

# **Action Steps for The Culture of Peace**

**Address by Hon. Douglas Roche**

**United Nations High-Level Forum on The Culture of Peace**

**Panel: Global Citizenship as a Pathway**

**to the Culture of Peace**

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The moment I realized I was a citizen of the world was during my first visit to Hiroshima. When I saw the scale of the destruction, the wrenching remnants of massive deaths, the plight of the injured, and understood for the first time the vulnerability of all humanity to such a catastrophe, I knew that we are one people on the planet. I sensed immediately that the world must have common security or no security. I felt then the interdependencies that later came to be called globalization. I knew that I belonged not just to a national grouping but also to the larger human family.

In later years, when I began to teach, I told my students I would take them up a mountain for a new view of the world: one in which survival could be assured through co-operation on the pillars of human security: economic and social development, environmental protection, nuclear disarmament, and the full implementation of human rights. I showed them what a culture of peace would look like.

Of course, this view was often obstructed by the crises of the day, with conflict breaking out in one place or another and political leaders

entangled in blaming one another. It has always been challenging to get the political systems, so greedy for power, to cooperate in building the conditions for peace. The violence-torn summer of 2014 has been particularly depressing. We find it hard to have our voices heard against the relentless barrage of bombings, mayhem, and maimed children that fill the TV screens. Stopping the carnage seems overwhelming.

But this period of global instability is not a time to back away from the UN agenda for the culture of peace; rather, when barbarism breaks out, it is time to re-double our efforts to build the rule of law.

After the 20<sup>th</sup> century in which two world wars plus the Korean and Vietnam wars and numerous conflicts killed upwards of 100 million people, did we think that it would suddenly be easy to turn the corner and enjoy peace gardens everywhere? Did we forget that the political structures are still mired in a culture of war in which the economic interests of the military-industrial complex outweigh the peace proposals of visionaries? Did we suppose that institutions to guarantee peace through the rule of law would just blossom in a desert?

We are living through a transformative moment in history and movement forward is uneven. The ugliness of war has become etched in people's minds, but the force of humanitarian law is not yet engraved in public policies. We now realize that in modern warfare there are no victors, but we have not yet gained sufficient confidence to reinforce the structures of peace. We must probe further to comprehend Dag Hammarskjöld's message that peace is not just a passive state of affairs in a world without war, but a state of living devoted to action.

The negative news of the day must not dissuade us from continuing our work for peace. Gradually, humanity is beginning to understand that war is futile. That is an enormous gain in the struggle for peace. The public rejection of war has enormous ramifications for how society will conduct its affairs. It portends an upswing in acceptance of the role of the UN as a mediating force and increase its capacity to judiciously implement the Responsibility to Protect doctrine. New thinking for the protection and development of the human community is taking form. It is a moment of astonishing change in the history of the world. Humanity is discovering a power it never had before to construct a more peaceful world.

So that is why we are here today, marking the 15<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the adoption of the UN Programme of Action on the Culture of Peace. We draw strength from one another as we work to extend the culture of peace. I can only tell you how I do this in my own life.

First, I think often of Hiroshima and am proud that I am an honorary citizen of that city. Also, as a citizen of the world, I try to break loose from the chains of nationalism. Hiroshima has made me understand that the full implementation of human rights is incompatible with weapons of mass destruction. Nuclear weapons are a crime against all humanity. I must promote a comprehensive diplomatic process to achieve a legal framework for the universal prohibition and phased elimination of nuclear weapons.

Second, I must help my own government of Canada to enlarge its vision of responsibility. The narrow interests of Canada – constant development of its huge depository of natural resources – must be done in a way that contributes to the well-being of all humanity, not just the Canadian people. My own country must raise its level of participation in global

development through more equitable trade and finance laws, sustainable development policies, and cooperation in forging common security policies.

Third, I must work to expand the culture of peace framework to achieve recognition of the right to peace. The debate currently taking place in the Human Rights Council on a draft UN Declaration on the Right to Peace shows the obstreperousness of several governments, which are still denying that the right to live in peace is inherent in human dignity. Particularly at this moment when barbarity has broken out, the international community needs to adopt a declaration affirming that all individuals have the right to live in peace so that they can develop fully all their capacities – physical, intellectual, moral, and spiritual – without being the target of violence. Such a declaration would be a step in the outlawing of war.

Let us be frank in acknowledging the opposition to the culture of peace. The thinking I have been expressing here is described by some self-appointed realists as “flawed.” They argue that terrorism defines the 21<sup>st</sup> century and can only be met by a “war on terror.” I disagree. There will always be individuals willing to give their lives to attack an enemy. But terrorism is an aberration, not a system of change in people’s lives and attitudes toward one another. There are not civil society groups by the thousands coalescing around terrorism, rather there are civil society groups by the tens of thousands implementing at ground level, in many ways, the values of the culture of peace.

This huge and often unsung movement, which rejects war, is driving the present transformative moment for humanity. It is, however, still overshadowed by the immense news coverage the media gives the existing

violence and strife. The movement to the culture of peace, however “soft” it may appear on the surface compared to the “hard” decisions of warfare still lingering in the militarists’ offices, is the real power of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. We must encourage young people to play a dynamic role in exercising this new power.

I call on the UN Security Council to overcome narrow, short-term interests and act in such a way that the hope of the world for peace is re-kindled. The barbarism the world has witnessed in the summer of 2014 cannot be allowed to define our time. I believe a permanent, highly-trained UN Peacekeeping Force, capable of rapid deployment by the Security Council in emergency situations, has now become essential to protect civilians and prevent regional conflicts from spreading into wars. A UN emergency peace service – what might be called an international “911” – would, if established, protect civilians and prevent regional conflicts from turning into wars. We must express our global citizenship by protecting the most vulnerable in the global community. This is a path to the culture of peace.

A global conscience is at work, stirring us, animating us, and making us reach out beyond ourselves. We must keep reaching and reaching.