

# **International Peace Bureau Annual Conference**

*Rolling Back Militarism: A Task for the Global Movement*

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**Remarks by Abdul Aziz Said**

**Response to Betty A. Reardon, International Institute on Peace Education,  
Recipient of the Sean MacBride Peace Prize**

Past efforts to foster greater universality all too often have been accompanied by coercive agendas or monocultural assumptions. Movement towards the construction of a functional, inclusive universalism cannot be achieved by simply opposing a “higher” set of values and beliefs to a “lower” counterpart, nor can it be accomplished through the methods that were used to build modern nation-states, replacing diversity with manufactured uniformity. Particularity and universality are not so much opposites as complements. Broadly participatory, intensive dialogue is the only way to ensure that new norms are based on genuine commitment and a transformation of worldviews, through a process of discovery in which existing identities and loyalties are stretched to make space for ethical criteria that are both global and responsive to the needs of our day.

The increasing density of global communications and interactions - globalization of human social life - is challenging us to “reconstruct” the normative criteria according to which human communities define their identities and loyalties. While some groups are seeking to shore up traditional boundaries and authority structures, dynamic leaders are inviting communities to embrace the opportunities presented by our new global social reality.

There are many opportunities to engage in acts of conscious moral and ethical reconstruction, not only in the domains of politics, economics, and religion, but also in the spheres of education and activism. To encourage changes in value priorities and deeply held belief systems, educators and activists will have to discover modes of practice that both affirm and nurture latent capacities for global citizenship.

For educators, efforts to meet these challenges can benefit from pedagogies that focus directly, dynamically, and creatively on contemporary global issues, and that provide young people with genuine experiences of cross-cultural encounter and dialogue. Efforts to implant information can be balanced with activities that create space for transformation, and that stimulate moral imagination through personal experiences of connectedness across boundaries.

At its best, education expands identities, fosters critical self-awareness, and facilitates new relationships and connections.

In higher education, creating space for transformation may mean balancing the existing emphasis on professional socialization with a concern for learners as “whole persons,” and by more openly embracing epistemological and methodological pluralism. It is particularly important for scholars to share the full range of value commitments, experiences, methods, visions, and insights that animate their research and inspire their teaching, rather than hide behind presumptions of “objectivity” and “distance” that conceal as much as they reveal.

Like teachers, activists and peace practitioners also have the opportunity to experiment with new modes of operation. It is particularly important at this time to embody as fully as possible an ethos that integrates urgency with inclusiveness. In other words, activists must balance their social action in ways that invite dialogue as well as critical awareness. Activists can benefit from becoming increasingly articulate about the relationship between the goods they advocate and values that are shared by diverse religious and cultural communities. When they are able to embody this discourse of common values through the development of transnational solidarities their activism becomes even more compelling. Rather than juxtapose allegiance to “universal” values against loyalty to “particularistic” agendas, activists can encourage members

of diverse identity groups to give their core values new meaning and fresh vitality through identification with emergent struggles to forge a more just and harmonious world community.

These ideas are not new, yet the call to earnestly engage the “subjective” dimension of global politics has all too often gone unanswered by thoughtful and committed academic commentators. In the absence of compelling intellectual visions that directly challenge key assumptions about the role of culture and consciousness in global change, we remain captive to popular - and often dangerous - mythologies. Since the end of the Cold War, there has been no shortage of worldviews for sale in airports as well as academic bookstores, yet readers seeking an overall vision of modern history’s grand trajectory have been far more likely to encounter claims about an impending “end of history,” an imminent “clash of civilizations,” or a “coming anarchy” than an invitation to participate in a painful yet also liberating transformation of human identity and purpose.

We can no longer afford to marginalize visions of global responsibility and conscious change to the “self help” section of modern book collections. In our time these themes have passed from the realm of ideals and aspirations into the realm of evolutionary challenge and necessity. The world must become more peaceful to survive and we must become more deeply, and broadly, spiritual to bring about this change. We can no longer accept mass death as rational or inevitable if we “see” the victims as people just like ourselves, and if we can identify and empathize with their suffering. The emotional cry of “this has to stop” would no longer be seen as a hopelessly idealistic outburst in a world driven by power and interest, but rather as an important insight into the contemporary human condition, arising from a heart becoming more attuned to the real pulse of our times. In effect, there is no meaningful distinction between the

true interests of the person and the planet, between the micro and the macro level of human affairs, between ends and means.

Contrary to the prevalent post-modern critique, there may indeed be a “foundation” upon which a new global “social project” can be “constructed.” It should be acknowledged that an open-ended dialogue on the future of the planet - in which all “voices” will be heard, and each “subject” is free to give and take - is really the only viable form this project can take.

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Hassan Fathy’s principles of architecture inspire us to advance Peace Education:

1. **Belief in the primacy of human values in designing social spaces:** ground all education in a guiding ethical order. This means ensuring that there is first and foremost no relative deprivation based upon class, gender, ethnicity or religion in the classroom, and opening up a public space for rediscovering the applicability of past experiences and values to the present.
2. **A universal rather than a limited approach to solving social problems:** avoiding the arrogance of ideological dogma or the educational methodologies in the East (rote learning) and West (standardized testing) that limit open, process-oriented dialogue in the classroom.
3. **The importance of community and socially oriented education techniques:** The search for truth and meaning must seek to understand the best each culture has to offer. At the same time, seeking knowledge forms community, so we must embrace and acknowledge the knowledge communities we construct.
4. **Importance of re-establishing pride and dignity through social development:** we must acknowledge the worth of every individual and their perspective in the classroom,

as well as taking the time to acknowledge that poverty is more than just material deprivation. Poverty represents a condition in which your dignity has been removed, and traditional ways of opposition (modern vs. pre-modern), the educational system should seek to critically engage local as well as global traditions.

5. **Essential role that tradition plays in social development:** The fact is that the whole world needs the whole world. Each culture needs to exchange its richness and traditions with other cultures to continually expand its horizons. Each tradition has an inherent basis of knowledge that can be drawn on to develop society. Exchange the best for the best.



Peace is a journey. It is a never ending journey. We are not alone on the journey. We are all connected. It is our connection to one another that opens us to thoughts, words and deeds guided by love.

When our thoughts reflect love,  
our words are those of a lover

And our deeds are directed toward the Beloved.

We are peace.

When peace emanates from us, Peace returns to us.

We become peaceful - a source and mirror of peace.