

'Peace Education and Culture System' for the Middle East and Beyond

Ada Aharoni

Founder and President of "Ifac Pave Peace" - The International Forum for the Literature and Culture of Peace – www.iflac.com/ada

Introduction: The need of a new "Peace Education and Culture System" (PECS)

Education can provide an important context and key channel for peace culture and the respect and love of humankind and of life. In the light of the recent increase of cultural conflict that we are witnessing in various parts of the world, the promotion of the *unconditional* love of peace, life and of humanity, through education, is of central importance. The dilemmas that face the education system are a microcosm of the contradictions and struggles of society as a whole, and attitudes towards education have an important impact. In trying to establish the dynamics that mark the interplay between education and society, we have to take into consideration that for this symbiotic interplay to take place fruitfully, a transformation of some of the priorities in aims and methods of traditional education is needed.

This article suggests that the major aim in education today should be the creation and establishment of a comprehensive and effective "Peace Education and Culture System" (PECS), which should be channeled throughout all levels of education. Schools, colleges and universities, are suitable forums where personal and national identities, values, ideals, and ideologies are formed. Curricula should reflect the central events and conflicts that mark our era, and address them from the point of view of conflict resolution.

Various researchers, educators and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have created programs, networks and websites to promote various aspects of non-violence. However, the positive impact of these efforts have unfortunately been restricted to small pockets around the world, pockets which form oases of peace in a global desert of a mostly violent culture. What is needed today is a colossal project to spread the "Peace Education and Culture System" (PECS), not only through educational institutions but also to the larger public, as widely as possible. It will promote a collective consciousness based on peace education and peace culture.

The growing boom and expanding dimensions of telecommunications offer various new opportunities and directions for the promotion of peace education and ultimately a humanistic peace culture. These new possibilities have not as yet been fully explored or used enough. Television, print media, radio and Internet play a vital role in forming our views, values and relations. Actions and behavior begin in the mind, therefore the stories we show, write and tell, should be peaceful and constructive ones, not violent and destructive. As the Nobel Peace Laureate, Elie Wiesel, said in his Nobel Prize speech in 1986: *"We are the stories we hear and tell."*

The International Forum for the Literature and Culture of Peace (IFLAC) began planning a huge project in 2007 to help spread the Culture of Peace, in addition to its daily online *IFLAC Peace Digest*.¹ The basis of IFLAC's plan is the foundation of a powerful *Salaam-Shalom Television by Satellite* (SST), and an accompanying *Radio by Satellite* (SSR), for the propagation of PECS. In addition to formal peace research and intensive peace education and peace studies programs, it would include an exciting and attractive agenda not only for children and youth, but also for teachers, parents and the wider public. As it is teachers and parents who are in charge of teaching the children, if they themselves are not peace culture oriented, the children cannot benefit from a significant and substantial peace education. It is planned that the SST will function in three languages: English, Hebrew and Arabic, covering not only Israel and the Palestinian Authority, but also the whole Middle East, and it would ultimately be made available to the whole world.

¹ See www.iflac.com and www.iflac.com/ada for more information about IFLAC.

Foundation of a powerful Salaam-Shalom Television by Satellite

The Salaam-Shalom TV by satellite, will not only intensively cover peace news, but also the various creative arts will play a great role in bringing to life new beliefs, new visions and models of effective collective actions for transforming the world from conflicts to peace, from competition to cooperation, from poverty to the creation of a new quality of life for all.

In the past wars and conflicts in the Middle East, the various sides tended to forget their common humanity and they energetically joined in efforts to kill their "opponents". However, killing will not stop killing, and it may unfortunately lead to a world nuclear war that would destroy the whole of humankind and bring a total nuclear winter to our whole planet. To preempt and prevent this horrific tragedy, all sides must join in an all-out effort to eliminate the deep causes of war, conflicts and terror. The Salaam-Shalom TV will create the conditions to awaken inner and outer peace, as well as a collective conscious creativity, by the new innovative peace education and a new understanding and promotion of peace culture.

The SST will function as "Preventive Medicine," before further wars, destruction and terror bring havoc and tragic calamities again to our much-ravaged region. Human greed, injustice and folly have already ruined many parts of our region and planet and have endangered its future. The most powerful institutions – global corporations, mass media and rich governments – put financial profit first, and not the good of the people. They do not focus on preventing wars and terror and on what will do the most good for the people, but on what will make the most money. The resulting violence, terror, and environmental carnage have been disastrous. All this could be changed conceptually and ideologically through the peace education and peace culture programs of the SST, and SSR, and it could significantly promote the great needed changes on the ground, toward a Middle East and a World beyond war.

War and Peace in Peace Education and the Culture of Peace

The Middle East has a long record of war and of using violence and military means in attempting to settle differences. Nuclear weapons are becoming available worldwide and can be used by irresponsible governments led by jealousy, greed and folly. Leaders and governments should be educated too; they should be taught and should acquire a peace culture so that they can indeed serve the people, instead of wasting their resources on more and more armaments that destroy instead of building.

The SST could vividly demonstrate that killing will only trigger more acts of violence and terror. It will prove to those who hate democracy and are in great fear of it, that democracy can bring prosperity and peace to the whole region and the whole world. It will address those crucial issues in exciting films, research documentaries, interviews, features and analysis, and discussion meetings for all ages, for children, youth and adults.

The Salaam-Shalom TV and Radio, are planned to be still more powerful and encompassing than CNN and Al Jazeera, and they will strive to establish the new crucial "Peace Education and Culture System" (PECS) – through the coaching of youths and adults to be responsible caretakers of our region. It could provide new perspectives for the progress and well being for all people and fair benefits for all. It will strive to foster mutual understanding and harmony among people and nations, and in particular among Palestinians and Israelis. Together, through an open and sincere dialogue they will gradually discover their common humanity, and will succeed to eliminate fear of one another and to overcome the causes for violence, terror and war.

To attain this, a powerful body of international funding should be created, as well as a skillful and consciously interrelated team and executive committee, based on mutual resonance. In addition, there should be international cooperation in the research of cross-disciplinary and multicultural peace studies. This international cooperative effort should be strongly supported and promoted by electronic technology and information services, which could significantly enrich peace education and the creation of a global peace culture.

Recognizing the importance of this new trend, UNESCO convened a conference on "The Impact of Information and Communication Technologies on Teaching and Teachers," to strengthen international cooperation in the pursuit of peace and international understanding (Khvilon & Patru, 1997). Many more laudable conferences of this kind should be convened and organized regionally and internationally.

Peace Education Researchers

Various research programs, courses and workshops on these subjects have been carried out by peace researcher Elise Boulding (1995), and in Brock-Utne's various peace education and peace culture research studies (1985). An additional example is the outstanding work carried out by Professor Ian Harris for the teaching of non-violence, conflict resolution and peace education in Milwaukee Public Schools, and at the University of Wisconsin (Harris, 1995), and in his book *Peacemaking* (2002). Various NGOs, such as the Israel-Palestine Center for Research and Information (IPCRI) and IFLAC, have also presented peace research at conferences and workshops, such as a recent conference organized by IPCRI and the Center for Peace Education Research at Haifa University, and the Peace Conferences organized by IFLAC in the Galilee, Israel in 1999, in Sydney, Australia in 2001, in London, England in 2002, in Bursa, Turkey in 2003, and in Los Angeles in 2005. The research presented at those conferences developed new content, curricula, and peace values, in peace education and peace studies, and they inspired and influenced various aspects of peace culture, that can be used in the forthcoming new Peace Education System.

The Function of the SST and SSR

The SST and SSR will function technically and content-wise, according to the highest professional and humanistic standards, and they will address the various ethnic entities of every creed and culture in the region. They will provide a way for all cultures and all people to tap the best in their thinking, values and faiths, and channel them toward the development of the innovative PECS, intended to function as an all-encompassing Peace Education and Culture System.

Today, all world leaders, institutions and media should urgently organize and act toward the foundation of the Salaam-Shalom TV and Radio by Satellite, that will oppose violence with nonviolence and will spread a reverence for life and for humanity – according to Martin Luther King Jr.'s, and Mahatma Gandhi's effective ideologies and proposed solutions. The SST and the SSR, following the ideologies and precepts of all great peace leaders, will put "The Golden Rule" at the basis of their peace education and peace culture agenda – "*Do unto others, as you would have them do unto you.*" They will provide a chance for people of all creeds in the region to air their views and their ethical and moral values as well as their reverence for life and humanity – through excellent films, visual explorations, group dialogue, and the relating of peace stories and historical examples of solidarity towards peace, poems and deeds, by top peace writers, poets and story –tellers, from all cultures, creeds and ethnic identities.

To further the foundation of the SST and SSR and to help create a successful PECS, all those who are able to command media attention have a special obligation to research and examine the present cultural crisis and develop ways and methods toward its possible solution. The present education and culture system, as well as the mass media today, have a sacred obligation to adopt a peace education and peace culture orientation, for they are the mouths, eyes and ears of the public, and they often form its consciousness. They should carefully and dutifully adopt and carry out the following four crucial factors:

1. Feature not only problems, but also solutions to the problems.
2. Headline cases of peaceful development and progress in human endeavors that replace: hate, fear, jealousy and greed - with: honesty, love, understanding, and care.
3. Give recognition and attention to people, institutions and projects that eliminate violence, terror and poverty, and foster peace culture, understanding and a love of life.

4. Use mass communication to inform and enlighten us and show a New World being born here and now.

The Daily "Hour for Peace Culture"

In addition to the foundation of the SST and SSR by satellite to promote the new innovative PECS, every existing TV and radio station in the region should program a daily "Hour for Peace Culture." The presenter could state at the beginning of the program, "In this hour for peace let us join our hearts and minds, each in our own way, with commitment to peaceful thoughts and actions today and every day." This would be followed by the sound of a Peace Culture Bell and appropriate music. In addition, with the media's active cooperation, each 21 September, the "Global Peace Day", should provide a great Peace Culture holiday in the whole of the Middle East, with worldwide participation by people of every creed and culture. These powerful events will inspire further development, progress and actions for the new PECS and the SST and SSR.

The Unison of Peace Forces and Guidelines

Thousands of NGO's and group projects are already working for peace between Palestinians and Israelis and for peace in the Middle East and in the world. Their unison can dramatically increase their mutual impact. The unifying around the creation of a powerful global campaign for the foundation of the PECS, the SST and the SSR, will reinforce a much needed life support system in our region, and promote a sustainable global human future. To succeed in such a gigantic project, the following guidelines have to be taken into account and carried out:

1. Peace education and the culture of peace, counteracting violence and war, should be a top priority in governmental planning, all over the world, as it has become evident that conflicts and wars are caused not only by territorial claims, but also have a cultural basis. A document to promote peace education and peace culture should be prepared, and it should be presented to the UN.
2. The development of a new PECS should be made part and parcel of intercommunications at all levels, as well as an integral part of the curriculum materials in the educational systems from kinder-garden through university.
3. Research institutions for Peace Culture and the Culture of Peace should be founded. The research could benefit the various levels of education, by the publication and production of peace materials, and the generating of a new literature of peace, using modern technologies.
4. Departments of Peace Studies should be nationally and internationally established and empowered. These could promote the publication of periodicals and journals, including online Peace Journals, videos, etc.
5. Peace grants for research and the encouragement of the writing of peace literature, film-scripts, plays, and all creative arts and music, as well as the presentation of awards and prizes, could have an advantageous and high payoff.
6. The translation of major peace literature would constitute an important step forward towards the creating of understanding, openness, and acceptance of a flourishing multicultural new era of peacemaking throughout the world.
7. Exciting peace books, cassettes and videos for all ages should be produced, presenting the various themes and aspects of peace, as for instance, the recently published book and ebook, entitled *Peace Flower* (Rowe Publishing, London), for young and old.
8. International Peace Education and Peace Culture Conferences and events should be organized and conducted according to the principles of cooperation and collective work projects. These events should be coordinated in time and space, and conducted in different countries, and continents, as catalyzes of new levels of cooperation and a new quality of life.

Conclusion

Humankind will obviously become what our education and culture will be. The key lies in what we imagine and envision it to be, and in the ways we will go about to create it. Through the fostering of

a new Peace Education and Culture System – including the SST, the Salaam-Shalom TV and Radio by Satellite – we can be brought to imagine and to achieve previously unimagined possibilities. This model should be spread all over the world as the “World Peace Culture TV and Radio by Satellite.”

One of the major purposes of a flourishing peace education and culture by satellite is to advance and develop a global consciousness that will enable us to function and create not only as citizens of our various countries, but also as global citizens. A true and effective peace education and a culture of peace, entails the transformation of the present human condition where violence, conflicts, wars, and hunger are rampant, by changing social structures and the patterns of thought that have created it. With the development of the dangerous cultural conflict in our region and our world today, not only our future, but also our present depends on this revolutionary transformation.

It is obvious that violence in most cases arises from ignorance – mainly, the failure to understand the oneness of humankind, and the mistaken notion that force is the only way to solve conflicts. An influential Peace Education and Peace Culture are therefore a crucial necessity in the Middle East and in today's world. By joining hands of all peace forces and researchers through PECS and the Salaam-Shalom TV and Radio by Satellite, we can indeed change our present cultural crisis in the Middle East and in the world, toward a new peaceful beginning for humanity.

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AUTHOR Short Bio

Professor Ada Aharoni is a peace culture researcher, writer, poet and lecturer. She writes in English, Hebrew and French, and has published twenty-five books to date that have been translated into several languages. She believes that culture and literature can help in healing the urgent ailments of our global village, such as war, conflict, and famine, and the themes of peace and conflict resolution are major ones throughout her works. She studied at London University and the Hebrew University, where she earned her degrees in Literature and Sociology. She lectured at Haifa University, the Israel Institute of Technology (Technion in Haifa), and at the University of Pennsylvania, where she received her Professorship. She is the Founder – President of IFLAC: The International Forum for the Literature and Culture of Peace. She is the Honorary Theme Editor of the UNESCO EOLSS – The Encyclopedia of Life Support Systems. She has been awarded several International Prizes, and was elected one of the “100 Global Heroines” in Rochester, New York (1998).

Prof. Ada Aharoni

Founder of the SST and IFLAC

The International Forum for the Literature and Culture of Peace

iflac@bezeqint.net www.iflac.com/ada www.iflac.com www.groups.yahoo.com/group/IFLAC

Tel. 972-4-77-3202818