

## **EDUCATION FOR PEACE**

**ECOSOC High-Level Segment 2002  
Ministerial Roundtable Breakfast on “Education for Peace”  
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Prepared by UNU**

1. Humanity has reached a staggering paradox: Unprecedented wealth and technological innovation coexist with untold suffering and deprivation. In September 1999 the Secretary-General of the United Nations, Kofi Annan, stated in his speech to the UN General Assembly that: “we leave a century of unparalleled suffering and violence”. In that context he raised a number of issues not always at home in the United Nations, questioning the concept and practice of state sovereignty and arguing that the international community must move from a culture of reaction to a culture of prevention in the manner in which it collectively addresses common problems. International terrorism at the scale we experienced for the first time on September 11, 2001 makes such change even more urgent. Education for peace can and must play a crucial role in achieving a culture of prevention, of tolerance and non-violence and eventually a culture of peace as advocated by UNESCO.
2. Conflicts often originate from the inability of people of communities, to negotiate and settle their disagreements by peaceful means. The recourse to force and violence can seem the only way to settle a dispute. Such a recourse appears even more an option when people in dispute have only a fantasized idea of each other. Situations and people that we do not know or understand are more likely to generate fear than those we comprehend. Lack of comprehension and the inability to put recognizable thoughts and words to recognizable situations tend to be frightening. People and decision-makers in situations of adversity, anticipating the worst from the unknown, are often lead by fear to choose war over peace, violence over reconciliation. Knowledge, contrariwise, has a domesticating, humanizing effect. It brings home the reality of the other without making it a source of fear. When knowledge softens the unsettling character of the unknown, situations triggering violence are less likely to arise. Rather than generating actions focusing on the divide, on the gap between “us” and “them”. Knowledge focuses on the bridge, on the sense of community.
3. Knowledge not only helps to diminish fear and the risk of violence, it also invalidates prejudice as a way of relating to a situation. Contrasting knowledge and prejudice is essential. Prejudices are more than false or misguided knowledge. They are in fact both expressions and tools of violence and war. Violence is not an accidental by-product of prejudice. It is one of its mechanical effects. Prejudice is part of a programme of violence. Knowledge, however, for the reason that it humanizes, is both pacifying and dignifying. Whereas prejudice downgrades and brings out the worst in humankind, knowledge, leading to understanding, tries to upgrade and enhance humankind.
4. Sound analysis and right actions cannot be based on wrong premises. No durable peace is likely to be generated out of fear and prejudice. Knowledge alone provides a sound basis for analyzing a tense situation and addressing what ought to be done to promote peace. Learning to understanding people coming from very different and diverse geographical, cultural, and socio-economical backgrounds, in short from different civilizations other than that in which one has been raised, socialized and educated, is therefore at the heart of any

sincere dialogue, of any successful effort to understand. Dialogue among people should be a carrying forward of the best that different civilizations have contributed over history to humankind.

5. As far as education for peace aims at mobilizing the present and future generations for peace, some conclusions can be drawn from the foregoing which might deserve some in-depth discussion during the roundtable and thereafter:
  - “education for peace” should be present in all education; rather than a different subject or discipline at some stage, it should be a perspective which gets attention wherever meaningful and appropriate throughout the educational programmes; it can, however, also be a “holistic” project in programmes for different age groups, bringing together knowledge from different subjects or disciplines;
  - “education for peace”, therefore, must be part and parcel of all education, formal and non-formal, regular and non-regular, face-to-face or distance education;
  - “education for peace” is cognitive, as well as affective in character, contributing to a better understanding of the wealth of cultural diversity of humankind and to a behaviour based on tolerance and mutual respect;
  - “education for peace” thus will contribute to all four levels of learning as defined in Jacques Delors’ report “Learning: the Treasure from Within”: learning to know, to understand, to do and to be” (i.e. live a meaningful life, worthwhile to live);
  - “education for peace” takes on an extremely urgent character in areas experiencing violence or just coming out of violence: next to common issues like the “rule of law”, democracy and good governance, highest importance must be given here to reconciliation;
  - “education for peace” should give worldwide attention to issues of reconciliation between countries and peoples which have a long tradition of war and conflict: mutually accepted projects of screening schoolbooks within the framework of UNESCO or maybe regional institutions might help to open up a common future for future generations, instead of continuing spirals of hatred.
  - “education for peace” leads to a reformulation of the programmes of primary and secondary schools, as well as tertiary institutions of learning; to bring in the “peace” perspective in all education also asks for adaptation of teacher training programmes.
  - “education for peace” needs to make an optimal use of the contributions NGO’s and the media can make.