

Thematic Session: Culture of Peace and the Earth Charter
Example of Culture of Peace at the Global Level
Amsterdam, 7 November 2005
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I am going to describe to you the experience of the United Network of Young Peacebuilders' work at the global level with the Decade for a Culture of Peace and Non-Violence.

The UNOY Peacebuilders is a global network of over 400 young people and youth organisations active in the field of peacebuilding. Our International Secretariat is based in The Hague where 15 youth volunteers run the activities. Our goal is to empower young people's local capacities for peace and increase their effectiveness. Since 1993 UNOY Peacebuilders has promoted the idea of a Culture of Peace and in 2003 we started the campaign Peace It Together. This is a global campaign with local emphasis. The campaign is action-based and encourages the sharing of knowledge, skills and experiences. It empowers youth in order that they might work with the UN, the media, government, other organisations and friends to develop actions in the context of the decade for a culture of peace. UNOY has been active in various ways during the first half of the decade. The spectrum of activities includes developing global and regional networks of young peace-builders; organising conferences and training seminars in the fields of peace-building, conflict transformation, campaigning and project management; empowerment for action including developing toolkits and practical research. Within the context of this campaign we became coordinators of a group of youth who went to the UN to advocate for a culture of peace. Here I would like to explain to you the process leading up to this action and the successes that were achieved.

In 1999, resolution A/53/243 was passed unanimously by the member states of the UN. This called for the UN, Member States and civil society to strengthen a global movement for the Culture of Peace. From then, annual resolutions have specifically asked for the actors within the global movement to make a report of their progress at the Mid-Decade point. As a result, last year, David Adams from the Decade Office of Fundacion Cultura de Paz, started to identify organizations in different regions of the world to collaborate in putting together such a report for civil society.

The global movement for a culture of peace is advancing. This is the conclusion of most organizations from around the world, when they reported on the progress toward a culture of peace during the first five years of the decade. It is documented in over 3000 pages of information by 670 organizations from over 100 countries. Hundreds of photographs illustrate culture of peace activities, showing a picture of children, women, men, working, playing, celebrating, demonstrating, engaging in thousands of activities that promote life, cooperation, solidarity, hope, commitment to change and improve their lives and the lives of others, a view of the culture of peace that is not found elsewhere in such a global and all-encompassing vision. A summary report was written with the assessments of progress and obstacles summarized by region. There is also a two-page summary of advice to the UN which addresses all eight programme areas for the culture of peace.

However, it proved much harder to distribute this report to Member States and the UN, than expected. There were a series of unsuccessful diplomatic initiatives for instance

- It proved difficult to work with UNESCO even though they were writing a similar report.
- Likewise, it was difficult to obtain an answer from the Secretary General, Kofi Annan about incorporating the principal findings into the Secretary General's report to the General Assembly. In the end the only response was a 1 page reflection from the 12 pages submitted.
- Neither could the UN office of NGOs provide any help.

UNOY Peacebuilders became involved in this initiative because David Adams approached us to be in charge of encouraging civil society in Africa to sign up and fill out the questionnaire for the report online. This is because we have a large network of youth peace builders in Africa.

We met with David Adams at several events during this summer and decided to work together in distributing the report to the UN and Member States. We thought that it would have more impact if youth

would take the lead to promote this Civil Society Mid-Decade Report. From the 1st till the 14th October, 7 youth participated in this lobby action at the UN in New York.

We had two days of training in order to gain lobbying and advocacy skills especially relating to the UN system, taking advice from Professor Alicia Cabezudo, Educating Cities, and Cora Weiss, Hague Appeal for Peace; We learnt more about the history of a Culture of Peace from David Adams, and a strategy plan was produced on how we should tackle the next two weeks, including discussing putting together information folders and letters for each country mission, a media plan and deciding which specific people to talk to.

From the third day onwards, the main goal was to contact as many Permanent Missions to the UN as possible, and to inform them about the Decade of a Culture of Peace in general, but with special focus on the Civil Society Mid-Decade report, and to ask them for their support and commitment. Our requests were the following: We wanted to see the Civil Society Mid-Decade Report published as an official UN-document. We wanted as many countries as possible to make a statement on the 20th October 2005 in the General Assembly mid-decade evaluation session, on behalf of the report. We wanted to convince as many missions as possible to co-sponsor the resolution. We wanted to submit an amendment to the draft resolution, emphasizing more civil society's contribution to the decade and mentioning the civil society report. We wanted a general discussion about 'a culture of peace' and furthermore, ways that individual countries could support the decade's next 5 years.

In these two intensive weeks, we made about 700 phone calls, sent around 100 Faxes, visited 48 representatives from the Permanent Missions to the UN and another 69 Permanent Missions were contacted via telephone, Fax or front office-conversations. In many cases, we were given an audience with the Ambassador. We also had a meeting with Ambassador Chowdury, Under-Secretary General for Least Developed, Landlocked and Small-Island developing States and a quick exchange with Jan Eliasson, Head of the General Assembly. We even had a public event at the end of our two weeks where an audience of around 60 people were told about the civil society report, hearing specific examples of organizations and individuals working towards a culture of peace. This event officially launched the report.

No one expected that this action would be such a success. But on the 20th October, while watching the live web cast of the general assembly session, which was dedicated to the evaluation of the Decade, we could become witnesses of our own achievements.

- The progress towards a culture of peace being achieved by civil society and their important role for the future was recognized by many of the speakers, and five speakers recognized, in particular, the Civil Society Report.
- Bangladesh, which takes responsibility for the annual culture of peace resolution, stated, "We are particularly thankful to the civil society. These include the NGOs and the young people. Their enthusiastic support to this cause has made a huge difference. Our special thanks go to the Fundación Cultura de Paz for their commendable work in compiling a report on the progress achieved by over 700 organizations from over 100 countries, including my own. We urge all of them to continue their good work."
- The European Union stated, "The European Union pays particular tribute to "The United Network of Young Peacebuilders", a global network of young people and youth organisations active in the field of peacebuilding. Their work is an example to us all, and evidence of the significant role that civil society can play in advancing a culture of peace."
- Bangladesh agreed to submit a letter to the Secretary General's Office to make the civil society report into an official UN document as a result it will now be translated into 6 languages and widely distributed.
- The amendment the youth asked for in the draft-resolution was submitted and accepted.
- The number of co-sponsoring countries to the resolution rose from 66 in 2004 to 105 this year; among the new co-sponsors were many of those countries, whose missions we visited!

The task for the future is how to use this momentum to develop strategies on how to proceed. We agreed that our activities need a follow-up. We want to continue working on these issues, and even more we want to show the UN, that we are taking them and their promises seriously and will have a strong eye on their activities during the remaining second half of the decade. We will try to build on the processes that happened in New York, by having more such advocacy initiatives. We are considering making this an annual action until 2010 at the UN, but we also need to come up with similar initiatives elsewhere in the world. We see this as a process of developing leadership for the Global Movement, passing on the knowledge and experience from one generation to another.

This action has been a great success. It is a reason to believe in the power of civil society, in the power of the combined commitment and action of individuals everywhere in the world working towards the same goal: building sustainable peace by living and creating a culture of peace. We see the Earth Charter and the Decade for a Culture of Peace as interlinking ideals. We urge that both work closer together and that individuals and organizations that are committed to the Earth Charter or Culture of Peace are committing to both. Let us work to bridge them together and build together a united world.

For more information please visit: www.decade-culture-of-peace.org