Building a culture of peace

Building a culture of peace entails unlearning the codes of the culture of war that have pervaded our existence. This means questioning the institutions, priorities and practices of this culture as well as the destructive production, trafficking and use of arms.

It further entails challenging the notion of development based primarily on economic criteria, and challenging different types of injustices, discrimination and exclusion. It also requires us to question the narrow concept of 'security', often measured by the counting of arms and tanks, instead of measuring the level of understanding between peoples.

A culture of peace cannot be imposed; it must be developed through a process and built upon local, regional, and national efforts. With the advent of modern technology and other human advances, the main threats to peace, security and quality of life for the individual transcend national borders and consequently

impress upon all the importance and necessity of a global identity linked to the values of a culture of peace.

To achieve a sustainable culture of peace, democratic participation, good governance and creativity must become the norm. Education for all is the key to achieving democracy in everyday life and a guarantee of a broad basis for recruitment to decision-making positions. Education, both formal and informal, in schools, in the family, through the mass media and social institutions, is the most important process by which people can gain the values, attitudes and behavioural patterns consistent with a culture of peace.

Education is the most important way to promote a culture of peace, provided that the education includes the excluded, is relevant to the different sociocultural contexts, is of high quality, gender-sensitive, encourages interpersonal, intercultural and international dialogue and is based on ethical norms and solidarity.

Often national statistics are not gender-disaggregated, and even when they are, gender differences are not adequately taken into consideration, either in the description of 'reality', or in plans for the future. We speak about the problems of violence in general terms, about criminality and youth gangs, without specifying that, to an overwhelming degree, it is boys and men who are represented in the statistics. Men's life expectancy is lower than that of women, men have more accidents, they fill prisons and top criminal statistics, and are the ones who almost exclusively take decisions that lead to armed conflict and war.

Do we socialize women for a culture of peace (to be caring, sharing, moderate, flexible and communicative) and men for a culture of violence and war (to be tough, over-decisive, forceful and aggressive)? If this is the case, then how can we best change these patterns?

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