



Climate Change and Peace

“...Extensive climate changes may alter and threaten the living conditions of much of mankind. They may induce large-scale migration and lead to greater competition for the earth’s resources. Such changes will place particularly heavy burdens on the world’s most vulnerable countries. There may be increased danger of violent conflicts and wars, within and between states.” Portion of the Citation awarding the Nobel Peace Prize, October, 2007, to Al Gore and the International Panel on Climate Change (IPCC).

There is a growing realization and sense of urgency, in both governments and civil society, that we must collectively respond to the challenge of climate change. Social justice is now, generally seen, as a key variable in achieving environmental sustainability and a livable planet. However, often forgotten is the third critical variable in this equation, a sustainable peace. Just as we must support sustainable ecosystems and sustainable socio-political systems, so must there be support for the creation of a sustainable architecture of peace. Without an ability to transform conflict by peaceful means, we will be unable to create just societies or positively transform our relationship to the natural world and our life-support systems. Responding to climate change requires that, as a species, we rapidly evolve to full maturity or simply perish along with countless other experiments in Nature that failed. While the environmental and social justice movements express the rallying cry of, “no justice, no peace,” peace is never clearly defined, but seen as an outcome, rather than a dynamic variable that conditions and helps to determine that outcome.

The potential for violent conflict is dramatically increased by: water, land, oil, and mineral depletion, food scarcity, environmental and economic migrants and the increasing disparities of wealth both within and between countries. Water wars and human displacement are already occurring and the scale is accelerating, with estimates of up to one billion climate change refugees. Water scarcity is already the most visible and profound climate change threat to developed and developing countries. If methodologies that mitigate against violent conflict are not utilized and, without an ethic of equitable sharing of the Earth’s resources and the redistribution of wealth, it will likely be impossible for responses to climate change to be effective. The entire project could well descend into a cataclysm of violence and destruction through competition over increasingly

scarce resources and viable living space. This is well-recognized by the Nobel Peace Prize Committee in the quote above and the rationale for giving the peace prize to climate stabilization efforts.

The good news is that there are proven peacebuilding methodologies developed by both governments and civil society organizations (CSOs) for the prevention, mitigation and transformation of conflict by addressing the root causes of violence. We speak here of such work as that of Johan Galtung and TRANSCEND, the Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict (GPPAC), and that of Dr. Mary-Wynne Ashford and Physicians for Global Survival. More generally, Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) and Nonviolent Communication (NVC) provide models for dialogue leading to problem solving and reconciliation, rather than escalation and violence.

It is violence that we wish to prevent, not conflict. When conflict observes the rules of empathic listening, respect and recognition of the legitimacy of all interests and a level playing field in terms of resources needed to present each interest, conflict becomes creative and provides the energy for positive change.

Indeed, with reference to the crisis of climate change, it is generally agreed by anthropologists that the great transformations in the history of *homo sapiens* - the agricultural and industrial revolutions - arose out of the problem of food and resource scarcity and the limits of a given type of socio-economic adaptation to provide for growing populations. We are again at a tipping point in the post-industrial world with the global warming crisis. On the one hand, there is the emerging sustainability revolution, but, on the other hand, there is the ominous rise of political and religious fundamentalisms and an increasing resort to military solutions. Militarism and the arms industry are the greatest destroyers of people, their communities and infrastructure. They are the chief vehicle of environmental degradation and resource depletion. In 2006, the nations of the world spent 1.2 trillion dollars on their militaries. The nuclear danger has also increased as nations increasingly normalize nuclear weapons as integral parts of their war-planning strategies.

Most of this build-up is justified in the name of national security. Yet we know that terrorism and insurgencies are aggravated by this posture, in particular, the perverse strategy of pre-emptive strike. Such policies put the whole world on alert, create fear, and fail to build the conditions needed to build true security. What then is the true meaning of human security and how is it achieved?

Expanding on the work of then Swedish Prime Minister Olaf Palme, true security is what he referred to as common security, containing the following values and goals:

- to promote and fully guarantee respect for human rights including labour rights, civil and political rights, social and cultural rights - the right to food, right to housing, right to a universally accessible, not for profit health care system, right to education and social justice;

- to enable socially equitable and environmentally sound employment, and ensure the right to development (as per UN Convention on this right);
- to achieve a state of peace, social justice and disarmament; through reallocation of military expenditure, and eradication of poverty
- to create a global governance structure that respects the rule of law ; and
- to ensure the preservation and protection of the environment, respect the inherent worth of Nature beyond human purpose, reduce the ecological footprint and move away from the model of development as endless growth.

This sounds like an unachievable set of objectives, but nothing less is required for the survival of our species and the creation of a dynamic, positive peace. The current military and national security positions, based on the existence of a perpetual enemy, will result in the continued use of force and further destabilization of the planet. In 2003, a Pentagon-initiated report entitled, "*An Abrupt Climate Change Scenario and its Implications for United States National Security*" by Peter Schwartz and Doug Randall stated that "because of the potentially dire consequences, the risk of abrupt climate change... should be elevated beyond a scientific debate to a U.S. national security concern (p.3)." It goes on to say that, "military confrontation may be triggered by a desperate need for natural resources such as energy, food and water rather than by conflicts over ideology, religion, or national honor. The shifting motivation for confrontation would alter which countries are most vulnerable and the existing warning signs for security threats" (p. 14). More recently, the same concerns were voiced by Britain's Chief of Defence Staff.

These views reflect a traditional military risk assessment but would take on entirely different cast when looked at through the lens of our common security, where we can see a non-violent and human-centred way forward. What is needed are implementation strategies to achieve these objectives and a mechanism to ensure compliance, of which the UN Millennium Goals are a beginning.

We are now in the midst of the greatest transition the world has ever known and without a global architecture of peace, it will not be achieved. One of the critical developments needed is the formation of ministries and departments of peace in all nations, working closely with the United Nations, and meeting regularly, not only in times of crisis, but especially in crisis. We are in global crisis now as we face unprecedented challenges to human survival in a changing planet. This would parallel the way ministers of finance, environment or natural resources meet now. Ministers of peace would be the focal points for the implementation of a culture of peace and non-violence at home and abroad as called for by the UN in its Declaration and Programme of Action for the International Decade for a Culture of Peace (2001-2010). Ministers of peace would assess the state of peacebuilding in the world and work to prevent violent conflicts, with the unique mandate of transforming conflict by peaceful means. These national departments

or ministries would serve as incubators of creative, non-violent approaches to conflict and as sensors for the early detection of potential violent conflict within and between nations. They would strengthen civil society initiatives in peacebuilding, including the engagement of professional unarmed civilian peace services, such as Nonviolent Peaceforce, and capitalize on the extensive peacebuilding methodologies already proven in the field.

The tools for conflict transformation exist. Now we need the global political will to implement them. The planet's future hangs in the balance.

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