Pax Forum—Appendix IV
Building Peace: To Understand, So We Can Act
Weekly Summaries: Abstracts

drafted by Arnaud BLIN, Pax Forum Coordination
ablin@beaumarchais.org
http://sympa.alliance21.org/forums/d_read/pax/participants/introductions/forum_coordination.htm

1 (December 6 – 16, 2001)
Participants Question the Concepts of Peace and Violence from a Broad Geocultural Basis

The Forum Coordination invited participants to introduce themselves before the debate opens to provide others with a better grasp as to why people might adopt a certain approach. The forum has assembled great diversity, both in terms of national and regional origins and with regard to social / professional backgrounds. All participants condemned the attacks but agreed that the construction of peace requires understanding the motives of terrorists. One of the questions asked was whether or not terrorism or violence could be considered, in certain cases, as justified, most notably in instances where an oppressed people only has this as its means to fight oppression. In a variety of forms, several participants discussed the idea that peace is defined by the dichotomy that separates the ideal concept of absolute peace and the reality of an imperfect, but attainable peace. All agreed that building peace is a duty that befalls all individuals.

2 (December 17 – 23, 2001)
Can We Turn Conflict into Peace?

New introductions showed this week that the geography of peace is very diverse as new participants hail from all the continents, a majority of them, however, men. All seem in one way or another committed to fostering peace in the world, with many active in work related to social issues. One person is founder of an international center for cooperation and conflict resolution, another devotes his work to nonviolence and education for peace. This week's focus was the problem of terrorism. Several condemned the events that followed the September attacks and raised the question of the legitimacy of violence in general, including when used by a state. This crucial issue raises the problem of democracy: Has it failed to achieve its primary goals? One participant underscored that globalization has fostered unequal development, producing tensions and conflict. Promoting sustainable development under the concept of planetization, he argues, should help to enhance democracy, freedom, and peace. Another thought presented is that, conflicts being inevitable, the major question is how to solve them short of violence. Until the end of January we are expecting your input on the agenda planned from February to June.

3 (December 24 – 30, 2001)
Attempting to Zero in on Solutions to Violence

A French painter, a future priest from Gabon (Africa), a teacher from the Balearic Islands (Europe) and an ordinary citizen from Venezuela (Latin America) introduced themselves to the forum this week. Attempts at explaining the root causes of terrorism pointed, once again, to the enormous inequities produced both by the dominant world economic system and by the high concentration of power in the hands of the few. To some, building a culture of peace is something that appears as possible, to others, it seems a daunting, almost impossible enterprise, but everyone appears to have expectations from this forum. Many see education as being the strongest vector for promoting peace. A number of questions have been raised, which will serve to guide our work from February to June (see below). Your input and comments for the agenda are more than welcome until January 27. And a Happy New Year to all!

4 (December 31, 2001 - January 6, 2002)
Seeking the Feasible Roads to Building Peace

We are witnessing an increasing amount of interactivity, with reactions to previous messages. An issue was raised regarding the necessity for this forum to find a balance between idealistic goals and practical results when trying to attain an understanding of peace and its feasibility. Three new participants introduced themselves: a woman from the Philippines who was previously involved in an underground revolutionary movement, a man from Switzerland who expressed his hope that the forum will produce something more than "bar-room talk," and a man from France who stated that for him, transformation of the world begins with transformation of his life. While concern over the war looming between India and Pakistan is raised, the responsibilities of governments were underscored, along with the question: What can we do to reform them so that they behave rationally to seek peace? A reason to believe that they can do this is that European governments are steadfastly building cooperation in a previously war-torn region.

5 (January 7 – 13, 2002)
To Understand So We Can Act, We First Have to Be Informed

First of all, a warm welcome to Delphine Astier who has joined the Forum Coordination as editor and translator of your messages. Until the end of January, we shall still be publishing your introductions and your statements on post-September 11. You may introduce yourself any time before the end of June, but your introduction is required before any contribution to the debate. In February, we shall open the debate on the first of the next five items on the agenda. Your questions for these five items ought to be submitted now. Throughout the entire debate, you may send us a report on your experience in actions for peace: it could inspire the rest of us to do something similar.
There were four new introductions this week, including three women. Newcomers come from three continents and the following countries: Canada, Spain, United States, and Pakistan. One of the participants witnessed first hand the horrific attack on the World Trade Center.
The main topic of the week touched upon the issue of information and misinformation, and how they affect global human understanding. The question of definitions regarding terrorism and violence was raised once again as was the issue of bad government. The need for a dialogue with scientists rounded up this week's debate.

6 (January 14 – 20, 2002)
The Role of Civil Society in Promoting a Culture of Peace

Six new participants joined the forum from Brazil, France, Spain, Greece and Japan. Among them, two directors of peace organizations, a student, and several people active in non-profit organizations. A seventh participant also introduced itself, the Ecole de la Paix, which on top of its duties as coordinator will also participate in the debate.
This week's debate touched on many topics including the legitimacy (or lack thereof) of war, the problem of clandestine immigration, humanity's blindness before environmental waste, the lack of competent political leadership and problems related to debt and the North-South gap of economic wealth. Questions were raised regarding the use of force employed by the U.S. to respond to what amounts to a crime but not a war. There were other questions regarding the feasibility of a sustainable peace and the role of civil society in promoting a culture of peace. The first item of our agenda is due to close on January 27, after which we shall enjoy our first well-deserved week-long "coffee break."

7 (January 21 – 27, 2002)
So What Do We Do about Violence?

Three newcomers joined the forum this week: a retired engineer from France who does volunteer work at the Ecole de la paix, a former executive member of the Goethe institute from Germany and an agricultural economist working with the FAO in his home country of Honduras. The main topic of discussion this week centered on aggressiveness and violence. What are the roots of violence? How can we make humanity less violent? These were some of the questions posed by participants. The topic of terrorism was also on this week's agenda. The main problem raised concerned our ability to turn this horrific event

into a call for peace. Finally, a participant addressed the issue of the relevance of conventions and treaties, concluding that there is an absolute need to make international agreements enforceable.

8 (January 28 – February 1, 2002)
Resisting against Violence's Becoming Commonplace

(The first "coffee break" week was summarized by Arnaud Blin by mistake, for informal coffee-break conversations were not actually intended to be summarized. There are no summaries of the four other coffee breaks.)

Many participants chose to attend this first "coffee break" session. Many topics were discussed including how different types of inequalities are perceived, how short-term solutions to violent conflict differ from long term peace-building processes, and how human responsibility is a key element in our collective refusal to see violence destroy our hopes for peace.

9 (February 4 – 10, 2002)
Sustainable Development, Survival of the Planet, and Lasting Peace

We are now launching the debate on "Humanity and the Biosphere." Starting at the beginning of last week, and until midnight (GMT) on February 24, we will discuss the following question: What does the way in which we humans relate to our biosphere have to do with building lasting peace? Three new-comers have manifested themselves including, at 82 years of age, the new "elder" of the forum. They are writing to us from Mexico, The United States, and Spain. The debate looks at two related topics, sustainable development and the survival of the planet, and how they are intimately linked to peace. Is it realistic to think that we may become collectively aware of our role in preserving the planet? This is one of the key questions addressed this week. In fact, individual, socially responsible action, NGOs, and civil society may have a greater role to play in fostering environmental awareness and a sustainable future than governments, which, without grassroots pressure, will apply their own agenda: fighting for control over natural resources.

10 (February 11 – 17, 2002)
Peace Is Definitely Related to the Future of the Environment, but What Can We Do about It?

Our sole newcomer this week is a hydraulic engineer. His introduction is timely as water is one of the topics discussed this week. Thought of by many as a source of war, water can act as a force for peace. Like other energy sources, such as solar energy, water is environment friendly. It is part of our future, just as non-renewable resources such as oil, gas and coal should be part of our past. We are all gradually acknowledging that our future, including the future of peace, is linked to the manner in which we manage to protect our environment. This can be done on several levels, macro and micro, global and local. Will this future integrate technological progress, in its positive and negative forms, or should it be conceived as a return to a simpler past where humankind was in greater harmony with its natural environment? These questions and more were raised this week in the debate and through a personal testimony.

11 (February 18 – 22, 2002)
Environmental Awareness Is a Way to Building Peace

This was the last week of discussion on Humankind, the Biosphere and Peace. Three newcomers joined the forum, from Mexico, Paraguay and Belgium. The debate starts with the negative role of politicians in environmental policies and the need to empower simple citizens. Education is once again at the center of this debate. A fundamental question was put to the forum: Is the awakening of a planetary awareness really a path toward building peace? Yes? No? Opinions varied although it was agreed that planetary awareness and sustainable development are fundamental parts of our future. Finally, one participant linked the first two topics of discussion of the forum by sharing with us how she gained a greater sense of environmental awareness through the September 11 events.

12 (February 23 – 24, 2002)

A Holistic Vision of Sustainable Development

Three introductions from India, Spain and Brazil. There was again a general consensus among the participants that our (humankind's) global approach to sustainable development must be strongly altered, if not revolutionized. As a species, we have become out-of-synch with our environment. Several contributors pointed to the fact that sustainable development can only be thought of in a holistic manner. Fixing the economy and global inequities, for example is not sufficient, even if we seriously started protecting the environment. Sustainable development should be thought of as an integral concept. It is not just based on economic and social development with a sensitivity to environmental protection. It must face the problems and setbacks of the human condition. Above all, it must integrate the challenges raised by a new type of governance. A political process of strong will is what will establish new conditions for a dramatic modification of International relations. A long lasting and global peace will not be possible without a more equitable distribution of wealth worldwide. We end this summary with a quote from Ervin Laszlo.

13 (March 6 – 17, 2002)
Economic Solidarity and Fair Trade Are Realistic Instruments for Building Lasting Peace

This is the first summary of the debate on the "Socioeconomy of Solidarity and Peace." We started with a few questions and two new presentations. The debate points to one of the great problems of our time: justice, most notably justice as fairness. In the present economic context, fair trade is a notion that needs to be encouraged and developed. Is the socioeconomy of solidarity an alternative to liberal and neo-liberal conceptions of the economy? Perhaps, if one starts with the premise that one cannot achieve sustainable peace in a society where most people are living in poverty or in the anguish of living in poverty in the near future. Protectionism is back in the news. It has repeatedly shown to be conducive to trade war and worse. In this context, there is a need to develop regulatory organizations like the WTO.

14 (March 18 – 24, 2002)
Is International Trade a Viable Agent of Peace?

The question of whether or not international trade is a viable agent of peace served as the main theme for this week's forum discussion. In general, forum participants agreed that international trade does have the potential to promote peace; however, many also agreed that much progress is needed for this to be widely applicable as an accurate statement. In order for this progress to be made, a balance between effective economic policy and ethical trade practices needs to be attained. A harmonious balance must also be established between the differing economic needs and cultural value systems of all countries within the international trade network. Also lightly touched upon were the issues of oil companies' relationship to international conflict, the possible connection between terrorism and poverty, and clandestine immigration.

15 (March 25 – 31, 2002)
The Theory and Practice of a Socioeconomy of Solidarity

This week's extended debate was in itself extensive. The discussion involved several exchanges among participants and a good mix of theoretical thinking on the one hand, and practical ideas on the other. The general critique of the current state of economics pointed to a great void in our ability to resolve the problem of poverty. Finding a manner by which to build a socioeconomy of solidarity seemed to be on everyone's minds. While some argued about its necessity, others illustrated this by providing practical ways by which to start constructing this type of framework. A couple participants shared with us their experiences in Africa and Mexico, showing that a climate of economic fairness and social tolerance in so-called traditional societies is built out of the most basic social relationship, that existing in the household, then going up in increasingly complex forms to the extended family, the village, and the nation. The role of women, and their ability to create a communal sense of solidarity and peaceful relations also came up.

16 (April 8 – 14, 2002)
The Role of Non-state Actors

This week sees the launch of a new discussion on governance and peace. The old concept of governance has taken on new meaning in the past few years. This new art of "governing without government" is closely linked to our concern for peace, from the village to the planet. It is therefore a very rich concept, which gives us matter for discussion for this new phase of the forum. Since governments have had many shortcomings, are NGOs the answer? Perhaps not, at least not until they reform and become more democratic. Today, the perennial problem of the global management of power is complicated by the presence of a lone superpower. To counterbalance its unilateralism, non-state actors should be given a greater role.

17 (April 15 – 21, 2002)
Good Governance Involves Governments, but Not Just Governments

This second week of discussion on the topic of governance and peace saw a good amount of participation. Topics debated on included bad and good governance, as defined by the levels of democratic processes, and the creation of new models and modes of governance. On this latter point, the idea of a World Parliament of Citizens was offered as a possible alternative. By the same token, the School of Peace discussed its ten years of involvement in the Colombian peace process, which resulted in concrete steps taken by the European community. The word of the week might be that good governance is a process that involves, but is not limited to, governments.

18 (April 22 – 28, 2002)
Bad Governance, Global Governance, and Reforming the U.N.

This is the third and last week's discussion on Governance and Peace. It comes at a time when France has been shocked by the results of the first round of its presidential elections. We pick up where we left off with a discussion on bad governance. Bad governments not only make bad politics but they create a general atmosphere of dishonesty and lust for power that trickles down to all parts of society. In the age of globalization there is a need to reform governance on a global scale. While the idea of a world parliament may be premature, reforming the U.N. appears to be the only realistic solution. Reforming the U.N. starts with internal democratization. The organization of a summit on global governance could launch a general debate that might lead to such reforms. We end the weekly summary with a list of possible proposals.

19 (May 13 – 19, 2002)
Can Education, Ethics, or Religion Make Humans More Prone to Peace Than to War?

After a brief recap of the new topic for discussion, the text delves into the topics raised over the passed week. Proving as intriguing as the question would suggest, this week's participants tackled many of the tough issues at the center of this new discussion. Discussed below is the role of education in the evolution of humankind, and if education does have a role, what should the subject matter be? This last question proves difficult to answer without having an established definition of the goals of humankind. It was suggested that an adequate education should teach individuals about responsibility, critical thought, and building a common future. From there, the discussion moved to the issue of ethics and religion, and what their combination should be in the arena of global consciousness. Perhaps the fact that ethics are still very much associated with particular religious traditions might be an impediment for a world that is more and more diverse and where tolerance is becoming one of the foundations of a nascent global community that is eager to emerge out of its restricted religious or ideological shells. This is not to say that religion should be completely discounted, but rather that its power and effect should neither be underestimated, nor used unwisely or inappropriately when shaping a new balance of global ethics.

20 (May 20 – 26, 2002)
It's Time for Us to Agree on Universal Values

This week saw a high degree of participation. Not surprisingly, there were many responses to last week's discussion on religion and war. Several participants felt that other factors, political or economic, are more fundamental factors of war than is religion. One cause of conflict, fanaticism, comes in many different forms, not just religious ones. Peace is a serious matter, and efforts to establish it should be made accordingly. Since peace is a pragmatic problem, it is on this level that it should be tackled.

Building a culture of peace through education is a first step in that direction. Elements of culture, such as art, also have a role to play, since it is a reflection both of who we are and who we want to be. Science and the media also participate in our perceptions of war and peace, but the media cannot be depended on to foster peace. Finally, the discussion focused on our general will to create a global community with universal values that reflect our cultural diversity and bring all of us together in our common destiny.

21 (May 27 – June 2, 2002)
Human Beings Can Be Educated to Practice a Culture of Peace

A human rights activist from Atlanta, Georgia (USA) introduced herself to the forum this week. The debate, which saw a lot of interaction among participants, focused on education, more specifically on education for constructing a culture of peace. A look at different societies shows varying levels of violence, suggesting that human beings can be taught to change—and adopt a more peaceful outlook. Education starts with children—in the family, then at school—where art and religion can teach them to be flexible in their thinking, tolerant in their ideas, and obedient to the basic rules of ethics. We all share basic values that cut through different cultures. In any case, what these values may be is not as important as learning to practice them. If education starts with children, it should trickle up to the adults, in particular the policymakers who lack imagination, often using simplistic methods without any long lasting effects.