

# **Culture of Peace: The role of human dignity in the culture of peace**

**By Iris Spellings / Global Movement for the Culture of Peace**

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The primary impetus on which the United Nations was founded was to create a new culture — of peace. The word “dignity” is prominently cited in the first sentence of the Charter of the UN, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and included in many other UN documents and resolutions. This should give us a clue as to its considerable significance.

## **I. What is dignity?**

The concept of dignity is used critically in moral, ethical, legal and political discussions to express the idea that a being has an innate right to be valued, respected and to receive ethical treatment. It’s also an extension of the concept of inherent, inalienable rights. Clearly, it pertains to worth, although there is no exact or agreed-upon definition of this worth.

Essential to human dignity is the ability to exert “free will.” Dignity is irreplaceable, and gives value to life.

Understanding dignity’s moral dimension requires us not only to avoid harming, but also to actively assist one another in achieving and maintaining a state of “well-being” for all! As the Sustainable Development Goals emphasize, leaving no one behind ([www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/development-agenda/](http://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/development-agenda/)).

## **II. What prevents dignity? – How can we achieve it?**

Human dignity is known both individually, and collectively. This is interesting — We lose our dignity and belittle ourselves by not respecting the dignity of others; as we respect and acknowledge the dignity of others, we gain it.

Inequalities — whether financial, through poverty, gender or racial — carry the potential of deeply wounding dignity. No one has ever advocated remaining indifferent to the debasement of human dignity. In fact, indignation as a reaction to injustice can open the eyes of the blind.

Devaluation undermines the dignity of all. We are called on to defend and bring forth our own and others dignities. Only by doing so can inequalities be rectified and the foundation for the Culture of Peace be built.

Irritation is incompatible with human dignity, and malice is beneath human dignity. What are nuclear weapons, drones, missiles and guns, but implements of our malice? Remember the UNESCO Constitution: “since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defences of peace must be constructed”?

The power of our thought need not be underestimated. “Energy follows thought” is a fact illustrated in Einstein’s formula  $E=MC^2$ . It is one of our most potent tools, along with mindful speech. Particularly, when it begins to affect public opinion.

Literacy enhances inherent individual dignity and, as Former UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said, “advances the universal goal of peace.”

### III. Why is the role of dignity important in the Culture of Peace?

The Culture of Peace — defined as “a set of values, attitudes, traditions and modes of behaviour and ways of life” (UN Declaration and Programme of Action on Culture of Peace) — is based on loving understanding, goodwill and right relations with all life.

Dignity is, perhaps, the foundation, the key ingredient in this formula, which also includes compassion, empathy, justice, solidarity, respect for diversity, dialog and understanding among other ingredients. It’s a recipe for success, a sure means of creating a more peaceful world, all manifesting within the context of human connections and interrelatedness — not in isolation. Built out of trials and tribulations, amid the turbulence of daily life.

Peace flourishes in harmony. Only through harmony can the beauty of the Culture of Peace be realized. To me, human dignity is an expression of the divine spark, shining and residing in each of us. Made brighter, or diminished by our

actions. The peace of the world rests directly with each one of us. Peace within begets peace without.

“Global efforts towards peace and reconciliation can only succeed with a collective approach built on trust, dialogue and collaboration. For that, we have to build a grand alliance amongst all, particularly with the proactive involvement and participation of civil society and young people ... No social responsibility is greater ... than that of securing peace on our planet” (Ambassador Anwarul K. Chowdhury, Former Under-Secretary-General and High Representative of the United Nations).

This quote emphasizes the essential need for us as individuals and groups, young and old, to work together in a spirit of joy and cooperation. It underscores the noble forward-looking initiative undertaken by you, the people of Ashland who, having established the Ashland Culture of Peace Commission in your community, have thereby lit the way for peace as a beacon of hope in the world. And soon, on 21 September 2018, the International Day of Peace, you will be honored with the World Peace Flame symbolizing just that! Congratulations, Ashland!

— Iris Spellings is the Peace Through Unity Representative to the UN Department of Information, serving the Global Movement for the Culture of Peace.