

Cora Weiss speech at the General Assembly High Level Forum, Culture of Peace

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As delivered

WE'VE GOT TO GET FROM A CULTURE OF VIOLENCE TO A CULTURE OF PEACE

Mr. Secretary-General, Last week you called for an end to nuclear testing as a step to the abolition of nuclear weapons; you have called for the resolution of disputes by peaceful means, not by military might. We thank you.

The United Nations has decreed an end to slavery, colonialism, and apartheid. It has unanimously called for a Culture of Peace. Its mission is to "save succeeding generations from the scourge of war". It is time to abolish war.

Mr. President, thank you, and your advisors, for opening space for civil society to participate in the conferences you have convened.

Federico Mayor, we have worked together for peace for many years. We cannot stop now.

Ambassadors, friends, I will repeat some of the things we have heard this morning, because repetition is the best form of advertising.

The recipe for a Culture of Peace has many ingredients. Of course education, as everyone has said. But it must include peace education. And equality, equality between women and men. We need full implementation of SC Res 1325 on Women, Peace and Security. Without women at all peace and decision making tables the decisions will be ineffective. Subsistence undermines democracy.

Some of the threats to a Culture of Peace can be reduced if governments and civil society cooperate.

-Poverty: The gap between the poor and everyone else is obscene and inexcusable. Poverty is a form of violence. It contributes to greater violence and can be prevented and cured.

-Resource wars: Extracting the world's remaining hard-to-mine resources will contribute to environmental damage, reduction of farm land, corruption, and affects local communities and displaces people.

The exploitative nature of extractive industries sows greater instability. "Only by developing renewable resources, and abandoning the race for what's left can we hope to avoid calamity on a global scale," says Prof. Michael Klare. (The Race for What's Left, the global scramble for the world's last resources. Michael Klare, Metropolitan Books, 2012)

- Global Warming makes climate change. The concentration of carbon dioxide is responsible for rising sea levels, floods, and drought, and is damaging to public health and social stability. We will see hunger wars, and new environmental refugees will lead to violent conflict.

- Military Spending and Weapons Proliferation: The Culture of Peace cannot survive bloated military budgets that soak up funds for human security, nor the proliferation of weapons— nuclear weapons, unregulated small arms, drones, bombers, and more. Nations have a right to defend themselves, of course. But to devote \$1.7 trillion to preparing for war is indefensible and in conflict with priorities the United Nations has approved. The world is suffering from terrible violence of hatred. We cannot drop freedom, democracy or gender equality in bombs.

-Inequality and Violence Against Women: Another threat to peace is documented by a professor who writes, "...the best predictor of a state's peacefulness is not its level of wealth or level of democracy... it is its level of violence against women. (Sex and World Peace, Valerie Hudson, pg.205) "The larger the gap between men and women the more likely a nation is to be involved in intra and interstate conflict..."

There are other threats to peace, of course. But there's also good news:

-India and Pakistan have signed a new visa agreement;

-Peace talks between the FARC and Colombia will take place in Oslo. Cuba, Venezuela and Chile worked together to make these welcome peace talks happen after over 50 years of armed violence.

-Most UN departments and agencies have contributed to a Culture of Peace in much of the world. UNDP in Sudan is working to reintegrate refugees, helping local people build schools and community centers to prevent further violence.

-The Non Violent Peace Force is helping create Women Peacekeeping Teams in South Sudan, moving from a culture of violence to a culture of peace. They connect communities with social workers, health care providers and police and have reduced the incidence of rape. We must not make war safe for women.

-The Global Network of Women Peace Builders implements a localization training of SC Res1325 in Burundi, Colombia, Nepal, Philippines, Sierra Leone

and Uganda. Their bottom-up approach to policy making brings mayors, police, tribal leaders, teachers and women together to learn how to adapt 1325 to resolve conflicts peacefully. In violence torn Kalinga Province, the Philippines, they practice the Bodong, an ancient conflict mediation and peace process. It is run by 24 elderly men. Never was a woman welcome until they saw the success of the localization training and they immediately invited 2 women to join the peace process.

To achieve a Culture of Peace we should take the following three steps:

1. Adoption by the UN of a Convention on Nuclear Weapons is the best step to a nuclear weapons free world. A more robust Arms Trade Treaty is needed, and a new Security Council Resolution on Children, Youth and Peace Building is essential if we want young people who know the horror of war to have ownership in building peace. Women and young people must be part of peace processes. Accelerate the end of poverty. We need a resolution on the Right to Peace.
2. Emphasize education, and learn how to integrate peace education into all national educational systems and teacher training schools. It must be participatory, with critical inquiry and reflection.

A Culture of Peace will be achieved when citizens of every nation understand global problems; have the skills to resolve violent conflict constructively; know and live by international standards of human rights, gender and racial equality, appreciate cultural diversity and respect the integrity of Earth. Such learning requires education for peace.

3. Close the gap between women and men. SC Res on Women, Peace and Security was unanimously adopted 12 years ago. It has not been fully implemented. Article 25 of the Charter says that members agree to carry out out decisions of the Security Council. Let's see something happen. When you leave this room, discuss what you have heard. Imagine how your country can benefit from a Culture of Peace and what you can do to help foster it.

And to my colleagues in civil society, no matter what you do in life do one thing for peace. People learn through civil society. Engage your organizations in conversation. Promote peace education in your schools...learning for and about human rights, gender equality, non violence, disarmament, and traditional peace practices. Object when you see decision-making carried out by men only. Unless they are men for peace and justice and gender equality.

I believe that a culture of peace is our future, and the United Nations can help ensure it takes root and thrives. Thank you.