Hume emphasised that “justice is the band of society and no association of human individuals could subsist without it” (An Enquiry concerning the Principles of Morals). English utilitarian philosophers described it as *the “art of treating other people fairly”*, *“to each according to their dessert”*, and *“to each according to their merits”*. In practice, what is it that belongs to each? Who defines what is one’s due? In several life situations, people cry foul and say: *“it is not fair”*. But what is fair? Attempting to find answers to these questions leads to a reflection on the critical stages of today’s world which has several defining characteristics, for many know justice when they feel and experience injustice.

African wisdom in many societies such as the Igbo of southern Nigeria summarised the idea and belief in justice through a traditional prayer while breaking the cola nut through the elders thus:

“May what is mine be left to me;

May no one die for nothing and may not the neighbour be lost;

May the Kite perch and may the Eagle also perch on the branches of the trees;

if one bird would deny the other the right to perch on a branch, may its wings break;

May all have life and live in peace;

May the lowly progress and may the highly placed progress also, each at their own pace; Iseeeee (Amen)”

The ethical challenge and the path to peace

The ethics of peace presents for our reflection the fact that much of humanity suffers depression, which is worse in its spiritual manifestations as found in loneliness, emptiness, meaninglessness, and escape from reality. Some people must abandon their homes in forced or induced migrations, searching for a better state of life, but find instead in their new countries of migration, much of legal barriers, non-acceptance, prejudices, and xenophobia that they are often cut between their desire for their original homes despite its problems, and the challenges of their new migrant addresses with its unfulfilled hopes, disappointments and exile spirit.

Value disorientation and a missing emphasis on the common good are critical factors that humanity cannot overlook without consequences for the soul of humanity. And this is the crux of the matter. Money has become a world formula, a new value, and the mighty author of all things. This culture exposes many flaws and weaknesses. It is often based on a materialistic conception of the world, devoid of any spiritual meaning, thus the meaninglessness of the present time. Individualism is on the increase, leading to a *“global crisis of values”*. Consumption patterns have increased. Specifically, one has to observe the horrendous waste of non-renewable resources; the dramatic and excessive burden on the environment’s capacity to absorb pollution, and the manifest damage caused by the global ecological balance. People are having more than they are becoming persons with integrity. Economic materialism, whether of the right or the left has divided societies on ideological paths to the extent that in many places, the centre is destabilised.

There is an apparent lack of ethical and cultural ingredients in determining the global social and economic systems in the formulation of policies that guide peoples and nations as businesses carry on as usual, negating and neglecting people’s traditional ways of life, their history, indigenous rationality, social development, and cultural values. Conflicts are escalated by latent prejudices, complexes of superiority and inferiority, fixations, attitudinal inhibitions, exotic sentimentalisms, and negative patriotisms all of which make the need for a deeper reflection and research in inter-human and intercultural dialogue necessary. Besides football where football fans and their nation side with their favorite teams, in a mark of general patriotism that is agreeable and understandable, (a lighter matter), the dialectic between *“US”* and *“THEM”* seems on the increase.

The dialectic and scope of the conflict are sometimes widened in ideological categories based on rationalised dichotomies and contrary positions on either side, without giving way to each other's point of view, so that an antinomy is placed between the categories of **"US and THEM"**; *"the individual and the community"*, *"faith versus life"*, *"knowledge versus experience"*, *"religion versus disbelief"*, *"relativism versus ethics"*, *"the employer versus the employee"*, *"the particular versus the universals"*, to mention but a few areas of such dualistic extremes. These dualisms increase when legitimate instruments of survival and communication are placed under the excruciating pressure of hegemonies and dominant claims, thus the *"might is right philosophy"*.

We live in an information age, a *"borderless age" and a very fast age*. With its many advantages, the explosion in scientific knowledge and technical knowledge and the availability of knowledge, capital, and manpower shudders the imagination and questions the sustainability of the human family, for it makes it easier for people to manufacture bombs in their sleeping rooms or private libraries by just opening the relevant pages on the search engine of their personal computers. If this is conceivable, then we are living in a dream.

The clash of cultures promotes the fight for dominance and does not give room for intercultural dialogue which is the basis for peace and progress in the world of today. *The conditions for achieving this starting point towards a communication of faith is tolerance, mutual respect, and the assumption that no one has a monopoly of the truth.* The ethics of peace is the understanding that a *"dialogue of cultures and civilisations"* can emerge. The opposite is a *"clash of cultures"* which does no one good. It is this search for an ethical balance between *"particularisms"* and *"universalisms"* that can give rise to the peace that the world desires at this time.

We may immediately assert at this stage that conflicts could be avoided if rational positions held sway and the principle of legitimate acceptance of differences even in universalistic categories were determinant. The modus would thus be unity in diversity, identity in plurality, individuality in communality, divergence and plurality in monolithic ideologies and dialogue as the fair platform for intercultural and interfaith relationships. There is no alternative to dialogue if humanity would survive on interdependence, not just independence.

The global outlook shows a tendency towards ideological socio-technological and economic paradigms which is a Western contribution to development. These have their merits but their deficiencies do not allow for sustainable peace. African values, to a large extent, on the other hand, are non-ideological because they are built around nature and life. The African language group in Nigeria and the Igbo proverb: *"Ezi Okwu bu ndu"* literally means *"Truth is life"*.

Africa's traditional value systems provide a basis for a dialogue of life, not just a superiority of ideas, making communal living together possible. Through such communal philosophy, the principle of the family, the large family, and the clan consciousness made sure that all had a place and *"no one was excluded as an island"*. Such wisdom of inclusion encourages consensus building instead of individualism or exclusion and promotes social responsibility, entrepreneurship, justice, and fair play. The wisdom of *"Egbe belu Ugo belu"* - *"let the Kite perch and let the Eagle perch"* means co-existence becoming a key principle for life and public policies. Its absence is the source of many problems globally, and much of it is also in African nations.

Thus, universal values of solidarity are expressed in the promotion of justice; the value of peace which is the primary objective of every society; the value of life itself as the most sacred and inviolable earthly reality, for it is not possible to invoke peace and despise life; the value of education which enables regard for one's own identity with an understanding of others and respect for diversity; the values of forgiveness and reconciliation necessary for building bridges over the barriers caused by non-communication and misunderstandings, thereby, nurturing the path which leads to peace.

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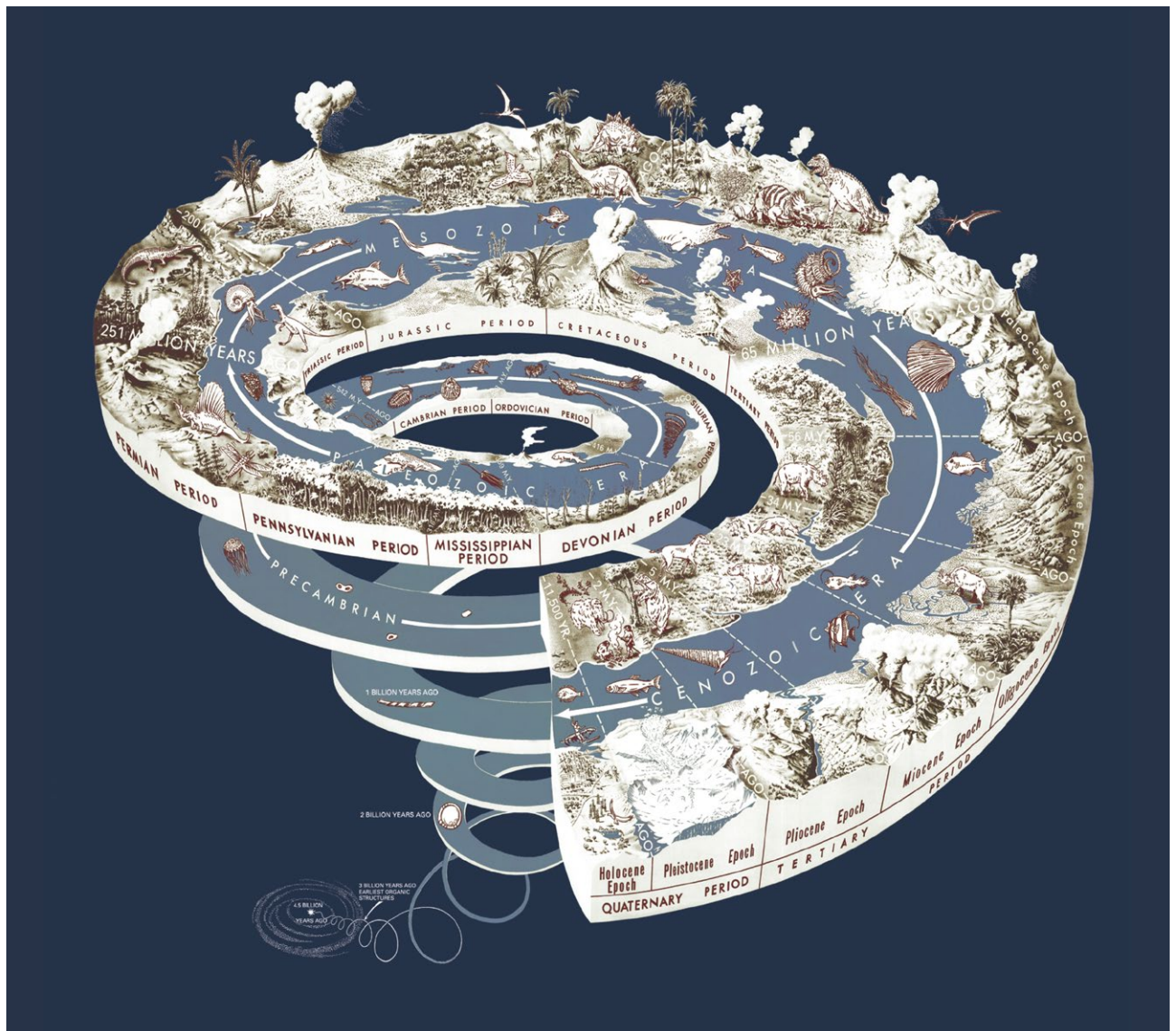
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Sustainable peace for existential security

by Yury Sayamov, member of The Club of Rome and the World Academy of Art and Science (WAAS).

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When speaking about enduring peace in the Anthropocene, it is necessary to define what is meant under the both complicated notions. Anthropocene (Greek: *ἄνθρωπος* – “man” and *καινός* – “new”) is mainly understood as the present time characterised by the high level of human activity leading to significant changes in the Earth’s eco-system. At the 35th session of the International Geological Congress held in Cape Town in 2016 it was determined as the new geological era replacing the holocene (see fig. 1), which began in the 1950s, however still needs to be scientifically justified. The idea of the changed stage of the world and nature endangered by the destructive effect of human activity to the degree of existential concern goes back to the scientific heritage of Vernadsky¹ who was advocating the noosphere, the world of thought, to mark the role which might be played by the human brainpower in shaping the future and environment in the way to save the world from degradation and self-annihilation.



Credit: United States Geological Survey, Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons

Fig. 1. Geochronological scale depicted in a spiral²

The global problems of humankind which since the 1970s have become the subject of universal anxiety, scientific research and political decision-making, have now taken on a tougher character regarding the problems of war and peace, society and environment. The report “Come On” identified the Anthropocene as “unstable trends of our time” pointing out that the “era of human domination over all spheres of our planet, including its biogeochemical composition” has come³. In other words, the Anthropocene has emerged as a term used to designate the present period when humans have got a decisive influence on the state, dynamics and future of the Earth System. This influence is causing threats that “bio-, cyber- or environmental disasters can exhaust a huge human potential, leaving behind a devastated biosphere”⁴. As a result we need to develop holistic scientific and technological knowledge on how to safeguard the existential security related to enduring peace which is often described as sustainable peace meaning much more than just the absence of war.

To effectively generate strategies for peacemaking and peacekeeping, sustainable peace should be seen in the context of the whole scope of dynamic processes and attractors affecting the global network of human relations on all levels. However, defining sustainable peace turned out to be quite elusive, like diplomacy being a complicated matter, but considered as an easy thing in a primitive approach. Multiplying labels like agnostic, armed, cold, democratic, forced, fragile, hegemonic, imposed, just, equal peace etc. confirm a wide variety of visions what may be seen as enduring peace in the range from a status quo preservation to a radical renewal of the world order. An optimum might be somewhere in between protecting important components of the status quo and at the same time looking for resilience and renovation in a holistic worldview established by the new enlightenment⁵ being regrettably more desirable than attainable.

To make the conflict de-escalate and change to peace, it is necessary to deconstruct and dismantle the war attractors focusing on peaceful solutions, stopping military aid and the delivery of weapons to conflict areas and replacing aggressive rhetoric by peace language. Pursuing their own interests, the incendiaries of the conflict are mainly not willing to do these things, and they should be forced to by international, public and other means of pressure. Not only by disassembling the negative attractors, but first by identifying and reinforcing positive attractors, the resolution and prevention of the conflict could be achieved in service of sustainable peace which is ever more asserted as the highest existential value. Sustainable peace includes peace in minds where, according to the preamble of the UNESCO Constitution, the thoughts of war are born and “the defences of peace must be constructed”. It further states that “...a peace based exclusively upon the political and economic arrangements of governments would not be a peace which could secure the unanimous, lasting and sincere support of the peoples of the world, and that the peace must therefore be founded, if it is not to fail, upon the intellectual and moral solidarity of mankind...”⁶.

The education for peace is indispensable and should be based on the following:

- **decolonisation** – including liberation from neocolonialism in education which binds educational help with imposing of educational patterns;
- **dewesternisation** – making education free from Western domination;
- **demonopolisation** – raising the value of national educational systems;
- **decommercialisation** – rejecting the governance of market principles in the educational sphere;
- **deprimitivisation** – introducing new complicated matters and challenges that humanity is facing and rejecting superficiality and minimisation of learning.

The education for peace should be liberated from:

- racism, fascism and nazism condemned by the Nuremberg Trial in 1946;
- brutality, violence, hostility and hatred feelings cultivated in the Western mass consumption culture;
- fake information, falsifications of history, denial of holocaust and nazi crimes against humanity;
- double standards and pretensions for exclusivity and domination of one nation over the others;
- manipulations with consciousness and prejudice.

It should be equipped with instruments to achieve a regenerative education as a public and common good and for this it is necessary:

- to provide teaching teachers and educating educators in order to enable them qualitative and comprehensive participation in the process of education;
- to strive for the intellectual and social equality in education at all its stages;
- to develop education on the Global Agenda and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) thus preparing specialists for practical work and providing teaching in the sense of considering the Global Agenda and SDGs after 2030;
- to develop and incorporate the interdisciplinary approach in education creating and teaching innovative courses⁷.

An important provision to obtain sustainable peace should be the satisfaction of basic human needs since their frustration leads to aggressiveness and violence. Those taking decisions should be made aware of the consequences of destructive conflicts and violence. Scientists now have the responsibility to develop a systems approach to address the changing limits that threaten humanity's survival, as it has become essential for our existence. As Lamarque⁸ pointed out over two centuries ago, humans are likely to annihilate humanity by making earth unsuitable for life. This observation has been surprisingly confirmed by unsustainable development in the past half century. For decades after the tragedy of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945, the last border of human existence was generally seen as mass annihilation by nuclear weapons. However, this is now being multiplied by new, important global dangers emerging from the present world development in the ecology, economy, energy, medicine and other vital spheres. The phenomenon of self-deception described already by Dostoevsky⁹ as a part of the problem of human self-consciousness acquires new dimensions in our age when the humankind in fact has to understand that it is right now at the last border of existence.

The list of global threats to our existence is becoming much longer than the gloomy choice to be suffocated ecologically or to die in a nuclear holocaust. Therefore, scientists have put forward the idea of a worldwide scientific "last border" emergency service. One of them, Yuri Karjakin in Russia, pointed out that "last borders" are being ever more multiplied within the present world development and since we do not know all of them, it could happen that humankind will accidentally cross over one of them or has already and is now living in the dead time zone. His conclusion is that all efforts should be united to identify "last borders" beyond which there is no return and before they are well defined to prevent any action in a dangerous direction¹⁰.

Considering the exponential development of science, where the acquired knowledge is doubled in five years and is supposed to be doubled soon every two years, the scientific "last border" emergency service should not simply follow the development, but should be at least a step ahead of it thus enabling the research on the consequences of science to be more advanced than the science itself.

Another scientist, Joshua Lederberg from the USA, also stresses the importance of foresight about future extrapolations for which early warning may have inestimable social value. Regarding the ability to make confirmable predictions as the core of experimental science, he believes that this art together with an understanding of technical complexities of matters pertaining to the environment, to human biology, to weapons effects, to technological capabilities of different groups of countries over time is indispensable in helping a society foresee the long term consequences of its policies in all those spheres.¹¹ Many scientific advances of our time have elicited well-founded anxieties about the compatibility of quarrelling national sovereignties with the survival of human culture. Since the world is still so far from a feasible model of supranational control of present enormous powers of destruction, the scientists today are considered to have a special responsibility to assist in the design of the interim arrangements of international accommodation to domesticate such powers. In today's world, divided manifold, be it North-South, East-West or any other way, with all existing impediments to constructive responses to global threats, the scientific thinking providing the ability to offer early warnings to society has become a life- saving profession and the main reason for existence of thought laboratories like The Club of Rome.

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ACTIONS TOWARDS PEACE

To restore humanity, stop the genocide and make Israel accountable

by Chandran Nair, member of The Club of Rome and founder and CEO, Global Institute for Tomorrow.

April 2024

“If you are neutral in situations of injustice,
you have chosen the side of the oppressor.”

Archbishop Desmond Tutu

In Gaza, the echoes of violence have reverberated every single day for months¹. We are witnessing the erasure of an entire society in real-time, television cameras rolling, live-streamed, into living rooms across the planet, as children watch other children being killed.

Innocent Palestinian children and women continue to be slaughtered daily while the very foundations of society – hospitals, schools, power stations, factories, water supply infrastructure – are systematically destroyed by the most powerful military alliance in the world. This is a military alliance led by Israel and the USA, supported by other Europeans, mainly the UK, Germany and France. It is a modern military empire that has written itself into the history books with its moral vacuum. But it will have nowhere to hide when the truth is fully revealed, supported by thousands of pictures and videos documenting the destruction of Palestine and its inhabitants.

The repeated global calls for peace and a ceasefire have been ignored by the agents of this assault, hellbent on revenge, committing war crimes in the process². So how can a lasting peace be secured amid such a fraught situation?

It begins with a recognition of what so many have knowingly shied away from doing: classifying the premeditated slaughter of tens of thousands for what it really is – a genocide.

Through The Club of Rome – an institution that has prided itself on calling out inconvenient truths of grave magnitude – there is an opportunity to put this on the record. There is also the opportunity to bring attention to the fact that so many institutions and public figures - especially in the West - remain eerily silent for fear of being charged with the lame tag of being anti-semitic simply for standing up against a government that has oppressed Palestinians for decades and which is now engaged in systematic ethnic cleaning under the pretext of self-defence. The pursuit of an enemy in a war does not under international law permit a scorched earth policy. It is time to fight back on behalf of the thousands of innocent children killed and make sure we mean, “never again”.

And amidst the humanitarian disaster, a disquieting disparity has become apparent: while the suffering of the Palestinian people pierces the global consciousness, the response of Western governments to the architects of this slaughter remains woefully inadequate and often downright inhumane³. There seems to be no Western-backed coalition of the willing to stop the slaughter of Palestinians, unlike the furious reaction to the war in Ukraine.

However, indignation in isolation cannot chart the course towards an enduring peace. The pressing question that demands the attention of all opponents of repression and crimes against humanity is this: How can the world cultivate a lasting resolution to this conflict in the Middle East and who should lead it going forward given the complicity of the West in the catastrophe? There are three aspects to consider.



Credit: Palestinian News & Information Agency (Wafa) in contract with APAimages, CC BY-SA 3.0, via Wikimedia Commons

Internationally recognise the truth of genocide

The first step towards a sustainable and lasting resolution necessitates a unified stance from the international community. This both means and requires the involvement of the global majority, not another disingenuous process led by the usual suspects from the West.

As mentioned, this begins with an honest acknowledgment, shared by all nations including the United States and its Western allies, of the gravity of the situation in Gaza and that this is nothing short of a genocide, perpetrated by the state of Israel.

The report by the UN Special Rapporteur provides a crucial foundation for such recognition⁴. It concludes, based on the Israeli government's intention to inflict collective punishment, the high civilian death toll, targeting of densely populated areas, and restrictions on humanitarian aid as well as forced starvation, that "reasonable grounds exist to believe the threshold indicating Israel's commission of genocide is met."

The statistics paint a chilling picture: Israel has unleashed 25,000 tons of explosives on Gaza, equivalent to the destructive power of two nuclear bombs⁵. Over 30,000 Palestinians have lost their lives, including more than 13,000 children. An additional 12,000 are presumed dead, and 71,000 individuals have been wounded, many left with life-altering injuries. The assault has set records for the number of children, women, doctors, nurses, teachers and aid-workers killed in a short period. Residential areas have not been spared, with 70% of them lying in ruins. The conflict has uprooted 80% of the population, forcing them into displacement en masse.

Even typically pro-Western organisations like Human Rights Watch⁶ and Amnesty International⁷ have raised strong concerns about Israel's actions, suggesting potential genocidal elements or hallmarks.

South Africa, a country still bearing the deep wounds of apartheid and human rights violations, did the global community a service by bringing Israel before the International Court of Justice (ICJ), accusing it of genocide⁸. Despite Israel's attempts to dismiss the case, the ICJ's panel of 17 judges chose not to do so. Instead, they issued a ruling that Israel must take measures to prevent genocide against Palestinians in Gaza, ensure the delivery of basic services and humanitarian aid, and deter and penalise any incitement to commit genocide. Would the court have issued such a directive if there wasn't substantial evidence of genocide to begin with?

Therefore, the assertion that Israel is committing genocide is now broadly accepted and is no longer dismissed as an unfounded allegation. The constant flood of deeply incriminating and painfully visual evidence has offered a burden of proof that will be hard to argue against in a court of international law. A significant portion of the global community already holds this belief. The ongoing catastrophe is visible to all, and the denial by the United States and its Western allies does not negate its occurrence, it only deepens the global resentment and loss of respect towards these Western powers.

The architects must face punitive action

Secondly, it is imperative that those within the Israeli government who have perpetrated this crime, along with their Western accomplices must be held accountable for its actions. Those responsible for this genocide must be subjected to the due process of international law. If not, the world will enter a new era in which international law lies irrelevant when it comes to crimes against humanity. Gaza would become the precedent that makes it very clear to the global majority that the West does not hold itself accountable to international law and dictates what is right and wrong, driven by its self-interests to maintain its global hegemony. This form of Western/white privilege in international rules-setting and enforcement must be buried in the ashes of Gaza once and for all.

This process will trigger a sequence of actions aimed at conclusively ending Israel's illegal occupation and oppression of Palestine. It will crucially curtail the economic and military support it has received from its Western allies over the years, which has perverted its sense of its own painful history and stymied appreciation to co-exist with Palestinians and its Arab neighbours.

Such a process will divest Israel of its much-abused privileges and the impunity that has facilitated its acts of violence and prolonged occupation. A carefully designed and targeted sanctions package will have to be part of this process, focused on military assistance, preventing Israel from gaining access to arms and exporting its own military technology and equipment to others.

Naturally, in terms of safeguarding Israel, an international security umbrella led by the UN must be established to uphold the country's security and ensure it is not threatened in any way as long-term peace is built, which will take a generation at least. The sanctions package should also impose restrictions on Israel's ability to engage with the wider world, effectively instituting a boycott. This would include banning Israel from participating in international sports and cultural events including the Olympics and soccer World Cup - as was imposed on apartheid South Africa and Russia - reinforcing its status as a pariah state for its crimes against humanity.

However, it will be important to remember that the sanctions should not be imposed indiscriminately on the Israeli public, as has been the case with the U.S. and European approach to countries such as Iran, North Korea, Myanmar and Cuba⁹. The sanctions should not target the welfare of citizens and should not escalate to extreme levels. The primary objective of these carefully curated and targeted sanctions is to encourage massive reforms in Israel, make it commit to a long-term peace agreement with the Palestinians as brokered by the UN, prevent its allies from emboldening it to further its destructive path and prevent the Israeli state from destabilising the entire region as it has begun to.

This is neither a novel nor a severe approach; it has been employed in the past. In periods when humanity has witnessed the ravages of war, the pursuit of justice has led to the prosecution of those responsible. This was evident in the Nuremberg and Tokyo trials following World War II¹⁰, the ICC trials in Cambodia and Kosovo¹¹ as well as in South Africa's post-apartheid Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC)¹².

Indeed, there are positive outcomes to be found in this. Germany is a prime example. In the aftermath of World War II, the nation emerged as a beacon of how to acknowledge and respond appropriately after committing crimes against humanity¹³. It became a symbol of how a nation should take responsibility for committing genocide against a group of people, the Jews.

Successive German governments took it upon themselves to educate future generations about their past wrongdoings to prevent history from repeating itself. Demilitarisation was also part of the international consensus for both Germany and Japan¹⁴.

Likewise, future generations of Israelis must come to terms with a similar reality. The acknowledgment of genocide must lead to sincere repentance and reform. It is this model of restorative justice that we should strive to emulate. Once this is accomplished, the international community can devise a plan for peaceful coexistence and hold all parties accountable in the construction of a new framework for peace and prosperity.

The West has forfeited the right to lead peace-making

This leads to the third and critically important point about who leads the process. The United States is not in a position to oversee this process nor is it capable of finding a solution. The responsibility of establishing a framework for peace and prosperity is a collective global effort.

The U.S., through its historical support of the Israeli regime, including supplying weapons and funding this massacre, has forfeited its ability to participate in this process as it is technically complicit in this act of genocide¹⁵.

Despite the West's propensity to disregard international law, it is crucial the world does not allow it this time and works together to uphold it. Justice must be visibly served, as enduring peace can only be established once the current genocidal leadership in Israel and its various institutions - which have steered the country down a path of self-destruction - are disarmed. The blueprint for lasting peace must include all necessary guarantees for both Israel and the Palestinians, overseen by the UN or a specially established body. Once again, this cannot be led by the U.S. or the West.

A main reason why the U.S. cannot adjudicate this process is the blood on its hands thanks to the proliferation of the military-industrial complex (MIC) and its role in exacerbating the conflict in Gaza¹⁶. The MIC is a significant component of the U.S. political economy, which stokes geopolitical tensions and enables nations and private entities to instigate and profit from conflict. The MIC blatantly finds the war in Gaza highly profitable.



Credit: IDF Spokesperson's Unit, via Wikimedia Commons

The MIC is quite open about this as well. Executives from weapons companies have publicly expressed their enthusiasm for the profitable opportunities that war presents. One defence executive, attending the biennial Defence and Security Equipment International (DSEI) conference at ExCel London in 2023, candidly told Reuters, “War is good for business¹⁷.” Leaders from the private sector have been even more explicit. For instance, during a 2021 investor call highlighting the company’s robust growth, Raytheon CEO Greg Hayes stated, “Peace is not going to break out in the Middle East anytime soon. I think it remains an area where we’ll continue to see solid growth¹⁸.”

Remarkably, the interest in the U.S. in safeguarding Israeli military interests is apolitical in nature. Despite being a deeply divided nation, the U.S. unites in its defence of Israel, a stance agreed upon by both Republicans and Democrats. The root of this support is the significantly large and powerful “evangelical lobby”, which exists on both sides of the political divide. The MIC requires an ideological base to politically support proxy wars, and that base is provided by Christian evangelicals. Because they exist on both sides, and all administrations and politicians must cater to this base, the support of Israel is unconditional.

Just take the Christians United For Israel (CUFI), America’s largest Christian Zionist organisation. They believe that as followers of Christ, they must ensure Washington’s commitment to Israel remains resolute¹⁹. In 2023, CUFI lobbied for a dozen pro-Israel bills in the House and Senate.

It is untenable and unacceptable that global stability is so unduly influenced by a nation where internal political divisions and the quest for power, driven by amongst other things religious fanaticism, is allowed to exacerbate religious conflicts elsewhere, threatening world peace.

Another reason why the West cannot oversee the peace-building process is because there is a considerable likelihood that the U.S. and its allies may also be implicated alongside Israel. Over 600 legal professionals, academics and retired senior judges, including three former Supreme Court justices and former president Lady Hale, have cautioned that the UK government is violating international law by persisting in its arms supply to Israel²⁰.

As such, those who have fuelled the tensions in the past, such as the U.S., are naturally precluded from presiding over the matter. While they can participate in the process, they cannot be the arbiters. The decision must be rendered by an impartial entity composed of the international community, led by the UN and not solely Western nations.

In essence, the genocide must be halted, Israel must be held accountable on a global scale, and it must bear the consequences of this crime. Subsequently, peace must be constructed by the collective international community, not solely by the U.S. or the West, allowing both Israel and Palestine to thrive together. A key step toward this is for Palestine to be admitted as a full member of the United Nations and one can only hope that the U.S. does not veto its current application.

Indeed, many Israelis and Jews around the world who oppose Zionism could be motivated to initiate reform once the charge of genocide is internationally and legally recognised. The journey towards reform and redemption will be protracted, but it will establish the foundation for lasting peace. Such metamorphoses have been observed in the past, in Japan and Germany. Their economies have since ascended to remarkable heights. However, these transformations were not immediate. They were preceded by international acknowledgment, condemnation and punishment for wartime atrocities. Only then were the steps towards restoration embarked upon.

Despite the challenges, with unity and commitment to justice, we can achieve peaceful coexistence. This is our hope, our goal and our legacy.

“Our lives begin to end the day we become silent
about the things that matter.”

Dr Martin Luther King.

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Have we lost our humanity?

by Esmeralda de Belgique, member of The Club of Rome and journalist, author and documentary film maker.

August 2024

Like millions around the world, I have watched in horror for the last year as the most horrific war crimes have been committed in Palestine. Relayed by the media in our daily lives, we have seen the desperate faces of children, the mutilated bodies of men and women in Gaza. Total destruction. Genocide.

Every red line has been crossed, hospitals and universities have been destroyed, journalists have been assassinated, aid workers targeted, an entire population has been submitted to starvation and yet western leaders have not even imposed sanctions on Israel and, in fact, continue to send arms to a state which violates so flagrantly many international rules of law.

Recently, to add to the shame, the Prime Minister of Israel received a standing ovation from the American congress.

On the other hand, citizens have flooded the streets of big cities across the world demonstrating their support for Palestine. Hundreds of thousands in places like London, New York, Madrid, Berlin, Amsterdam, Istanbul, Rabat, São Paulo and many more have protested every week, in sharp contrast with the politicians of the western world.

In Israel itself, the protests have been huge. And whereas in Europe and the United States the propaganda is such that one, single criticism of Israeli policy is immediately condemned as being anti-semitic, thousands of Jews have been vocal in their condemnation of the war against Palestinians.

But with time passing, front pages are now on the American election campaign or the Olympics or other conflicts around the globe. Our rage and despair in the face of injustice has a limited lifespan and we too easily move on with our lives.

I have been asking myself all along this one question: why is it that the powerful governments of the world, the elites of the high-income countries, can pursue their agendas, their manipulation and double standards even when the people, the ones that elect our democratic leaders are evidently not in agreement?

Could it be because of the colonialist legacy and vision of the leaders of these countries, who are determined to safeguard their political and economic power and their influence?

The occupation of Palestine, the actual apartheid imposed by Israel has a lot of similarities to what happened in South Africa. It also has similarities with Indigenous people's oppression from the time of colonisation until now.

It took almost 50 years to bring an end to the apartheid regime of South Africa and this happened because of intense international pressure, economic sanctions and relentless internal resistance and organising. This international pressure is obviously not happening in the case of Palestine.

After the terrorist attack of 7 October 2023 carried out by Hamas, Israel's revenge was to enact a total war of annihilation against Palestinians. As Joseph Massad, a professor of Modern Arab Politics at Columbia University, explains: "This ongoing assault is logistically and financially supported by the European white supremacist countries and the white supremacist US, who are also giving it political and moral cover.

The European and US press have played an active role in promoting justifications for the Israeli genocide of the Palestinian people through the promotion of racist stories of barbaric and primitive Palestinian violence, a good number of which have already been debunked and retracted. Yet these racist fabrications continue to be parroted by western political leaders as true.

This western consensus on the necessity of carrying out a genocide against the Palestinian people was accurately summarised by Israel's President Isaac Herzog who declared that the war "is not only between

Israel and Hamas. It's a war that is intended, really, truly, to save western civilisation, to save the values of western civilisation." To explain why such a wide white European and US consensus exists in support of the "annihilation" of Gaza and its people, Herzog argued that "if it weren't for us, Europe would be next, and the United States follows."¹

For indigenous peoples' oppression, this pretext of saving Christian or white civilisation has been used through centuries by the European colonisers in Africa, Asia and the Americas. They also portrayed the natives as "violent savages" who needed salvation. They built their wealth and development by extracting resources, exploiting populations, destroying their culture and religion in the name of white supremacy causing deaths of millions in the process as well as environmental devastation.

This economic dominance and exploitation has produced consequences that remain with us today. The descendants of indigenous peoples and slaves were marginalised, treated as second class citizens, just as are the Palestinians in Israel.

Malcolm Ferdinand, a researcher at the Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique in Paris (CNRS) summarises this: "On one side, there is a dominant population that of the West. On the other, there are dominated populations considered to be too numerous and exploitable. This separation remains in place today through the global economy of extraction, intensive monoculture and ecocide. People and nature in the Global South are still exploited for consumers far away."²

In South America, oil and mining multinationals corporations are grabbing land and practice with violence and intimidation a policy of resource extraction for the benefit, once again, of consumers abroad. The result is deforestation, poisoning of the soils and rivers and deterioration of ecosystems which is also contributing to climate change. The indigenous and local communities trying to protect their territories are displaced, threatened and murdered. It is estimated that globally four environmental defenders are being assassinated every week.

Since the time of the colonisers, indigenous peoples have been facing displacement, insecurity and the loss of their traditional life and culture. Here again similarities exist with the situation of the Palestinian peoples in Gaza as well as the West Bank who are losing land and homes and whose centers of education and culture are being destroyed.

Although indigenous peoples have had their rights recognised in the constitution of Brazil as well as in the United Nations, they are still facing numerous threats and human rights violations. They are more visible in international conferences but this presence remains superficial as long as they are not part of decision making about their lands. Maybe the fact that scientific studies recognised the excellent state of biodiversity in places administered by indigenous peoples will be an incentive to include them more in the fight for our environment.

As for Palestinians, who have no power but incredible courage and resilience, we have to continue fighting with them, for justice and humanity.

During recent months, for the first time Israel has lost considerable moral support and the West, its credibility and superiority. But the bloodshed continues. And arms and funding keep flowing.

A recent report by civil societies reveals that European financial institutions have provided 36.1 billion euros in loans and hold 26.1 billion euros in shares and bonds in companies arming Israel. Among them BNP Paribas, Deutsche Bank and Barclays.³

Our world, already facing an existential threat from the climate and ecological crisis, is in urgent need of peace, collaboration and respect. We cannot let hate, polarisation and, most of all, a lack of humanity govern our society. We will only be saved if we build a just, sustainable and equitable future for all of us and for nature.

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Planetary reconciliation: Betting on the most improbable

by Carlos Álvarez Pereira, secretary-general of The Club of Rome.

May 2024

From Spain to the world?

As a Spaniard, I am African, Iberian, Phoenician, Greek, Roman, Germanic, Arabian, French, Christian, Muslim, Jewish, and more, all at the same time. I profit from a rich heritage, which is also a heavy burden. Spain experienced the first fantasy of worldwide supremacy in the 16th century. That was done by developing a centralised bureaucracy with early characteristics of what modern states would be, forcing Spanish Muslims and Jews either to convert to Catholicism or to flee, colonising a large part of the world to create the first Empire where the sun was never setting, and establishing for centuries the Holy Inquisition as a bloody police of bodies and minds.

Spain committed atrocities in America and, while recognising a soul to American natives, forced them into conversion, and enslaved many Africans to work in the “New World”. We lived tumultuous 19th and 20th centuries, including the first phase of World War II in the form of an implacable fratricide conflict, leading to 40 years of an equally implacable dictatorship. This is also part of my personal heritage: my parents strongly believed in social justice and the dignity of everyone, and because of that they had to flee and live in exile for most of their lifetime.

Having been for a long time the dominant power in Europe and the Americas, Spain nonetheless experienced total collapse. Maybe the complexity and infinite sufferings of our history helped acquiring a rather balanced understanding of conflicts and an educated scepticism regarding international relations. We lived for decades under the threat of nationalist terrorism, but we resisted the temptation of more violence and exclusion to end up violence and exclusion, and nowadays the Basque Country is probably one the happiest places to live on Earth. We also suffered from Islamist terrorism, but we reacted by resisting the temptation of revenge and racism, and by withdrawing in 2004 from the illegal and deadly invasion of Iraq.

Nowadays Spain is one of the few countries in Europe having reacted to the war in Gaza in a rather balanced manner, nurtured by a sense of human dignity. While condemning the horrendous actions by Hamas, we told our Israeli friends that blind revenge to the point of genocide (whether intentional or de facto) is not legitimate nor effective in providing Israel for a safe home. When it was argued that some workers of United Nations Relief and Works Agency were supporting Hamas, Spain decided to increase its support to the humanitarian organisation in compensation for the cuts it was suffering from other countries. And, trying to contribute to a better future, Spain has been actively campaigning for the immediate recognition of the Palestinian State. To be clear, this is not to say that my country is exemplary in any way. It is to say that my conclusion from Spanish history is that no nation is entitled to exceptionalism nor supremacy over others, moral or otherwise. There is no superiority of some humans over other humans. And then, let me ask: why does this simple conclusion seem so difficult to learn, especially by those pretending to set the moral standards in the relations between nations?

Us and them

As Terence put it, “*nothing human is alien to me*”. He was born in Africa more than two millennia ago and brought as a slave to Rome. That simple statement carries the mark of wisdom from ancestral times and resonates strongly today. I wonder if it could have been said by somebody that did not experience slavery. The experience of oppression or collapse might open the mind to a more holistic view of what makes us humans, for the good and the bad. In my reading, Terence’s statement does not only point to the fundamental relatedness of all humans. It brings a deeper reflection: any of us can connect with all human feelings and actions, even the most different from ours, and the most terrible. It is easy enough to connect with the many forms of beauty that

humans can produce, as well as with the pains of all victims. But we can also connect with the dehumanising rage that makes humans commit atrocities. It might be unpleasant to face it, but we must recognise that both the evil and the divine are in all of us. Moreover, the good and the bad are outcomes of collective patterns in which we are all involved.

When ignoring that fundamental ambivalence, we continue practicing the fantasy of exclusion. We still establish who are “Us” and “Them”. There is an “In” of the circle of people we treat by default with respect, trust, and generosity. And we continue drawing a line and leaving most of humanity “Out”. For sure others are not us, but there are critical differences between distinction (“you are not me”), separation (“you don’t belong to my circle”) and exclusion (“I don’t have to care about you”), and we override those differences all the time. People who are “Out” do not have by far the same rights as people “In”. Not only do we create artificial boundaries, still dealing with nationalisms originated in the 17th century. We also take for granted a moral superiority of “Us” over “Them”. We feel allowed to treat “Them” in ways which would be unacceptable among “Us”. And we avoid recognising the responsibility for the many forms of injustice and exploitation we impose on “Them”.



Credit: fauxels, Pexels.com

When Ursula von der Leyen said in 2022 “*Ukraine is one of us*”, she was also saying “*and Russia is not*”. By doing that she was reinforcing the “Us and Them” dynamic. Disgusting and difficult as it could be, we must start thinking that Putin, Netanyahu, Hamas and all perpetrators of violence and oppression are, well, part of “Us”. And that different people have different views on who is perpetrating violence. Recognising the state of oppression in which Palestinians have been living for decades is not a justification of terrorism nor a sign of antisemitism. Unless we recognise that everyone on the planet, human or not, is one of “Us”, we will not climb the steep ladder to overcome current wars and the structural elements leading to violence. With images of destruction flooding our screens every day, this may sound naive, utopian, or even cynical. But this perspective is not pantheist nor illusory, it is just systemic.

The violent nature of international relations

One essential aspect to overcome the logic of war is to realise that international relations continue to be dominated by the brutal exercise of power under “Us and Them” framings. We dream that a multilateral framework of global governance ensures most of the times that conflicts of interest are solved in a fair and peaceful way. Unfortunately, this is an illusion, at the very least for Most of the World. The dominant framing says that violence is associated with “under-development” and that once a society becomes “developed” in the Western sense of the term, it leaves violence behind. And then, the solution is obvious: apply the Western recipes to your own country and you will become peaceful and prosperous. But as Gandhi warned us, the issue with Western civilisation is that “*it would be a good idea*”. It is still that, an idea. My guess is that you can only assess the moral value of a political and economic system by asking the excluded how they feel they are treated. The incumbents profit from the system, it is all too human for them to see only its advantages. What do “Them”, those who are “Out”, think?

I am afraid that the excluded from power think the global system we have is brutal and totally unfair. It is based on the use of force of different kinds, including military power, and it is not at all democratic since power is concentrated in the hands of countries representing a small and declining minority of the global population. Moreover, once the Cold War finished, it is based on the idea that only one model of development is legitimate, and that is one providing advantages to the already powerful. The Cold War itself was a long sequence of brutal and mutually reinforcing interventions by the USA and the USSR to prevent any other country from following a path different from being with “Us” or “Them”. And then, with the collapse of the Soviet Union came the illusion of “*the end of History*” à la Fukuyama.¹

Powers, and especially the winners of the Cold War, continued to behave basically in the same way, including illegal and devastating military interventions whenever it suited their interests. And they continue to privilege their interests whenever a dilemma between values and interests exists. Most of the world’s population is aware of this. The fantasy of exclusion is all around and we should not ignore the cybernetic nature of this situation: in most conflicts, both parts are interested in keeping them alive. Geopolitics is built on a logic of power equally fed by all actors looking for hegemony. These may appear as enemies but they all contribute to keeping the logic alive. Nothing is better for an empire than another one to fight, in a mutually reinforcing confrontation forcing everyone to choose between “Us” and “Them”.

Bridging the gap: Towards the improbable

We hear that the military actions in Gaza will not stop until Israelis feel safe. The way it goes, that means never. This is exactly the same logic that Putin applies in Ukraine. It is a weird logic, endlessly reinforcing loops of violence lasting forever. Violence destroys people and things, but it does not destroy itself. All the contrary, it guarantees the continuation of violence. The war is killing Hamas militants, but it is not destroying Hamas, it is confirming most Palestinians in the idea that they need Hamas. This reminds me of what the Black Consciousness Movement emphasised long ago: oppression also oppresses the oppressor. Violence also kills the killer.

Looking at these issues from the history and values of The Club of Rome, a humanistic and systemic approach is required. It was already set up many years ago, when in 1979 Aurelio Peccei was calling in “*No Limits to Learning*”² to “*bridge the human gap*”, the one between our capacity to act and transform the world, and our capacity to understand and deal with the consequences of our actions. Five years later, Aurelio Peccei and Daisaku Ikeda³ called for a “*Human Revolution*”, a shift of mindsets by which we would liberate ourselves from the mental jails in which we are trapped, and most notably the “Us and Them” framing.

Safety does not come from the destruction of the “enemy”, because there is no way to destroy the enemy, because it is ourselves. Or, if you wish, destruction of the enemy is ultimately suicidal, a pathway in which humanity is well engaged right now.⁴ Safety is only mutual, or none. And, of course, the very first step is to stop the violence. But how could we understand that the actions by “Us” and “Them” are expressions of joint collective patterns requiring other lenses than confrontation? How do we shift from practices of confrontation and punishment to collective emergence and reconciliation across divides?

In other words, how do we open the space of possibilities for self-liberated humanity to build desirable futures? This is the critical question today. And it is hard to address within the prevalent paradigms in the global scene. The “One World” scenario was a misleading fantasy, but that does not make the “Multipolar World” in which we live the appropriate response to the existential challenges of humanity. In my view, it is more than time to consider our evolution into a “Pluriversal World”, multipolar but peaceful, built on love, trust and curiosity rather than fear and greed. The seeds of this world already exist, they play a silent melody that we do not hear, busy as we are in making a lot of noise to ignore our fears. They are trying to experience infinitely diverse pathways to something that could be called “ecological civilisations”.

We live now in a sort of time warp. The police repress demonstrations by students asking for peace and justice, as in 1968, the year The Club of Rome was founded. Western leaders are seriously speaking of war as a means to end war and violence, as if we had learned nothing from European history in the 20th century. So, I know that I am betting here on the most improbable option, but it is because all probable ones lead to dead ends and to unprecedented tragedies. I am sure that the time has come to open the space of possibilities for the sake of ourselves and of generations to come. And I am convinced The Club of Rome has an essential role in saying that a planetary reconciliation is actually possible, and, overwhelming as the mission sounds, in making it happen. This is a tall order, of course, but if not us, who? If not now, when? We must contribute to a second chance for humanity on Earth, one in which beauty and truth are finally reconciled⁵ through love.

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War and humanity

by Yi Heng Cheng, member of The Club of Rome and guest professor at Tong Ji university, Shanghai.

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Once the war starts, humanity disappears. For rockets and bullets won't differentiate between innocent children or unforgivable demons; strong youths with their whole future in view, or old folks reaching their sunset stage with no hope. Hitting their target, and die, without prejudice.

When the war goes on, an ending of humanity is not the focus or even in view. War and humanity are like a kite without a connecting string, flying apart so long it lasts. Painful lessons were exposed by the First and Second World War, and humans can only survive if there is no further war. The good will that first formed the League of Nations, then later, the United Nations, assured that the blame for these crimes against humanity were placed on the decision making individuals, instead of a nation, to be followed up by an International Criminal Court- with specific regards to genocide against humanity, aggression and war crimes, and last but not least ecocide. Yet wars are unavoidable. What has been done, is now reality, with crimes committed: damaged facilities, deaths, civilisations in ruins, termination of lives and hopes, large scale destruction of ecological environments, all have turned into facts.

Despite being neighbours for hundreds of years, relatives with common ancestors in multi-generations, classmates and play-pals since childhood, once the war starts, no one cares about what those relationships used to be, only who will survive. What about justice? Righteousness? Morality? Fairness? Rational? Legality? Destiny? These questions all become pale before the hatred and outrage. In its place, a focus on the conquerer, occupation, massacres; served with ferocity and brutality.

Fairness and justice is the huge "label" on a flag of war, a badge of false honour that ensures historical wounds that will never be healed; they are the foundation of peace and negotiation, but also the cutting point to exaggerate and create hype for further division and tension. These actions can be the bright side of love, or the darkening side of the hate.

Humanity is borne to human. It is a natural flow of love and feeling, that goes through human to human, human to animals and human to nature. It is the basis of coexistence and symbiosis of any ecosystem. The performance of humanity is a natural action of being human without any constraints, however, humanity is screened by different civilisations and technological advancements, that are accompanied with greed, desires, eagerness of reputation, social status, wealth and power.

Humanity prescribes the intention coming along with love, however, to keep the original intention with love, one needs a very firm belief in order to hold back all kinds of temptations.

Humanity is about tolerance and giving. While only humanity can prevent war, sustaining through disasters will also need humanity to refocus and cooperate unanimously for resilience.

War and humanity seem like two extremes without any overlapping, nevertheless, like Ying and Yang, they are both contrary and complimentary to one another. War starts, when humanity disappears, war stops, when humanity overwhelms. Past history has taught us, war can cease via: a mutually entrusted party, that has the capability to bring both parties on table harmoniously, a powerful party with enforced intervention on terms and conditions, a proposal from an international organisation that is agreeable to both. No matter which one will be adopted, it must be agreed by the majority of both, otherwise, war will come again, with peace seen only a momentous mirage.



Credit: Salah Darwish, unsplash.com

To transform from a mindset of fierce violence and lethal brutality, the hatred and anger need to first to fade away. Only then, can justice and fairness find their proper position for acceptance, so that any grievances can then be released. An atmosphere of negotiation based on consensus can then be achieved. Tolerated adaption will then bring to action a full hearted implementation. At the same time, any self-centered mindset will require frequent review based on the original intention of being human. Using rule of law as the real baseline and equal treatment as the bottom principle, further checking oneself by morality. In this way both sides can reach divine love without prejudice.

War does not happen in a day, the same applies to peace. This applies not only to parties directly involved but also those that are indirectly connected. Changing an enemy from not seeing eye to eye into a friendly competitor of mutual enhancement, is a process needing time. Further transforming to a relationship of alliance with mutual trust, and turning into friendship as good as brotherhood, this is directly related to love's conceptual, awareness, to individual and collective consciousness.

Love is a fundamental nature of human being, there from the birth to maturity, with influences from the close environment, family and society. That makes the differences in each individual, that can be classified on five levels:

- Love with touching;
- Consciousness of Love;
- Satisfaction of the need of Love;
- Love of group and society;
- Consciousness of Divine Love.

In a different aspect, appreciating and spreading Love, there are also five levels:

- Love of oneself;
- Appreciation of Love;
- Awareness of receiving Love;
- Love to the others;

And, the fifth one, Love to environment, Eco-system and Nature, all united to Oneness.



Credit: Salah Darwish, unsplash.com

50 years ago, the first report to The Club of Rome *The Limits to Growth* applied the very first big system simulation model, World 1.0 to run scenarios on possible futures of the world, on population, resources, food production, industrial production and pollution. The conclusion rang the alarm bell about unlimited economic growth, and warned, if mankind started to take action at that time, we might still be able to avoid the disasters. However, we did not change our course, and ended at the exactly along the business-as-usual path. Today, we are experiencing climate change and heat waves hitting, pandemics such as COVID, and many other natural catastrophes as we hit tipping points. In addition, the wars that have broken out in Russia-Ukraine, Israel-Hamas, and some others, such as North-South Korea, China and Taiwan Straits, Islands in South China Sea, etc. are with high risks.

We can neither wait for the disasters to happen, nor let the wars keep on going without ending. However, it must be clearer to us, if we use the historical experience/data, by collecting more data, applying more precise algorithms, and developing more complicated models of World 3.0, 4.0 and so on, will not make us smarter than what *The Limits to Growth* has already demonstrated.

Looking at the wars that are happening now, and those areas with high risks of war, are not they related to the challenges we face for sustainable development when implementing the Partnerships for the Goals (SDG17)? And then, does not all that point back to the original intention of love expressions of human to human, human to the living things, and human to the nature?

Let us focus on the common symptoms of the wars in Russia-Ukraine, Israel-Hamas and the increasing tension with high war risk of China-Taiwan Strait:

- **Historical burden:** All three areas have complicated, intertwined, and unsorted histories. All these need to be flipped over, instead of continuing as karma, impacting future generations; These actions need courage, to letdown the hate while facing the past, and welcoming the future, to start to love;
- **Collectivism and individualism:** Culture is deeply rooted in the collective consciousness, while each individual still can make their own choices with certain freedom. Taking over traditional values without evaluation makes us limited in our own self-expression, whereas no restriction from tradition and culture leads to becoming a self-centred egoist. They are not opposite but are always in a balance just like Yin and Yang.

- **Power ruling and self-governance:** Power ruling can force people to submit, but cannot change their fundamental thinking; Self-governance needs recognition of the others, that is usually gained by sufficient self defence ; Power ruling always has military strength as backbone, whereas self-governance requires confidence in self defence. Power ruling and self-governance are originated from nationalism and self-reliance, respectively. By overusing power controlling where it is not clearly defined, or overstretching self defence even as striking forces, may invite other powers to intervene, which will usually end up as historical burden.

Comparing the expected state of society and the current state, will show the driving forces that can lead the people and society, in combination with the positive energy flow, towards the sustainable direction of the following states:

- **Achieve consensus in governance;**
Consumption power is the basis of consensus in reality. Mutually agreed governance needs recognition of the majority, and the original intention of love;
- **Information flows freely among people, education is open and widely covered;**
Free flow of information is the guarantee of plurality of society. The time will come, when tradition can be preserved with the transformation based on scientific advancement;
- **Trust and cooperation among people, peacefully and mutually.**
Every individual can enjoy sufficient freedom. Love to the people and nation is coming from the need of satisfaction of love, and not from propaganda.

We have been kept on the same historical track and repeating the same mistakes again and again by our current mindsets. Just like the *The Limits to Growth* has shown us, there has been no change and our mindset has remained the same. So is the resolution of war. Human and nature is not about occupying and manipulating but harmoniously coexisting, no matter in countries, regions, or races.

What we need is to go back to the root of humanity, love, and rebuild societies based on sustainable development, to achieve the peaceful coexistence of all. Humanity has never left us, it is only blended by our own deeds, from a different angle, and we can start reforming the state of wellbeing for all.

Let's stop the war, and return to the Humanity.

Challenges and pathways to enduring peace and human security

by Garry Jacobs, member of The Club of Rome and president, The World Academy of Art and Science.

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Search for root causes of the polycrisis

We live in turbulent times characterised by rising levels of doubt, distrust, uncertainty, polarisation of society, confrontation, conflict and violence. At the global level there is a retreat to the Cold War mentality of competitive nationalism, a renewal of the arms race, and marked weakening in the leadership impact of national and multilateral institutions. At a time when unprecedented levels of international cooperation and coordination are essential for addressing existential threats to human security, the world lacks the understanding, vision, institutional capabilities and leadership required to respond effectively to the challenges we face.¹

Agenda 2030 already delineates the urgent goals humanity must strive to achieve. The limitations in current theory and policy are heatedly discussed. A plethora of policy-measures and programs have been proposed. Yet we have not yet been able to formulate and execute an effective plan of action to reverse the growing levels of tension and redirect humanity's collective energies for the common good of all.

Humanity confronts this dilemma at a time of unprecedented social, technological and organisational capacities and expertise. Yet something is still missing for the translation of lofty ideas and ambitious goals into practical results. An understanding of the root causes of this dilemma is essential in order to address the underlying causes that prevent timely, concerted action. That understanding must be matched by the capacity to formulate a set of practical strategies capable of reversing the negative momentum through dynamic, catalytic initiatives that transform the atmosphere of competition and confrontation into one of trust, coordination and cooperation for the good of all. Initiatives are needed which can mobilise available energies and capacities and provide the necessary incentives needed to call them into action. This paper examines the root causes that impede humanity's progress at this time and proposes catalytic initiatives to revive the positive momentum exhibited in 2015 when 193 nations arrived at a consensus for the formulation and launching of Agenda 2030.



Credit: Matthew Ten Bruggencate, unsplash.com

Global evolutionary social transition

In 2013, the World Academy of Art & Science collaborated with the UN Office in Geneva to examine the major challenges confronting humanity today². We came to the conclusion that the political, economic, social, and ecological challenges of the 21st century are global in nature, interconnected and interdependent, that none of them can be successfully addressed without fundamental changes in prevailing public policies, national and international institutions, education, social theories and in the compartmentalised, reductionist thinking that dominates thought and policymaking. These conclusions still hold true today.

Humanity is in the midst of a major evolutionary or revolutionary social transition. The pace, reach, and magnitude of change is greater than at any previous time in history. The people and cultures of the world are coming into closer contact and relationship than ever before physically, economically, politically, socially and culturally. The problems confronting every society today are expressions of the rising friction and tension between the reactionary response of a receding past to a fast approaching, progressive future. They are products of the inherent resistance posed by existing centres of social power and the outdated ideas, beliefs, and institutions on which they are founded. A fundamental shift in ideas, identity, values and social institutions is essential for a successful passage to a more peaceful and sustainable global society. In the past changes of this magnitude have taken place over centuries, but current threats necessitate urgent immediate action. We no longer have the leisure for slow, incremental changes. Nor can we expect radical changes to occur simply because we proclaim the need for them. We need catalytic strategies that mobilise and motivate practical changes and serve as both success stories and stimuli for change.

It is not difficult to understand why the institutions established after World War II are inadequate to meet current needs. The collapse of imperial empires after World War II marked the transition toward a global community of nation-states both collaborating and competing with one another for security and development. The multilateral system which presided over that transition was shaped by the unequal distribution of power at the end of the war. Over the past 80 years, the number of nation-states has quadrupled, and the distribution of power has been radically altered, but the old ideas, political institutions, economic systems and ways of life prevail and resist change. The world continues to be in a competitive race for superior power and wealth while undermining the health and ecological stability of the planet.

Social evolution involves a progressive redistribution and democratisation of centres of social power. The concentration of power institutionalised in the post-World War II multilateral system by the division into two armed camps led by superpowers and largely preserved during the Cold War has already been diminished by the collapse of the Soviet Union and Warsaw Pact, the birth and expansion of the European Union, the rise of China and India, and the emergence of BRICS. It has been further undermined by the globalisation of trade, finance and economy over the past three decades, which have liberated multinational corporations from the control of national governments. Meanwhile new centres of power are emerging and breakthroughs in technology are democratising access to all forms of power to wage war and compete economically.

Evolutionary movements in space and time

The evolutionary process the world is undergoing impacts both space and time. Humanity is contacting, interacting and converging in ways unimagined in the past. National boundaries no longer deter global communications, interactions, exchanges and collective action. We are bombarded by the impact of ideas, influences and events from all over the world as never before. At the same time the pace of change is accelerating. The speed of technological innovation is increasing exponentially, and its impact is touching and altering virtually all fields and dimensions of global life. The unprecedented speed with which the internet developed and spread was followed a mere decade later by the global impact of mobile phones, which now are accessible to two-thirds of all people on earth. AI is already taking off at a blistering pace that will exceed anything we have seen until now.



Credit: Mohammad Yasir, Pexels.com

Our ideas, social institutions, values and cultural attitudes are unable to keep pace with the unprecedented rates of technological advancement and the global human interactions they influence. The competitive self-striving of each group has not yet given place to the self-evident need for interdependence and global cooperation of all. The bipolar system that dominated international relations has come to an end and a new multipolar world order of more equal and equitable system is striving to emerge in which nations will have a more equal voice. Rule of law will gradually come to dominate over the threat and use of violence and the refusal of nation-states to submit to global authority, but it may be a long slow process fraught with resistance and conflict.

At a time of unprecedented advances in science, technology, economic power, education and human rights, humanity is experiencing unprecedented levels of uncertainty and insecurity regarding our individual and collective future.³ Adjustment to evolutionary changes of this magnitude have previously occurred piecemeal in one place at a time over centuries of slow, unconscious social change, often accompanied by long periods of warfare and destruction. But the magnitude of the challenges and threats we face today compels us to seek the knowledge, will, strategies, and leadership required for a more conscious, rapid and peaceful transformation of all the world's people simultaneously. Such an endeavour is unprecedented in human history.

Up until now the collective attempt to address the pressures generated by war, economic inequality and environmental destruction have focused primarily on changes in strategy and policy and relied primarily on the power of economics and technology to solve our problems. The results obtained are insufficient. Deeper, more fundamental changes are needed at all levels and in all sectors of global society. The objective materialistic views of modern science that have directed social progress during the past century must be replaced by transdisciplinary and integral perspectives, incorporating the subjective dimension of knowledge based on universal human values.

The following strategies emphasise the absolute necessity of establishing an atmosphere of peace and stability as preconditions for advancing human security and sustainable development, especially among youth and addressing fundamental root causes rather than merely specific threats.

1. Human security for all: Change begins with a change in the way we think. The change in thinking should be predicated on a change in the kind of knowledge we need to understand this increasingly complex, rapidly changing world and the values we need to survive and thrive together. One of the most essential and urgent changes needed is in the presiding concept of security that governs global relations today. We need to shift from a concept that focuses almost exclusively on national security by means of military preparedness to one which focuses on the primacy of people and human security. The world spent more than \$2 trillion USD last year on military preparedness and war and that figure is rising rapidly. Meanwhile the sense of insecurity continues to rise, due to the spread of violence resulting from war, revival of the nuclear arms race, rising intolerance and threats to individual freedom, social tensions, the polarisation of societies, a loss of faith in our institutions, rising unemployment and job insecurity. The recent advent of generative AI has added to the anxiety and sense of insecurity, both among workers who fear for loss of their jobs to students who wonder whether their present education will really be sufficient to ensure a remunerative job in the future. Insecurity is the foundation of instability, desperation, impulsive action, loss of control and violence.

2. Global peace offensive: Today's youth want peace more than anything else. Rising levels of conflict undermines all their hopes and aspirations. Peace is imperative. The Peace Offensive mobilises the weight and influence of the NGO community to engage all stakeholders in global society in a systematic initiative to reduce all forms of war, conflict and threats to human security, major and minor, by a global peace offensive based on reciprocal, incremental, unilateral initiatives to de-escalate conflicts.

3. Integration of common and human security: Without peace there can be no real security for people. Without human security there can be no firm foundation for a secure peace. An integrated global system based on an integrated conception of security is needed that unites the common security of nation-states with the human security of people and communities worldwide. This is endorsed by the Inter-Parliamentary Union. Among the essential changes needed is a shift from the concept of competitive security of sovereign nation-states based on military preparedness to the human security of all individuals on earth based on sustainable development for all life on the planet. A global cooperative security system that replaces competitive nationalism and reliance on military preparedness with a common security system that prohibits aggression against other nations and offers global safeguards to members, akin to NATO's collective security system, but inclusive of all nations which agree and adhere to a non-aggression treaty founded on universal human values.

4. Human security for sustainable development: Too few understand that the 17 UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are a personal message to all of us, a recipe for enhancing the security of everyone on earth. The concept of human security is a complement to the idea of sustainable development embodied in the 17 SDGs. The only difference is that it is focused on people and the personal real-world impacts on individuals, rather than on the macrolevel threats understood primarily by academics and policymakers. Food security, health security, peace and political security, economic, environmental, community and individual security are issues that appeal directly to the needs and quest for security of everyone on earth. The 17 SDGs unanimously adopted by 193 nations are of unprecedented importance. But the focus on global macro goals has failed to reach and galvanise the energy and commitment of the masses of people and communities. The focus on human security covers nearly all the objectives of the SDGs in a language and with a specificity that can appeal to and mobilise people. It resonates with parliamentarians charged

5. Technology for SDG implementation: Technology is a powerful driver for progress, but too often the preoccupation with profit eclipses the enormous untapped potential of technology as a force for good. The latest Force for Good report identifies 10 scalable, digital, tech-enabled solutions based on existing technologies which if applied globally can fill 50% of the funding gap in SDG implementation. The India stack of technology has delivered financial inclusion to 500 million Indians. In Spring 2023 India offered this technology to the world at a UN event in New York. , , Already five nations have signed up and another 50 are expected to do so within the next five years. Extending financial inclusion to people everywhere can provide the disadvantages with access to bank accounts, credit, incentives, insurance, and subsidy payments for the price of a low-cost mobile phone.

6. Digital connectivity: Presently 40% of the world's people lack access to digital connectivity. That means they lack access to the enormous reservoirs of information and access to health and medical services, safety warnings, access to goods and services, government programs, vocational training and educational programs available to the rest of us. Extending the global system of digital networks to include the 40% who do not yet have global connectivity can now be done through telecom networks at a fraction of the former cost, while opening enormous opportunities for delivery of public as well as commercial services and serve as a powerful lever for implementing of all 17 SDGs.

7. Global education platform: Education is vital for preparing today's youth for a better tomorrow. It is essential for achieving the 17 SDGs. Approximately 250 million children worldwide are out of school, lacking access to affordable primary, secondary, and higher education according to UNESCO and UNICEF. This situation is particularly dire in regions such as Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia, where substantial proportions of school-age children are not attending school. , A significant digital divide exacerbates educational disparities. Around two-thirds of the world's school-age children, approximately 1.3 billion, do not have internet access at home, which limits their ability to participate in remote learning and other digital educational opportunities. The lack of access to education and digital resources poses a major challenge to achieving global educational goals and improving overall educational outcomes. Digital and AI based technology now makes it possible to deliver world class education and vocational training that is accessible and affordable to all. The latest advances in generative AI-based educational technology , such as Khan Academy's Khanmigo , can provide personalised, customised, interactive, school and life-long learning in their own language to students everywhere students have access to digital connectivity.

8. Central bank blockchain currency: Quantitative Easing (QE) has been widely employed by central banks to stem the economic threats since the 2008 financial crisis. Major central banks, including the Federal Reserve, Bank of Japan, European Central Bank, and the Bank of England, have collectively pumped over \$25 trillion into the economy, including more than \$9 trillion added in response to the economic challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic. , Most of the funds released after the 2008 subprime mortgage crisis were used to support financial institutions overextended by their quest for speculative profits. Very little went to address the needs of the millions of homeowners who lost their properties because of the steep decline in real estate prices. QE is a shotgun approach which distributed new money indiscriminately and is often reinvested in unproductive or socially unnecessary investments. By linking the value of the currency to a fixed value or stable basket of currencies, the use of cryptocurrency for speculation and widely fluctuating value can be eliminated. Blockchain currency has the capacity use smart contracts to limit use of the currency to specific social beneficial applications, such as investment in renewable energy, low-cost housing, medical care, education, job skills training, climate and other environmental areas needed for achievement of the SDGs. It's ludicrous to plead lack of funding to meet these essential human needs while spending \$2 trillion or more fighting wars of aggression that endanger the whole world.

9. Global voices and a global social movement: Peace is the essential foundation for security and human security is the essential foundation for lasting peace. Such a radical change usually occurs only with the passage of many generations. The only possible shortcut to accelerate this long, slow process is to engage the global public directly in the process. The world's people today are represented by nearly 100,000 international and national NGOs representing various segments and voice of global society, but they provide only token access to policymakers in national and international governmental fora in institutions whose decisions are decided by diplomats representing 193 national governments, which are far removed and often indifferent or opposed to the voices of their populations, especially youth. Humanity can at last be given a voice by establishment of a global, blockchain-based network for global citizenry, especially youth, to debate critical issues and conduct global referenda to reflect for the first time the real aspirations and voice of humanity relating to issues of global importance.

The recommendations in this article may not appear to directly address the pressing challenges of global society in the manner commonly advocated for specific policy reforms. Rather they seek to address the underlying root causes that have so far left the world indifferent, distracted or lacking the power and resources to take essential actions needed on behalf of humanity. These strategies are intended to act as catalysts to awaken, energise, organise and empower untapped forces to break the indifference, resistance and paralysis that prevents the effective action and leadership so essential to the future of humanity.

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The future of peace: Youth-led conflict transformation in the Anthropocene

by Matias Lara, co-director of The 50 Percent and Otilia Rose-Marie Meden, student and activist, International Relations at the University of St Andrews.

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In our ever-complex world, the challenge of achieving enduring peace requires us to rethink traditional approaches to conflict and embrace new paradigms.

The term “*conflict resolution*” often simplifies armed conflicts as problems that can be quickly solved. However, true peacebuilding is a long-term process that demands deep involvement from all stakeholders, especially young people and grassroots organisations¹.

The *Conflict Transformation* approach goes beyond merely resolving conflicts; it involves addressing the underlying social, economic, and political issues that give rise to violence². This approach necessitates the inclusion of all stakeholders in the peacebuilding process, ensuring their voices are heard and their needs addressed. Unlike conflict resolution, which often intervenes only when conflicts have escalated into violence, conflict transformation focuses on building the foundations of peace to prevent violence from emerging in the first place.

A key component of this approach is education. Education plays a pivotal role in peacebuilding, but it must go beyond traditional curricula. Effective peace education includes teaching virtues such as temperance, fortitude, prudence, and justice. These virtues are crucial for managing conflicts peacefully and help individuals develop the moral framework necessary for dealing with conflicts constructively. Additionally, programs in peer mediation, negotiation, and debate equip young people with the tools to manage conflicts in their daily lives. These skills not only help prevent violence but also foster a culture of tolerance and understanding. Simplifying and disseminating the principles of conflict transformation and positive peace can empower communities to actively participate in peacebuilding.

However, there is no one-size-fits-all strategy for peacebuilding. Each community and conflict is unique, requiring tailored approaches that respect local dynamics. Successful peacebuilding involves spending time in the affected areas, engaging with local stakeholders, and understanding their specific challenges and needs. It’s about having deep and meaningful connections. This grassroots involvement is crucial for creating sustainable peace.

Young people and grassroots organisations are often the most affected by conflicts and yet the most overlooked in peace processes. Empowering them is essential for achieving lasting peace. For instance, during the 2021-2022 protests in Colombia, young people voiced their frustrations over the lack of opportunities and representation. These protests were named “el Estallido” and were infamous in the region for the violent repression that armed forces of Colombia used to stop them.

The intervention by UN officers and the Catholic Church, who facilitated dialogues with these youth, led to the establishment of a network of youth representatives consulting the government. This example highlights how empowering local voices can lead to meaningful and lasting change and **mitigate** violence and armed conflicts.

Despite the evidence supporting conflict transformation and grassroots involvement, many international organisations and political leaders continue to favour traditional conflict resolution approaches. This often results in **failed** peacebuilding efforts, as seen in many places through the last decades. To shift this paradigm, we must empower young people and grassroots organisations to understand and apply the principles of peacebuilding and conflict transformation.



Credit: Larm Rmahe, unsplash.com

How do we practically work towards a future of peace?

The first step appears to be cultivating the ability to visualise and imagine the future we desire. Peace is an abstract and innately contextual concept. Therefore, by visualising what a desirable future of peace can look like, we can tangibly work toward that future in our contextual circumstances. This approach is not necessarily new. Christiana Figueres and Tom Rivett-Carnac establish it in *The Future We Choose*³, aimed at providing ground upon which we, young people in particular, reckon with the power of the mind to build a peaceful and sustainable future. Taking inspiration from their work, we must recognise that reality comes into existence through storytelling: through the reality we narrate.

This brings us back to the educational foundation for peace. Two educational methods that utilise the power of storytelling are the genres of *useful fiction* and *futures thinking*. Useful fiction makes sense of the world around us based on facts while also narrating a potential future based on imagination. For instance, the author Peter Warren Singer⁴ addresses complex themes from the human mind to drones through fiction, making the topics easy to understand and interesting to read. Without labelling Singer as a peace educator, one of the insights from his work is that we can promote peace through fact-based fictional stories about peace.

Futures thinking is another useful method to visualise peace. It can be described in educational settings as a cross-disciplinary approach to considering potential futures through understanding trends and motivators for change. The task here is for young people to evaluate possible, probable, and preferable changes in their given contexts. These different but not dissimilar methods create foundations from which peace can prosper in our minds and materialise in our everyday lives⁵.

The second step relates to learning the necessary skills for conflict transformation. In alignment with the above, young people must become equipped for a future wherein changes and crises are ever-happening. It is not an easy task to build peace in such terrain. The emergent strategist, adrienne maree brown offers a potential pathway for navigating change and transforming conflict amidst crises. In *Pleasure Activism*⁶, brown does not shy away from seriously considering pleasure, joy, and love as foundations from which peace, life, and light must grow.

When striving to transform conflicts, we must start within ourselves, recognising that our inner landscapes can foster – and hinder – a sense of peace and pleasure. Importantly, this directed attention does not glorify our inner world as free from conflict or discomfort. We all experience internal battles, and, therefore, we take a crucial step toward transforming conflict between us by starting within ourselves.

It is a pertinent time to talk of such matters since mental health is an increasingly relevant topic and a critical concern among all people. Extending from brown's idea of peace as pleasure, we consider mental health and inner peace as crucial components of conflict transformation. Importantly, they neither can nor should consolidate in solitude. We must insist that mental health as intertwined with peace and inner peace requires a relational and communal focus.

By doing so, we combine brown's powerful message with peace educational work to identify synergies across fields that are useful for further outlining the necessary skills for conflict transformation.

Quakers in Britain is an organisation that promotes peace education as described in their report *Peace at the heart: a relational approach to education in British schools*⁷. They offer a framework with four complementary aims:

- Individual wellbeing and development ('peace with myself');
- Convivial peer relations ('peace between us');
- Inclusive school community ('peace among us'); and
- The integrity of society and the earth ('peace in the world').⁸

While we address young people, mainly outside school settings, Quakers' work is important because of its focus on improving mental health and building inner peace through cultivating relationships - with others as well.

Summarised from the Quakers' report, careful facilitation in collaborative workshops about mindfulness and peer mediation equips young people with empathetic awareness, relational analysis, and effective communication to help them handle conflicts⁹. Their work illustrates some of the practical ways young people learn strategies and skills for peace to transform conflict; they acquire peace and conflict literacy.

Finally, this step does not disregard that social, economic, and political situations shape one's mind and condition the conflicts in need of transformation. Instead, it appreciates that because of, rather than despite, different abilities and privileges, peace and conflict literacy can only be learned in socially sensitive settings, ideally from an early age.

Transforming conflicts from the inside out thus requires a skillful lens through which all young people's agency is amplified, regardless of their everyday circumstances.

In brief, these two steps offer some reflections on paradigms that practically work toward a future of peace. They are neither the definitive nor exclusive ways to do so. Like most peacebuilding processes, the steps are to be trialed across time and space. Therefore, they can at best serve as guiding goals for a future of peace, pioneered and steered by young people's voices for peace through, inside, and outside education.

A final thought

Building peace is not an easy task. It requires time, effort, and a commitment to listening to and involving local communities. Only through collaboration and the empowerment of young people can we hope to create a peaceful society where the foundations of peace are strong enough to prevent violence from taking root. We must believe that peace and a second chance on this earth are possible. Because if there is one thing that the current system does every day, it is making us think that we won't be able to change this world.

But we will. By believing in the possibility of peace and working together, we can transform conflicts and build a world where enduring peace is not just a dream but a reality. The future lies in the hands of the young, and by empowering them, we pave the way for a world where hope triumphs over fear, and peace overcomes conflict.

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Trusting our humanity in a crisis of humanity

by Karima Kadaoui, member of The Club of Rome, co-founder and executive president of Tamkeen Community Foundation for Human Development.

May 2024

If I must die,
you must live
to tell my story
to sell my things
to buy a piece of cloth
and some strings,
(make it white with a long tail)
so that a child, somewhere in Gaza
while looking heaven in the eye
awaiting his dad who left in a blaze –
and bid no one farewell
not even to his flesh
not even to himself –
sees the kite, my kite you made, flying up
above
and thinks for a moment an angel is there
bringing back love
If I must die
let it bring hope
let it be a tale.

Rafaat Alareer¹

We are all part of Gaza, the concentration strip that condensates the unbearable suffering of the world. We are all witnessing unspeakable human suffering and destruction *and*, we behold the possibility, as humanity, to disarm *with* humanity the unhinged rage that dehumanises and destroys all including itself. In the midst of total despair and abomination, humanity is able to *fly a kite* invoking hope and love beyond time and place, beyond differences and divides.

Shane Claiborne's peace incantation evokes the way to the way; the widening of the field of possibility that widens and reflects the widening of the heart.

"Peace making doesn't mean passivity. It is the act of interrupting injustice without mirroring injustice, the act of disarming evil without destroying the evildoer, the act of finding a third way that is neither fight nor flight but the careful, arduous pursuit of reconciliation and justice. It is about a revolution of love that is big enough to set both the oppressed and the oppressors free."²

Witnessing

Peace making is the functioning of bearing witness.
Once we listen with our entire body and mind,
loving action arises.

Bernie Glassman³

The witness bears testimony from the lived experience, even (and maybe more so) the one who turns one's eyes away. By witnessing we "*dissolve in the witnessed*". If we try to distance ourselves, we dissociate ourselves from ourselves. Such is the powerful beauty of our inherent empathy. Such is the *affect of Gaza* on our human collective psyche. We are witnessing like never before livestreamed crimes against humanity.

Our fellow human beings in Palestine are documenting the destruction of the very possibility of their existence, of the very probability of life. We are hearing them plead for their suffering to be seen and felt, for their nightmare to stop. We are witnessing unimaginable pain in the flesh and in the soul. The pain of a soul that supplicates for humanity and cries for her humanity to be recognised. The images of mothers and fathers having to display the lifeless bodies of their children to beg us to see them as our own will forever haunt the halls of dehumanisation.

Our fellow human beings in Israel, are imploring for their loved ones to come back, grieving for their lost souls and their heartless government. Young men and women in uniforms, are sharing videos of their fear, grief and trauma mutated into shocking and devastating dehumanising. Others without uniforms are shredding their trauma numbed basic human decency and are posting their obscene parodies and celebrations of deliberate starvation and killing of children. Extreme self-dehumanisation is pouring its drowning compassion into the abyss of eternal lamentations.

Murderous revenge is fuelled and armed by countries that still recognise themselves as upholding universal values of human rights. Lifesaving humanitarian aid is criminalised, defunded and hindered in the name of protecting democratic values and as a mean to fight terrorism. Self-deceiving political discourse and policies of cognitive dissonance are veiling discernment and humane rationality. Contracts of terror, selling arms, selling gas, selling geo-political influence are selling out our shared humanity.

The images of Gaza's social infrastructure total obliteration by Israeli (and supporting countries) bombs stand side by side with the surreal images of a port being built with the rubbles of homes and remains of human beings whilst buried alive children cannot be saved.

Countries' unconditional support to Israel's "*self-defence*" have enabled so called safe zones to turn into mass graveyards, hospitals into battlefields, journalists and humanitarian workers into obvious targets and starvation into a weapon of mass destruction.

International laws and governance institutions meant to prevent and stop crimes against humanity and intended for a world of peace are rendered moot, impotent and are perplexed to discover they always wore invisible chains ready to pull them back into irrelevance.

Young people around the world are being arrested and brutalised for denouncing and rejecting genocide. Universities are violently repressing their students, their professors and the values they consider they grew from and stand for. People fear losing their jobs if they speak out against the massacre of children and their fear is proven right. Peace marches of all faiths and walks of life are demonised, criminalised and repressed with terror.

The unjustifiable is justified, the unexplainable is explained and pushed down our throats by politicians dehumanising themselves to self-oblivion. Mass dissociative disorder is echoed and self-reinforced by hyper-reality broadcasting journalism.

Realising our shared humanity

All you have to do
Is close your eyes
(Seeing these days
Blinds our hearts.)
Close your eyes, tightly
So that you can see
In your mind's eye.
Then look into the mirror.
One. Two.
I am you.
I am your past.
And killing me,
You kill you.

Rafaat Alareer⁴

And, in the midst of the most extreme forms of dehumanisation we are also witnessing extraordinary expressions of humanity finding healing in humanity:

Our fellow human beings in Israel denouncing the slaughter called self-defence and pleading for diplomatic means to ensure the return of their loved ones held hostage.

Our Jewish brothers and sisters around the world supplicating *“not in our name, do not weaponise antisemitism, never again for everyone and anyone”*.

Doctors and health workers in Gaza, exhausted, horrified, helpless, grieving their children and their patients and giving their lives to save their patients.

Neighbours relentlessly digging with their bare hands through the rubbles of destroyed homes seeking for a pulsation of hope, listening out for a breathing breath.

Palestinian journalists raising their words to describe the unspeakable whilst their family members live the abominable. Israeli journalists risking their all to seek the truth and questioning the sanity of their internationally assisted government blinded by revenge.

International humanitarian workers coming back to *“hell on earth”*, to the *“graveyard of children”* staggered by the *“never seen before”*. Saving lives at the risk of their own.

Hundreds of thousands of persons around the world sounding the drums of peace march after march. Students on campuses proving that the intergenerational gap is one of courage.

Politicians unshakingly remaining faithful to the memory of their own country's history of suffering, of apartheid, of colonisation and who understand that speaking out for justice and to stop crimes against humanity is not bound to time nor place. Countries such as South Africa, Colombia, Spain, Belgium, Ireland, taking actions upholding their moral grounds in the understanding that *injustice anywhere is injustice everywhere*. Suffering anywhere is suffering everywhere.

We are seeing both; expressions of inhumanity and humanity and as long as they reflect each other we can realise our shared humanity.

A crisis of humanity

The diameter of the bomb was thirty centimeters
and the diameter of its effective range about seven meters,
with four dead and eleven wounded.

And around these, in a larger circle
of pain and time, two hospitals are scattered
and one graveyard. But the young woman
who was buried in the city she came from,
at a distance of more than a hundred kilometers,
enlarges the circle considerably,
and the solitary man mourning her death
at the distant shores of a country far across the sea
includes the entire world in the circle.

And I won't even mention the crying of orphans
that reaches up to the throne of God and
beyond, making a circle with no end and no God.

Yehuda Amichai⁵

We are witnessing sheer madness of apocalyptic proportion and consequence for the future of humanity. No one is spared. We are the destroyer and the destroyed. We are also the healer and the healed.

In this dystopian world to stand “with” or “for” opens pitfalls of polarity and discord and uncovers soul devouring quicksand. Neither pro-Palestinian nor pro-Israeli, Neither Christian, Jew nor Muslim. Neither North nor South. Neither West or East. Divides birth more divides. Only Humanity can disarm inhumanity.

We are able to recall how to stand “in” recognition of our shared humanity. We are able to seek how to stand “under”; growing a shared under-standing of what it means to behold a humanity that defines us and connects us to each other, to our natural world and to the whole beyond our conscious grasp.

In this dark unprecedented moment in our modern history, all discourse on justice, equity, human rights, climate change, education, sustainability, regeneration, systems transformation ... no matter how sophisticated the language, no matter how sincere the intent, sounds rhetorical, vain, artificial, disconnected, profoundly dissociated; a smoke screen fanned by our burning sense-of-life and sense-of-humanity.

We are experiencing a crisis of humanity and the so called polycrisis is maybe the multiplicity of manifestations of a dislocated locus of humanity value, of a blurred humanity proprioception (the faculty to sense one's motion and position) and of a dwarfed sense-of-humanity. When we elevate our discourse to the depth of what makes us human all questions are questioned and all matters shed a new light of understanding (climate change, circular economy, regenerative finance, education for the future of humanity ...).

Crisis etymologically means a “*decisive point in the progress of a disease*” also “*vitally important or decisive state of things, point at which change must come, for better or worse*”. Trusting our humanity in a crisis of humanity is perhaps the most beautiful paradox of our human condition.

Standing “in” humanity, trusting our humanity

O HEART!

Always

Pulsate the drums of Life.

Vibrate the chords of Love.

Weep the tears that blossom Compassion.

Pray, plead, supplicate, speak out,
act upon, act now,

Whatever is at your brave reach.

For the children of Palestine,

For the children of Israel,

For all our children

Everywhere, anywhere,

And their children ...

Karima Kadaoui



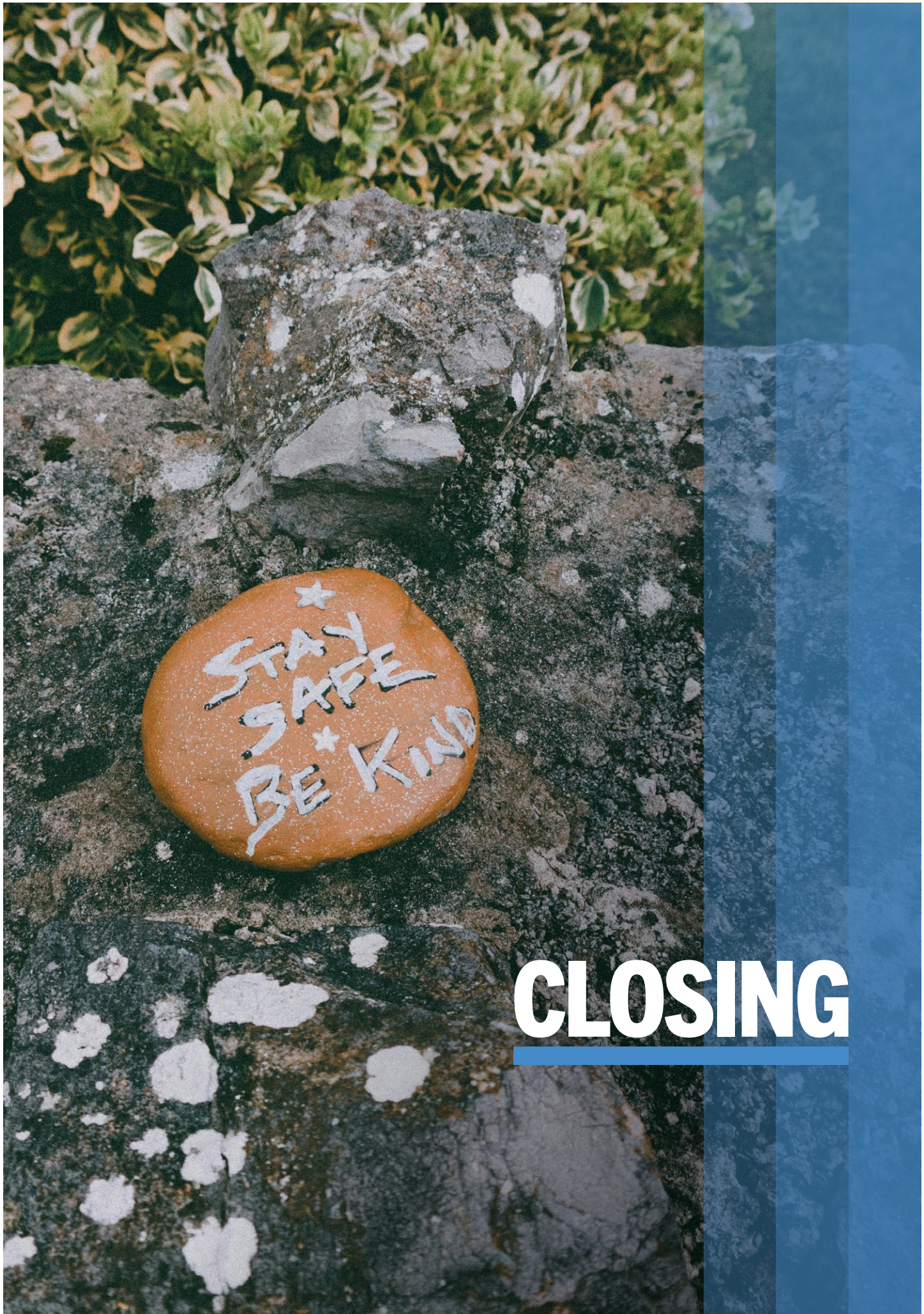
Credit: Ahmed akacha, Pexels.com

Let's never forget, children are being murdered by mass bombing and bullets. Children are being buried alive under the rubble of their home. Children are being starved, maimed, orphaned and traumatised for life. More children have died in Gaza in the last 7 months than in all the war conflicts in the last four years. The bleeding wound of our humanity is widening every minute of every day. We can no longer wait. The announced calamity of Rafah is unforgivable and is still stoppable.

For the sake of our children of Palestine, for the sake of our children of Israel, for the sake of our children everywhere and anywhere and their children we must stand in humanity, have an immediate and unconditional cease fire, negotiate the release of all hostages held in Palestine and Israel and find a way to peace that mirrors our shared humanity. Trusting our humanity.⁶

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CLOSING

What to do if we want peace in the Anthropocene?

by Paul Shrivastava, co-president of The Club of Rome and professor at Pennsylvania State University
and Carlos Álvarez Pereira, secretary general of The Club of Rome.

In many ways this volume was triggered by the deeply destructive war between Israel and Hamas in Gaza. The origins of the war go back decades, and some argue that perhaps centuries. For many around the world, the war and, even more, its escalation into a large-scale regional conflict, questions what it means to be human, and how is the challenge of enduring world peace different in the Anthropocene. It brings forward a burning question: how do we stop the self-reinforcing loop of existential madness which is derailing any possibility of a decent future? This question applies to the whole of humanity, whatever the physical distance to the places of violent conflict.

The world has witnessed wars from the beginning of civilisation. In every geography and every historical period, wars have played decisive roles in shaping human civilisation. Some may even argue that wars are a tool of civilising the world, which of course raises issues about what it means to be “civilised”. As weapons of war have become more destructive in power, their damage to human life and the natural environment have become less acceptable. With weapons of mass destruction, it is now possible to annihilate entire cities, countries and render natural environments uninhabitable for decades.

This scale of destructive power should make the use of weapons of mass destruction socially and politically obscene and unacceptable. Yet, over 20 nations across the globe now possess approximately 12,500 nuclear warheads as of January 2023. Almost 90 percent of them belong to the United States and Russia. Moreover, a large fraction of research and innovation spending, and especially AI, goes to improving human capacities for destruction, and re-legitimising murder, individual or collective, as a mean to a higher end. In this context, wars are not a solution to any human problem, but rather an existential threat to humanity. And not only a physical threat: the acceptance of war and genocide dehumanises us all and frustrates the possibility of making sense of our presence on Earth.

The current situation of wars in Europe (Ukraine and Russia), in the tinderbox of the Middle East (Israel and Hamas in Gaza, Israel and Hezbollah in Lebanon, tomorrow a full war of Israel and Iran?), and long-standing conflicts as in Sudan, all point to the urgency of rethinking and re-acting on peace. The root causes of wars are complex and intertwined, involving political, economic, social, cultural, and psychological factors, as well as the novel pressures brought on by population growth, resource depletion, climate change and environmental degradation. Military interventions only exacerbate these problems and create new ones. Militarism undergirds our economic and political systems, and “Military Industrial Complex” was the term used by President Eisenhower to describe what undergirds security in modern nation-states. Its dismantling and replacement with an eco-technological peace complex or nexus, is the challenge we face today. Eliminating causes of war will require systemic and holistic transformations to all major systems that support modern life. In other words, modern “civilisation” is so deeply entangled with industrialised violence against peoples and nature that Peace in the Anthropocene requires a civilisational shift.

Peace is not just the absence of wars. Peace in the Anthropocene is the continual transformation of life systems (both natural and social), building peaceful foundations that facilitate humans and other species to thrive. Peace is a commitment to living regeneratively. The various essays in this volume have presented many different perspectives on peace. They have identified a wide range of variables from unifying ideologies and belief systems, divisive extremist thinking, outdated patriarchic institutions and practices, extractive economies, nationalistic politics, colonial legacies and neocolonial practices, that contribute to our current conflict-ridden world. This is not an exhaustive list. It is illustrative of dimensions underlying the diverse changes necessary for a peace infrastructure to emerge.

As we enter a new era of the Anthropocene, that is accompanied with many existential threats to humanity, we begin by asking - who is the enemy in the Anthropocene? Humans fighting against other humans (on national, ethnic, religious, or other social identity grounds) obscures the real enemy. The most powerful sources of peril for all humans in the Anthropocene is not other human communities, but rather the feedback loops by forces of nature that our collective human actions are carelessly perturbing with unpredictable consequences. But it would be foolhardy to see “nature” as an enemy. It is what humans are doing to nature that poses existential risks to human civilisations. It is our own hubris which is problematic, as autochthonous cultures know since the beginning of times. We, modern humans, are our worst enemies. Understanding our own nihilistic tendencies is a good first step to building long term peace infrastructures.

Another important question to ponder is the nature of conflicts that are emerging in the Anthropocene. Conflicts are unlikely to be simply about control over land. Complex conflicts are emerging over natural resources including water, over the control of advanced technologies and sources of information, over climate migrations, over sources of pandemics, over the moving impacts of environmental pollution, and over social and economic inequalities. These are conflicts in which the enemy is not a nation or group of nations, and the impacts are not contained within national boundaries. These are conflicts fought not just with arms and ammunition, but implicate major systems of our economy, transportation, habitats, the atmosphere, and the biogeochemistry of the earth. These are ill-structured and wicked conflicts that intermingle multiple harms, jurisdictions, and levels. There is a lot more to be done to understand the nature of these conflicts. From its origins The Club of Rome has sought peace, and it will continue to deeply debate conflicts of the Anthropocene and seek peace as both a precondition and the achievement of sustainability.

Our discussions on peace are in the early stages. And even in their infancy our conversations have opened up several new action opportunities. We have been invited by the Kyung Hee University (KHU) of Korea, to collaborate on a global peace conference and help launch their Miwon Peace Prize initiative. This builds upon our prior collaborations with KHU in creating two prior peace symposia. In 1975, KHU founder, Dr. Young-Seek Choue, co-organised the International Symposium titled “Looking Ahead to the 21st Century: Prospects and Problems of the 21st Century”. In 2016, KHU chancellor, Dr. Inwon Choue, co-organised an international symposium with The Club of Rome, titled “Transformative Challenge: The Worlds of Human Mind and Planetary Engagement” to commemorate the 35th World Peace Day. Elsevier Publishers and the Hiroshima University based Network for Education and Research on Peace and Sustainability (NERPS) have launched a new International Journal on Peace and Sustainability and invited our participation. We are collaborating with the Interaction Council, a group of former Heads of State, on creating the EXIST Board to deal with existential risks and peace. Our Youth Leadership and Intergenerational Dialogues Hub and The 50 Percent platform are making conflict transformation a key focus of their work.

Many more actions are needed to make true peace a reality. The Gaza war with its horrific toll on human life and the natural and built environments, sparked our questions on what it means to be human in the 21st century. In times of the Cold War between the USA and the Soviet Union, Europe and North America lived in the privileged illusion that peace and prosperity were achievable provided one accepted the benevolent supremacy of Western civilisation. That happened while dozens of countries around the world suffered unspeakable tragedies due to colonialism and the violent pressure of both blocs to make them align on one side or the other. There was always a very dark side to the civilising process. And part of it was the doctrine of the Mutually Assured Destruction (MAD). Terribly enough, the acronym could be taken as a prophecy to be realised, rather than the foundation for anything sensible in the long term.

MAD was built on the idea that there is an Other, that we consider the enemy, but is powerful enough to refrain our own temptation to engage in its destruction. That sense of containment is now lost. The Anthropocene is the period in which we have unleashed so much power in our relationship with the Other (human cultures and nature) that we are able to create spirals of increasing violence without even realising they are suicidal. That violence also kills the killer. Even worse, when perceiving the cracks of our civilisation, we attribute them to the Other, and we try to keep control by doubling down on violence, just accelerating the collapse.

With the call to essays in 2024 that led to the present publication, The Club of Rome reconnected with its own traditions, from times of the Cold War, and started a new initiative for Enduring Peace in the Anthropocene, or in other terms for the achievement of Planetary Peace. This is of course a tall order, whose realisation goes well beyond what The Club of Rome can achieve by itself. But there are some elements that we are well placed to bring to the fore.

To start with, there is the realisation of the systemic nature of war as a structural characteristic, even if not necessarily permanent, of what we call modern civilisations. War is not the consequence of the temporary madness of some irresponsible or evil leaders, notwithstanding that leadership certainly plays an important role. It is the periodic release of tensions accumulating over time from the permanent violence of our systems of relationships, among humans and nations, and with nature.

This consideration of the systemic nature of war has many dimensions, of course. The prevalent interpretation of the system of international relationships set up after World War II is that of a benevolent framework based on universal values, and using violence only as an instrument of last resort but generally working towards the peaceful development of all countries. Many attempts at addressing what does not work in the multilateral system of today and in particular the persistence of wars in large numbers, recognise the failures and imperfections of the system as it is, but look for solutions taking for granted its benevolent intentions.

Though, many in the Global Majority have a different perception. They see the multilateral system as a sophisticated expression of the dominance of the West and to a large extent the prolongation of the colonial, extractive and even supremacist mindset of the “developed” countries over the “developing” ones, unable to prevent that whenever the most powerful actors require it, they can choose pursuing their own interests rather than supposedly shared values. This fundamental dissonance cannot be ignored if we intend to address the systemic nature of war: the world is truly pluriversal, with a multiplicity of worldviews and values that give cohesion to cultures and societies, and trying to replace them by one single worldview based on Western history and preferences is nothing less than ethnocide, a key component of the colonial mindset.

Second but not less important, in the prevalent model of “development” human modernity is massively waging war against nature, not caring about the ultimate consequences of our actions on the ecosystems on which the survival of humanity depends. Not only the relationships among humans and nations, but also the relationships of humans with nature are framed by the same spirit of competition, the othering of people and all living beings, the extraction of short-sighted economic value, and the fight for supremacy in multiple forms. This leads to the conviction that making progress towards the elimination of war and the emergence of planetary peace requires addressing wars among humans and war against nature as two sides of the same coin. Such is the complexity of war’s systemic nature but, once realised, such is also the clarity that this notion brings to establish the foundations of planetary peace.

Within this systemic approach, The Club of Rome will continue to develop its Planetary Peace initiative with the following elements:

- The vision presented above to reinvent peace by expanding its notion from the absence of wars to the regeneration of whole planetary systems, and hence de-siloing the topic of peace from being a matter for specialists in international relations to becoming the core of socio-ecological transformations towards wellbeing for all on a healthy planet;
- A deliberate attempt at making sense of the current situation (with the crumbling down of existing multilateralism) in ways leading to a new and pluriversal future of peaceful post-hegemony collaboration to address existential challenges of humanity, rather than being drained into more confrontation, rearmament and ultimately more wars among humans and with nature;
- Integrating peace and non-violence considerations into economic, social and governance systems. With the help of partners and funders, doing deep systemic analysis of existing systems, to reorient them towards regeneration and eco-civilisation goals;

- Working closely with partners of all kinds, NGOs, universities, actors in the multilateral system but also the private sector, to share this systemic orientation and co-create with them ways out of the conventional narratives in which our mindsets are trapped, including those of militarism and consumerism.

While we are on a journey whose destination is still largely unknown, we foresee that the way forward will require the elaboration of some kind of general framework for Planetary Peace, audacious and hopeful and at the same time rigorous, to inform, influence, and hopefully shape the ongoing debates and proposals addressing but also going beyond the immediate necessity to overcome existing conflicts. At the same time, that framework will become more substantial and legitimate if building upon initiatives with specific targets, such as:

- The role of science for peace and scientific diplomacy;
- The engagement of young generations enabling the shift to the vision of Planetary Peace;
- The role of the business sector in accelerating the emergence of regenerative economies.

The Anthropocene will only last for a few decades. Either because the self-regulating processes of Gaia make sure that Life on Earth continues without us, or, hopefully, because we are able to shift to an appeased and regenerative relationship with the Other, that is also Us. The essays in this publication are starting and also keeping open a space for conversation on what it will take to eliminate wars as a way of solving human conflicts. They call for transformation toward a peaceful ecocivilisation. For that we need The Club of Rome to be true to its origins and live up to its highest mission, by being an effective catalyst to overcome the hubris, learn new ways of becoming human, and accept Otherness as a mirror for ourselves and as the condition for mutually assured thriving.

For that we also need your ideas and proposals for deepening our engagement with peace around the world. So as you come to the end of this publication, consider how you and we collectively can contribute to the cause of peace and make peace a central part of our work, for the sake of the future of humanity on Earth.



The Club of Rome is a platform of diverse thought leaders. Drawing on the collective know-how of our members, the organisation provides holistic solutions to global issues such as climate, economics and the wellbeing of humanity. It promotes policy initiatives and action so that humanity can emerge from its self-inflicted planetary emergencies.

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