

Culture of Peace: Agenda for a new global civilization

By Anwarul K. Chowdhury

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I am delighted to contribute the first in a series of writings to focus on the broader national and international perspectives on the Culture of Peace which have been initiated by the Ashland Culture of Peace Commission in collaboration with the Ashland Daily Tidings and the southern Oregon community. It is an honor that I cherish deeply.

Peace is integral to human existence — in everything we do, in everything we say and in every thought we have, there is a place for peace. Absence of peace makes our challenges, our struggles, much more difficult. I believe that is why it is very important that we need to keep our focus on creating the culture of peace in our lives to prepare ourselves, to empower ourselves to face the challenges of our lives, individually and collectively.

When we see what is happening around us, we realize the urgent need for promoting the culture of peace — peace through dialogue — peace through non-violence. The culture of peace should be the foundation of the new global society. In today's insecure and uncertain world, more so, it should be seen as the essence of a new humanity, a new global civilization based on inner oneness and outer diversity.

This I have seen firsthand as my work took me to the farthest corners of the world. What I have seen has given me hope and encouragement that there are forces which are determined to turn our planet into a livable place for all. They are working hard to turn all the negative energies into positive ones so that every individual can realize her or his highest potential and live a secure and fulfilling life. I am always inspired by the human spirit and its resilience and capacity to overcome all adversity.

The culture of peace begins with each one of us — unless we are ready to integrate peace and non-violence as part of our daily existence, we cannot expect our communities, our nations, our world to be peaceful. We should be prepared and confident in resolving the challenges of our lives in a non-aggressive way.

Our times require the culture of peace which recognizes that peace not only is the absence of conflict, but also a positive, dynamic participatory process where dialogue is encouraged and conflicts are solved in a spirit of mutual understanding and cooperation. In its foundational documents articulating the culture of peace, the UN, therefore, assert that a key role in advancing the culture of peace belongs to all.

The adoption of the Declaration and Programme of Action on Culture of Peace — adopted by consensus by the General Assembly on Sept. 13, 1999, was a watershed event as an appropriate response to the evolving dynamics of global war and security strategies in a post-Cold War world. It has been an honor for me to chair the nine-month long negotiations that led to its adoption. This historic norm-setting document is considered as one of the most significant legacies of the United Nations that will endure generations. For me, this has been a realization of my personal commitment to peace and my humble contribution to humanity.

On Sept. 7 this year, for the sixth time in a row, the U.N. High Level Forum on The Culture of Peace was convened by the president of the U.N. General Assembly. This daylong annual gathering of the apex intergovernmental body of the United Nation deliberating on peace and non-violence at the U.N. headquarters in New York is an opportunity for U.N. Member States, entities of the U.N. family, media and civil society in discussing the ways and means to promote the culture of peace.

As we build the culture of peace, we should never forget that when women — half of world's seven-plus billion people — are marginalized, there is no chance for our world to get peace in the real sense. It is my strong belief that unless women are engaged in advancing the culture of peace at equal levels at all times with men, sustainable peace would continue to elude us.

To turn the culture of peace into a global, universal movement, basically all that is needed is for every one of us to be a true believer in peace and non-violence, and to practice what we profess. Peace and non-violence should become a part of our daily existence. This is the only way we shall secure a just and sustainable peace in the world.

Connecting the role of individuals to broader global objectives, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. affirmed that “An individual has not started living until he can rise above the narrow confines of his individualistic concerns to the broader concerns of all humanity.”

With initiatives like the Ashland Culture of Peace Commission (ACPC), a lot can be achieved in promoting the culture of peace through individual resolve and action. Its pioneering role could be replicated in other cities. I sense a great interest in the culture of peace beyond the walls of the United Nations. In this context, the very significant contribution made by the Global Movement for The Culture of Peace (GMCoP) representing civil society as a whole deserves international community’s recognition.

Let us — yes, all of us — therefore, embrace the culture of peace for the good of humanity, for the sustainability of our planet and for making our world a better place to live. Each of us can make an active choice each day through seemingly small acts of love, compassion, forgiveness, empathy, cooperation or understanding, thereby contributing to the culture of peace.

—Ambassador Anwarul K. Chowdhury is a former Under-Secretary-General and High Representative of the United Nations. The Ashland Culture of Peace Commission website is www.ashlandcpc.org; like the commission on Facebook at www.facebook.com/AshlandCultureofPeaceCommission; follow twitter.com/AshlandPeace on Twitter. All are welcome to join the ACPC’s Talking Circle at 11 a.m. each Tuesday and Community Meeting at 4 p.m. each Wednesday, both at the ACPC office, 33 First St., Suite 1, diagonally across Lithia Way from the Ashland Post Office.



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