

Alliance for a Responsible, Plural and United World

World Citizens Assembly

Lille - December 2 to 10, 2001

Thematic group

To set up a dialogue between the sectors of society to build peace

This workshop was part of the second stage of the general program of the Assembly. The point was to work on an issue that had been identified during the previous two days. It was to structure and set up a dialogue between the different actors of society to build peace. That dialogue is not limited to the local scale but should also be international. Since that group was new and the participants had never met before, we began the day by a round introduction of one another. The participants were to introduce themselves by telling who they were, what they were doing and give a synthesis of the work of their previous socioprofessional groups. Some also developed ideas on the themes that seemed important to them and which had not sufficiently been discussed in the first stage. The two days were organized into free interventions and work in little groups which would report their conclusions, their suggestions and their strategy of action. Generally speaking, the discussion would start from a global reflection rather than a theoretical one to proceed to concrete suggestions for the future .

Let's begin with a survey of certain of the diverse comments that were made at the beginning of the workshop. Here they are, in a chronological order. The discussion at that moment was quite free.

“ The 20th century is the ecumenist time for Christianity and I hope the 21st century will be the century of ecumenism and cooperation between all the religions. I hope this century will be the century of tolerance . ”

“ We must take our moral stand against war and slaughter for we must stop watching dying people. ”

“ Peace begins with socialization and education. Peace does not mean the absence of war but begins with the equality of persons and the effort to diminish the economic gap and balance. ”

“ People die not only in Afghanistan or Palestine but also in Sudan, but they don't die in front of cameras and the world does not know it. Must it be repeated that war in Sudan has killed 2,5 millions people?”

“ Peace is also related to the sanitary state of populations. The Congo war has already made 4 millions victims. One million have died in Rwanda and 500.000 in Burundi. There has been 3 millions of deaths or war victims in the war in Angola. All those besides the refugees and transported people. Our responsibility is to act to stop war in those African countries. ”

“ To get rid of nuclear weapons is fundamental to take part in the world peace institution. ”

“ There are two great needs : stability and change, two apparently paradoxical themes but which are bound to each other. ”

“ For the lasting development of the world, children must be educated to be responsible. Governments must prohibit multinational companies from producing toy weapons. ”

“ The non acknowledgement by the international community of the aggression of Congo by its neighbouring countries is shocking. Women have been raped by Uganda armed groups who were seropositive. Women are the great victims of the conflict situations. By losing their families, they become very important economic agents who must be integrated into political discussions, negotiations and decision-takings. There is a situation of insecurity due to weapons’ proliferation. A Kalashnikof gun costs only \$100... ”

“ The prevalence of force over right hasn’t been discussed enough these few days. The soldier at the service of right is still necessary . ”

“ Against globalization, the Non-Governmental Agricultural Organisations and all the forces for the improvement of the rural world must unite and seek alliances with other actors of the civil society to make up a social force against neoliberalism. There is a war in South Senegal no one knows about. I want the citizens here to know that it is a cultural problem and I beg them to help us building peace . ”

“ To build peace, we need to tackle the question of the outlying countries’ debt, the question of the problems due to starvation, to health, and land reform. ”

“ Militaries don’t want war, but war results from bad politics. ”

After the introduction of the participants, the leaders tried to extract the gist of the points raised during the introduction so as to be more specific in the discussion. Then the participants added a few other themes they considered important.

List of the primary themes to build peace:

Disarmament and peace

The international community and peace

Right and force

Education

Religion and culture

Tolerance

How to build peace after war and how to integrate former soldiers into the civilian society?

Stability and change

Hardly-considered conflicts

Moral position against war

Peace as the result of equality

Urban violences

The stages of the solution to conflicts

The competences in peace building

The role of women and the youth in peace building

Nationalism and patriotism

The starvation, health and peace issues

The Rights of Man and peace

Socialization and feminization

The next step was to part the workshop into reflection groups in order to begin to sketch out the first elements of the strategies.

The strategy elements for the establishment of a dialogue to build peace.

I. The necessity for the civilian society to restructure the United Nations :

To reform the system of the right of veto in the U.N.O.

To find genuine mechanisms to have efficient solutions.

To suggest a more genuine and ethical commitment from the members and employees of the U.N.O.
The necessity of an efficient and immediately available force. To increase the role of non governmental organisms.
To work on the regional, national and international level.

Comments : 1/ It is important because this selective process starts inside the States. Without ensuring a democratic system in countries, we cannot hope for democracy on an international scale.

2/The creation of new international juridical entities to solve the narcotraffic and terrorist problems. The supranational organisms and the Non governmental organizations should mobilize themselves to develop the civil society in order to give a positive force to the “global village” so that the international organisms and the governments be more watchful. The action of these organisms must not only be a request or an appeal from the countries that are members, but also social demonstrations which genuinely express the voice of peoples. This, to set off a more human, coherent and realistic action of those international organisms in the field of the conflicts in our global village.

II. To abolish conventional weapons and mass destruction weapons

Total world disarmament and end of the fabrication of weapons
The control of weapon smuggling

To take part in different campaigns for nuclear disarmament and against weapons smuggling. The action of the Alliance must be added to the work of other existing entities. A greater participation of citizens in the building of peace.

Comment : to carry out genuine peace, the XXIst century must abolish nuclear weapons and become the century of humanity. The budgets allotted to war must be given to peace education. The countries which want to abolish weapons must stick together to achieve it. The international court condemned nuclear weapons, these condemnations should apply on an international scale.

III. Civil society does not know of the political social problems

Education at all levels: to integrate and commit people and the joint building between the people and the government. Peace messages are not actually efficiently transmitted by the means of communication of the world.

Creation and reinforcement of the alternative means of communication through the Internet, the radio, TV and the written medias at the level of the base community.

Awareness campaign to formal world means of communication in favour of the broadcasting of peace messages.

IV. To ensure the respect of International Agreements

To circulate international agreements in a wording understandable by everyone thanks to the pressure of the Non governmental organisms, academics and base communities..

Comment : the interpretation of the agreements is not equal. It is the Alliance's role to set about controlling and ensuring the respect of the agreements and to study if it is necessary to create new ones.

To give more power to the non governmental organisms and civil society to make the public aware of the respect of the agreements.

V. The role of the medias

Comment : The Hollywood movies show the stereotyped good ones and bad ones using racial, cultural or national categories. Often, the medias are badly in on the subject they are dealing with and twist the information; need to create independent and positive medias.

A role for the Alliance : to find the way and means to put this into practice.

Questions:

1/ How can civil society regulate the Internet ?

2/ Must we use the existing medias and transform them or create new ones ?

To go from the war created by the medias to a peace message thanks to the elaboration of a peace dialogue. In other words: to take over the power from the medias to organise this dialogue. Since war is waged with arms as well as with images, peace medias must be created. For instance: a CNN for peace, a Hollywood for peace. Peace medias must not remain secretive. The dialogue for peace must be media-globalized, which also contributes to show peace as dynamic and exciting.

VI Education

The problem of peace must be tackled in a very realistic way and worked on with concrete examples. One of the possible themes is education.

First general point : the manner in which peace is taught is an essential problem. Compulsory education of children must be legally set up. In most of the developing countries, compulsory education does not exist. The city of Hiroshima for instance, has establishments built in some South East Asian countries. There are thousands of manners to teach peace to children, for example, to visit the museum of peace, summer training for peace, setting up of peace meetings and lectures.

In France, some teachers even use visual aids such as cartoons to show the history of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

Teacher's training. In Viet Nam for instance, the Association of schools of peace provide documents so that teachers can inform themselves and talk about peace.

People talk more and more about the growing influence of a culture of violence on children. The audiovisual medias are partly responsible but the development of the Internet may be even more. The latter is a limitless and uncontrolled way of broadcasting. Essential question : how to face this intrusion of violence in a culture that strives to spread the image of peace ?

Universal education for all. This is the role of the UNESCO and UNICEF. Access to education and control of the curricula. Respect, tolerance, diversity and democracy teaching.

Peace must be dynamic and exciting. Peace must have an image as fascinating as war has had till now.

VII. Tolerance, religion, culture, ethics and moral

Global peace begins with inner peace, spirituality and traditional wisdom. Development of the competences in peace building.

Dialogue is not the last step to peace building. To reach a dialogue, one must act first to prepare people to understand and experience other situations.

Moreover, opportunities must be created for young people to share and try common projects with people from other communities.

One important activity is the revision and rewriting of History, in a way that stereotypes and visions of a subjective history be replaced by a respectful comprehension of the values of the other groups so as to present a many-sided history, so that memory may be a source of understanding rather than antagonism.

The analysis of the causes and consequences of conflicts and violence should be done in a more rigorous and accessible way and be spread through the education of young people and adults.

The education of peace must take into account the levels of thoughts, emotions and sensitivity as well as the individual capacities of action. The education of peace must integrate the knowledge of other situations, challenges, joys and pains and the knowledge of the principles of communal life, to have experienced taking the other's place and established a dialogue and managed to reach a tolerant and respectful agreement.

VIII. Poverty abolishing as a means for peace

Identified problems : racism, North and South relationships, the unbalance of the different powers, the inequality of resources distribution.

Necessity to set up a simultaneous agenda (to act, think and organise.)

Civic strategy :

Empowerment of the citizens against State power. Education must also be capable of producing an alternative language in economics and the medias.

IX. Democracy

Necessity to redefine democracy emphasizing what participatory democracy is.

A few strategies :

To re-educate the Non Governmental Organizations using the Alliance as a means of change

To educate the citizens to the setting up of a responsible and participatory democracy

To set up a system of experiences-sharing

To launch activities to write the history of peoples and multicultural conflicts

To form a group to develop the competences in social movements setting and to reinforce those movements into being actors for a non-violent social change

To manage peace through democracy : to ensure the establishment of democracy from the lowest to the highest level, from the individual to the universal

To back up existing legislation in the field of individual rights

To favour the participation of women in the process of decision taking for the necessary feminisation of power

To support the creation of a responsible and active civil society

The democratisation of the United Nations

To better the designation of governing people and governing methods.

GENERAL COMMENTS ON THE ELABORATED STRATEGIES

- To realise those strategies and support those who realise them, a power is needed (a government and a force to support its policy)

- Idea : The setting up of an observatory made up with non-paid citizens and financed by the United Nations to intervene for the defence of man's rights and to solve conflicts.

- What can be the contribution of the Alliance ? Resources, ideas, groups of citizens, and so on. We can decide on what that particular group can do. Our power is that we are able to develop bounds with social movements and for democratisation. We can benefit from this source of power by assisting those various wheels of power on a national and regional level. Our power is that we have a network of resources.

- History shows that numerous things supposedly impossible became realities. So why not dare ?

We must find ways to transform the governments which are not 'good'. States must represent public interests, not private interests.

- Our duty is to set us up as an alternative power made of the world citizens who choose to become a pressure group. The Assembly must play an active role.
- We must go home and speak to our 'communities.' A very pragmatic suggestion : let us identify together a region that requires urgent action. There, we can show our will to change things. We must remain realistic about our capacities for action.
- Let us spread the idea that the employees of the United Nations should have an experience as militants and activists and not only university training.

The idea of the Alliance is to be PRESENT at big international meetings. Thus, the initiative of the Assembly is extremely good and encouraging for the Alliance.