

PEACE, HUMANITY, EQUALITY
The Challenge for Peace Education

By Senator Douglas Roche, O.C.

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The war culture has been glorified for millennia. Poets have praised it. Painters have dramatized it. Clergymen have reassured warring factions that God is on their side. Youth have been called to sacrifice their lives in the name of racial and national patriotism. The disastrous consequences of this culture of violence over the past century are obvious and stand out in history books.

Yet despite surging wealth, unprecedented technological advancement, and an understanding of the world that our forefathers could only dream of, humanity remains locked in this continuing crisis. Violence remains the accepted means of resolving conflict. One need only look at the current U.S. Administration's buildup to war in Iraq, or the Russian President's response to the Chechnya claims of independence, to find evidence of this. Despite the many valuable efforts to improve the plight of the weakest around the world and end their suffering, the war culture remains a roadblock to progress.

The terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, brought out the war culture in all its force. We were told that September 11th "changed the world." This could not be farther from the truth. The attacks served to put a spotlight on a world that has been changing for the past quarter-century.

Now that the weight of Cold War rivalry has been lifted, we can better see how technological advances for the movement of people, materials—and especially information—are transforming the world. Although this global circuitry has served to extend the reach of governments, it has also empowered groups and individuals. Al Qaeda brutally reminded us that not all of them have peaceful intentions.

At the outset, we must emphasize that “globalization”—as this new system is called—has produced much that is good. From a materialistic point-of-view, the technologies that fuel globalization enable more countries to produce more products more cheaply and sell them in bigger and bigger markets. Trillions of dollars change hands everyday at all hours. More than just facilitating trade and investment, this technology is also the driving force behind advances in communication and information services.

Because globalization involves the wiring of vast networks around the world, civil society is able to influence governments as never before. This new reality was a crucial factor in the campaigns that led to the 1997 signing of the Anti-Personnel Landmine Treaty and the recent Rome Treaty establishing the International Criminal Court. My office receives hundreds of emails every week from individuals expressing opinions on everything from gun control to pesticides.

But, judging from the concern of the educators at this conference, all is not well. The world we live in is still very much a violent one—both physically and structurally. The same forces that have bred economic and political successes have also generated inequality, injustice, and conflict. Globalization has been a very unequal process and has done nothing to narrow the gap between the world's haves and have-nots. This is confirmed by the most recent United Nations Human Development Report, which reports that the number of people living in extreme poverty remained unchanged in the 1990s.

Globalization has also been an extremely violent phenomenon. It has worsened day-to-day individual suffering. Drug traffickers, arms peddlers, warlords and terrorists alike are disrupting the lives and sense of security of ordinary citizens. It is a reality that has always been with humankind, but now the criminal practitioners have at their disposal all the tools of contemporary technology, weaponry, propaganda and the Internet that allow them to move across borders with ease. This is the dark underbelly of globalization. Not even the citizens of the world's most powerful nation—with the biggest military, the most extensive intelligence and the most vigilant system of national security—are safe.

This social decay is a legacy that is reproducing itself as new generations learn from the violence of those before them. How is it that this grotesque situation is allowed to persist?

The answer lies in the impasse created by the two competing international systems in the world today. One international system—represented by the United Nations—is based on peace, whereas the parallel system is based on militarism and war. Both claim the loyalty and dedication of humankind. The first system sees human rights, cooperation and toleration as the main instruments, while the other reaches for power and subjugation to maintain order. It is this archaic system of predominant militarism that prevents progress on the peace agenda.

Despite the carnage of the past century, governments continue to pursue an elusive peace through militarism. This year alone, global military expenditure is estimated at some \$850 billion (U.S.). At nearly \$400 billion, the U.S. spends more on its military than the next 25 countries combined. And Canada, despite its progressive policies, is still among the top military spenders and ranks high on the list of arms exporters. The Canadian government spends \$12 billion a year on its military, while the Canadian Peacebuilding Initiative is given an annual budget of only \$10 million.

In an increasingly interconnected world, both developed and developing countries bear the consequences of this enormous expense. Little attention is given to the effect of continuing high military expenditures on the ability of governments to pay for sustainable development and programs to foster social justice. It is a fact, staring us in the face, that governments—including our own—in one breath plead an inability to fund social and environmental needs and in the next breath appropriate huge sums for warfare and its preparation. According to the United Nations, all of the Millennium Development Goals could be achieved if Official Development Assistance was increased by \$50 billion, one-sixteenth of what the world currently spends preparing for war. This double standard is a scandal. I feel a personal outrage.

This continued development, production, distribution and use of increasingly sophisticated weaponry is the lynchpin that keeps the culture of war in place. The situation is untenable. Time is running out before the confluence of sustainable development problems, on the one hand, and the proliferation of hi-tech weapons, on the other, produces a massive conflagration that would devastate humanity. The problems of poverty, suffering, the humiliation of millions of people and the growing gap between North and South are a time bomb. These problems are a source of conflict

and are fertile soil for the terrorism of the future. There is a choice, however. We can give in to events, or we can try to change them. We were given a wake-up call last year on September 11th. The question is: will we apply our understanding? That is what stands in the balance as we gather here today.

The war culture must be addressed as the institution it is. Change will depend upon the ability of this generation to raise up the next generation's awareness of the issues at hand. This can only be achieved through education. Governments are too occupied with the crisis at hand, business is caught up with the bottom-line, and the media deals so incessantly with the confrontational that they sublimate creative thinking.

Where else but in our schools and universities can the future be drawn? Today's students must be taught to heed the admonition of Nobel Peace Laureates who, at their recent Summit in Rome, said that this generation must "refuse to accept the cynicism and despair that crushes hope and vision." The Laureates strongly affirmed "our common humanity and capacity to work cooperatively, informed by compassion and inspired by love."

The Laureates laid down a basic challenge to peace educators:

Of particular concern... is the increased reliance on violence and war as a primary means to resolve political disputes. It is imperative to seek peaceful solutions to conflict and to deepen collaboration among states, be it through the United Nations or other regional security organizations.

Just as minds have in the past been prepared for violence and prejudice, they can be prepared for peace and tolerance. The obvious question is “how”? Making this happen will obviously not be automatic. Our society continues to follow a narrow path, stuck in an ingenuity rut, not looking at the broader picture. This is not a path we can afford to continue. Although I do not profess to be an authority in designing school curricula, I would like to offer my understanding—gained from my political experience—of how education should address the war culture.

A key prerequisite to achieving a culture of peace is safeguarding the rights of the world’s youth and nurturing their development. To end the war culture, it is vital that we make a sustained investment in our children and help activate their potential to address conflict peacefully.

To date, education systems in Canada and elsewhere have been very successful at increasing literacy, numeracy, and helping people attain the job skills needed to succeed in today’s fast-paced work environment. Our society measures the success of education policy by the number of university

degrees per capita, along with other economic criteria such as corporate tax rates. Education is considered just another competitive advantage for those Western countries at the forefront of globalization.

But this approach has done little to widen the prospects for peace or sustainable development and has instead served to harden national feeling and competitive individualism. As a consequence, the present generation has been left ill-prepared to adapt peaceably to an interconnected world that is demanding precisely the opposite qualities.

The reality of globalization demands that the current generation, and those that come after it, acquire more knowledge and understanding of the world than their elders ever did. In a world where our fate is held in common, simply learning to manage conflict within the current war system is not enough. Courses on war and arms, which have dominated the long-standing peace education syllabuses, must now stress the complexity of international conflict issues and the integrated agenda for peace. Although perhaps too complex for our youngest, they too must be offered values of tolerance and respect for cultural, religious, and political diversity. Above all, the current and future generations must be taught the skills necessary to solve conflict without violence.

I am talking about nothing less than a revolutionary transformation of the status quo—one that is both necessary and possible. The first step is enabling the coming generation to understand that, in a highly complex and intertwined world, security cannot come from the barrel of a gun. In other words, we have to stop offering our youth—those who trust us to prepare them for the real world—a *might is right* logic. Treating issues such as violence, environmental degradation and poverty as if they are someone else's problem will do little to prepare them for the real world. In the modern world, someone else's problems—sooner or later—become our own problems.

Education must reflect this reality. In essence, this means that learning must also become global in scope and seek to raise up our youths' understanding of the interconnectedness of the modern world. Education must go beyond the mere science of conflict that preoccupies current curricula and aim to create the knowledge, skills, and attitudes that will allow people at all ages and levels to develop the behavioural changes needed to not only resolve violence but also prevent its future occurrence.

For too long, the business of conflict resolution and peace has been left to the experts and assumed too technical for the average person, let alone our youth. But today this is precisely the person that needs it. Today's

challenges are too multifaceted to be left in the hands of politicians. These are the same people who have increased military spending while cutting development assistance to its lowest level in decades. There must be a demystification of the technicalities that obscure the fundamental security issues of our time so that people at all levels are empowered to assess and evaluate the possibilities for change.

The United Nations is at the cutting edge of this effort. The new U.N. Study on Disarmament and Non-Proliferation Education recognizes the crucial link between disarmament and other international issues. It provides specific measures for opening up current curricula to address the complexity of international issues and seeks to raise the level of public engagement through education. The study realizes that the knowledge required by a school-age child in a refugee camp will be different from that needed by a diplomat, but understands correctly that the most effective way to inspire activism, and thus change, is through learning.

There is a strong appetite for knowledge of our world in all its complexity. My students at the University of Alberta provided me with compelling evidence of this. There is a public yearning for understanding of the situation we are in. There is a public hunger to find solutions to the

contradictions and confrontations we face. People want to raise their awareness of violence and how it can be prevented.

Thirty years in public life, as a parliamentarian and a diplomat, working in Canada and in the United Nations system, has convinced me—just as many of you are convinced—that the political process, left to itself, will not bring peace to the world. Politics is driven by the demands of the rich and powerful and responds to the crises resulting from arrogance, greed, and intellectual corruption. The vision and requirements for peace, that you and I so strongly believe in, are too often sublimated by the relentless political surge of the culture of war. We are in the midst of such a surge at this moment, as the final political decisions are being made whether to have war in Iraq.

The war mentality must be confronted head-on in our schools. I call on you, as educators in Canada, and might I say in the world, to meet this challenge. I urge you to extend your work, unpopular as it sometimes might be, to chart a better course for our young people. Students today are growing up in a world of widespread war and violence, terrorism, poverty, and environmental degradation. We must find the ways to teach them solutions that emphasize peace, humanity and equality. In teaching the new generation “how” and not “what” to think, we will open up the political

process to include those it claims to encompass. Your resolve will be the determining factor.