

Culture of Peace,

International Day of Peace and Global Ceasefire

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Culture cultivates.

It is the medium that nourishes shared values and belief, aesthetics, taste, virtue, and common sense. Ideas are thinkable or not depending upon what the culture allows. Culture says whether war and violence make sense or whether they are horrors beyond the boundaries of rational thought.

September 21, the International Day of Peace and Global Ceasefire, is the day when the world will take a step closer to that moment when war and violence become distant memories. September 21 is the day when they become known for the death dealing unnecessary evils that they are. This is the day when the world will think about a transformation from a culture of violence and war to a culture of peace for the sake of the health of the world. The countdown to September 21 has begun.

We live today in a culture of violence. It is a hierarchical, power over culture. It is a culture of domination. "Do what I tell you to do or I will beat you up." We speak about what we will allow and what we will not. (The world will allow genocide in Darfur, but it will not allow Iran to obtain nuclear weapons.) This is the message that nation states convey to each other through threats of war and economic sanctions.

This is the message all too many men give to women, parents give to children, and children give to each other. Employers tell employees to conform to the corporate culture or suffer. They cannot move forward or they may be asked to leave.

The violence may be physical or psychological or both. We live in a culture that allows both personal and structural violence as long as we make an argument that the violence is justified. And we can always find a justification, even if the reasons turn out to be lies that give us what we want. As Martin Luther King observed more than 40 years ago, our value system is all too often racist (think beyond black and white) materialistic and militaristic. Such grows from a culture of violence.

In a culture of violence, the language of war and victory in war makes sense. Peace people are pushed to the margins of public discourse as unrealistic. However, a culture of peace cultivates a logic whereby we understand that the moment we resort to violence, any kind of violence, even and especially the extreme violence of war, we have already failed. We have already suffered defeat. The question becomes: how deep, how costly, how long lasting is the defeat? Dominique de Villepin, French Foreign Minister during the months before the Iraq War was correct when he said: "war is always the sanction of failure."

It is a failure of communication, diplomacy, truth telling, critical thinking, compromise, and respect for the humanity of the enemy. War is a toxin that poisons the global body politic because local and global violence are connected.

Homicide is one of the leading causes of death in the United States. Public health experts now consider violence as a public health problem. Understood as such, researchers can study risk factors and protective factors. Violence is not a response that is encoded into human DNA. It is learned. It is cultivated. According to the World Health Organization, income inequality is a primary risk factor for violence.

Thus, when the economic resources of a nation go to feed a military-industrial complex and not to feed its people, or give them decent housing, or health care, or education, or to improve the nation's

infrastructure, income inequality creates an environment that invites violence. And the whole world suffers.

So, on September 21, the International Day of Peace and Global Ceasefire will call attention to these facts, and peace advocates will invite ordinary people from around the world to make peace in the part of the world where each one stands – in their own homes and communities. It will invite people to turn away from a culture of violence with its emphasis on power over others and turn to a culture of peace with an emphasis on shared power.

This will require a logic of generosity and sharing, both of spiritual and material resources that will open the door to the possibility of peace. “May peace prevail on Earth.”