# MAKING PEACE:
# INTERNATIONAL CIVILITY AND THE QUESTION OF CULTURE

BY VIRGINIA STRAUS

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## The Concept of Civil Society

Civility derives from the Latin word *civitas*, meaning "city." The term arose when people moved from agrarian to city life and needed to develop workable strategies to communicate across barriers of language and custom. Civility, therefore, was a set of behaviors that allowed a community of strangers to live together peaceably.

During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, it gradually took on a narrower meaning, delineating only that part of a democratic society separate from the state. In Europe, as state governments began to assume greater responsibility for military, legal, administrative, and other functions, the pluralistic realm of society that was governed by the state, but operated independently from it, was dubbed civil society. Its partially autonomous spheres include the economy, religion, culture, intellectual life, and politics.

While touring America during the nineteenth century, the French writer Alexis de Tocqueville observed vibrant civic associations beyond the control of state institutions that kept the popularly elected government from becoming oppressive. Such networks helped maintain democratic equality and prevent tyranny of the minority by the majority.1

In civic associations, citizens could experience the satisfaction of cooperation with fellow citizens, and see that they are not independent from their fellows.2 Because of this spirit, America has been presented in political theory as a model of civil society.

Interestingly, in Communist central and eastern Europe during the 1970s and 1980s, nonviolent revolutions led by political dissidents were fueled by civic associations created initially to provide a refuge from state power. As democracies were established, the dissidents—now holding political office—defined their first task as one of expanding these emergent civil societies as guarantors against state tyranny. Thus, they went about rebuilding such networks as the unions, churches, political parties, cooperatives, neighborhoods, and the various brands of civic associations so admired by Tocqueville for their ability to sustain a continual "democratic revolution."

## Civility within a Civil Society

Edward Shils says civility and civil society both postulate a minimal dignity for all citizens.3 Civility means regarding others as members of the same inclusive collectivity and respecting them as such. Even one's enemies must be included in this same moral universe. In addition, civility describes the conduct of a person who has a concern for the good of the whole society, a person "whose individual self-consciousness has been partly superseded by his or her collective self-consciousness."

Key features of civility, he says, involve two capacities:

1. The capacity to regard one's fellow citizens with goodwill and accord them dignified treatment and the capacity, when necessary, to give precedence to the common good over individual self-interest; and

2. An attachment and willingness to participate in the institutions of a civil society, and



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even hold affection for them, since they embody and sustain the civility of the whole society.

Another writer on this subject, Adam Seligman, also sees civil society as a crucial arena, ethically, where a balancing of private interest and public responsibility can occur.4

In other words, these two writers point to a kind of social solidarity in civility, interdependent with the state, serving to cultivate respect, regard, and participation in the institutions of the state, especially as these institutions are led by individuals exhibiting civility in good measure themselves.

Sometimes, civility connotes a certain hypocrisy, the outward show of good manners that acts as a smokescreen for self-interested behavior. In *The Nation*, Benjamin DeMott describes the "leader class" as basically motivated by power and profit, but busily criticizing ordinary citizens for the decline in the civility of their behavior. DeMott regards the widespread "incivility" among the ordinary masses of people as a justified cynicism toward a morally bankrupt leader class that has no true regard for democratic values.5

Neither this kind of insincere civility appropriated by an amoral leader class, nor the kind defined in the *Oxford Unabridged Dictionary* as a bare minimum of courtesy, as implied in the phrase, "keep a 'civil' tongue," is at issue here.

### International Civility and the State System

On an international level, there are two social orders: the state system and a far-flung non-governmental sector. First, let's look at the state system. Nation-states are jealous of their sovereignty and compete with one another. Hard-power politics, the prevailing mode of interaction, reflects the workings of realpolitik under the dominant "Westphalian Model" of international relations, which traces its origin to the Peace of Westphalia in 1648.

This treaty established a system of sovereign states asserting total independence from one another. There is not much room for civility here or such "soft" sentiments as goodwill or neighborliness. This Westphalian order also bears no resemblance to the single moral universe into which civility draws even one's enemies. Instead, it is informed by moral skepticism. With the nation-state as the basic unit of international society and sole standard for measuring international conduct, this agreement permits, in fact encourages, a state to see its primary responsibility as pursuing its national interest. Moral principles take a distant second place.6

In practice, the society of nation-states is not much of a society at all. It is a disorganized association of governments that alternately compete for political and economic power and cooperate for mutual benefit. Various regional and international institutions have grown up around their cooperative efforts, from NATO in the military realm to the World Bank and International Monetary Fund in the economic, from ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) to the Big Seven. The workings of these institutions reflect the uneven distribution of power, resources, and military strength among the participating nations, as well as shifting alliances between them.

### The United Nations: A Singular Hope

The one international body with a moral foundation that includes all nation-states is the United Nations and its agencies. Founded in a rare instance of international unity after WW II, the U.N. is based on a profound revulsion against war and a commitment to peace. There are traces of the birth of a true international civility here. The U.N.'s agenda reflects an ethical vision of a world at peace—giving precedence to human rights, disarmament,



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the elimination of poverty, human development, and, more recently, environmental protection.

In practice, the U.N.'s effectiveness in pursuing these goals has been limited by the reluctance of nation-states to cede any degree of their sovereignty to the U.N. by giving it the necessary powers of enforcement, and hampered by an undemocratic structure. In crucial matters, the five countries that are permanent members of the Security Council have greater authority than the General Assembly of all nations.

Therefore, the one institution with the potential for putting the good of the whole world over individual state interests and for establishing a minimal degree of neighborliness within the world community is prevented from doing so.

Today this singular hope is floundering in the face of mounting evidence that the global problems the U.N. is expected to address are worsening daily and vastly exceed the reach of its limited powers. The problems the U.N. must address include: increasing incidence of ethnic violence, rising levels of poverty as income gaps between and within nations widen, and the dangerous deterioration of ecological systems throughout the world.

Other fundamental behaviors that militate against civility are:

1. When force is used to resolve disputes. The U.N. Charter actually outlaws the use of military force except for self-defense. During the Cold War, the provision for states to establish a collective security system to multilaterally enforce this prohibition did not gain support, for obvious reasons. The end of the Cold War, however, opens the door to revisit this question, but this is unlikely to happen if the Westphalian model of international relations prevails.

2. An almost complete absence of the rule of law at the international level. Instead, an uneven hodgepodge of treaties on various issues of mutual concern dot the inter-state landscape.

### *International Civility beyond the State System*

Does hope lie with the civic associations commonly known as international non-governmental organizations— NGOs—the primary actors in the second realm of social order at the international level? Since many of these NGOs object to a term that defines them in the negative sense, by reference to what they are not, I will use the preferred term, civil society organizations, or CSOs.

Peace scholar Elise Boulding has called the emergence of international CSOs one of the most important developments of the twentieth century. In 1909, there were only 176 international CSOs.7 Today there are more than thirty thousand. They have come into existence because of a shared concern for human well-being across national boundaries.

The character and scope of these people's associations is extremely varied. They pursue a wide variety of goals in all the fields in which the U.N. is active—from disarmament to human rights, to sustainable development, and even peacekeeping. They are much more willing than states to work with the U.N. on the U.N.'s global agenda, and they want to make the U.N. more effective. Compared to the U.N., these organizations have greater flexibility, better access to on-the-ground networks in various regions of the world, and a continuity of interest that political structures, with shifting leadership, lack.8 Today, international CSOs serve as a training ground for global citizenship in much the same way as did the civic associations Tocqueville admired in the nineteenth century.

As the problems pressing on the world for its undivided attention have increased, this people's movement has steadily gained adherents and now presents a strong challenge to



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the prevailing Westphalian order of the nation-state system. The shared ethical concerns of CSO members are strong motivating and unifying forces. By definition, CSOs possess the capability to put world public interest over national interests—a key ingredient of civility which sovereign states lack. But they sometimes display their own sovereignty concerns by focusing so exclusively on their particular missions that they miss opportunities to collaborate and to strengthen the standing of the overall movement.

### A Key Breakthrough: The Human Rights Declaration

Ironically, a key move on which the rapid growth of this movement was based came from the states shortly after the founding of the United Nations. CSOs active on human rights issues prior to the U.N.'s founding were disappointed to see no mention of human rights in the U.N. Charter. This omission occurred in spite of the fact that public support for the war effort had been generated in large part by an idealistic vision of "establishing the supremacy of human rights everywhere," a phrase used by United States President Franklin D. Roosevelt and echoed by other national leaders.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, eventually adopted in 1948 through the efforts of a committee led by Eleanor Roosevelt, stands as the greatest legal challenge to every aspect of the Westphalian system.

As human rights specialist Winston Langley has pointed out, the Treaty of Westphalia in effect "defined states as subjects, and vested them with all rights and responsibilities under international law. Individuals, on the other hand, were objects—objects like ships, mud-islands, and boundaries—to which international law applied and had effects." The Human Rights Declaration, by contrast, defined the individual, not the state, as the basic unit of the international community. From this perspective, the Human Rights Declaration becomes a kind of foot in the door for international civility by giving the individual human being standing in the international arena.9

### U.N. Conferences: Gathering Momentum

The movement of people's associations has gathered strength from opportunities created by the U.N. itself. In addition to governmental forums, a series of international conferences in the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s, allowed CSO forums to be staged. CSOs became particularly active during the 1990s, developing their own agendas for action and pushing states to make concrete commitments.

Many CSO leaders got themselves appointed to the state delegations that attended the governmental forums and worked as intermediaries between the CSO forums and the official conferees. In this way, these people's associations proved to be adept at influencing state policies and also learned to network together and share information for the sake of common interests, rising above the specialized interests that any one of them might have previously held paramount.

Women's groups proved to be particularly effective in this arena, uniting CSOs and working across their sovereignty lines on common issues. They have shown how civil society groups can unite in common cause across a number of related issues. The late Bella Abzug was a leading figure in these activities, through the worldwide association she founded, Women's Environment and Development Organization.

As social solidarity was built among the CSOs, what Elise Boulding calls "women's culture" has begun to create a new kind of politics. According to Boulding, the women



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leading international CSOs generally see patriarchy and militarism as closely linked. As they begin to participate in international affairs, the patriarchal order erodes because they refuse to maintain it.

In addition, in the collaborative participatory processes they set in motion through their customary modes of relating to others, they also begin to replace power politics with a politics of mutual aid, a type of human relations fundamentally based on goodwill toward one's fellow citizens.10 The U.N. has found that CSOs can expand their effectiveness in the field in dealing with humanitarian emergencies, sustainable development, and peace building.

### A Challenge to the State System

Another historic development that occurred in large measure because of the intensive lobbying of CSOs is the creation of an International Criminal Court. This breakthrough reflects a change in international ethics, a new conviction that crimes against humanity cannot go unpunished. The establishment of the Court works with the Human Rights Declaration to further establish the primacy of the human being and human morality in the international order. Giving CSOs standing to bring complaints to the International Court, in effect recognizes them as agents for the protection and advancement of the common interests of humanity and as a civilizing influence.

In addition, CSOs are exploring the possibility of establishing a CSO voice at the U.N., exercising the kind of policy influence they did at the series of world conferences.

There are many who, with Daisaku Ikeda, the founder of the Boston Research Center, believe that a Civil Society Forum at the U.N. is the way to finally make the fundamental democratic reforms in that body which the states will not make on their own. In his words, "My basic concept is that the United Nations will be properly reformed only when it succeeds in hearing and empowering the voice of the common people."11

This people's movement has staying power and the qualities of global citizenship which embody the essential qualities of international civility: they put the common good of humanity above parochial interests and they uphold a standard of human dignity and humane behavior in the international order.

### Into the Next Century

If not from CSOs, the other alternative would be that civility emerges from the community of nation-states themselves. Accord-ing to Edward Shils, one of the characteristics of a civil citizen is support for, and even love for, the institutions of a civil society.

Unfortunately, the United States is showing the opposite inclination. It is the chief scofflaw on U.N. dues, setting an example of non-support to all the other nations of the world. In addition, its national policy statements fly in the face of the U.N. Charter in regard to the use of force in international relations. These statements reserve the right to use military force to protect national interests in any part of the world, while the U.N. Charter clearly states that military force should be used by nations only in self-defense.12

Far from exerting a leadership role, the US frequently takes obstructive action against international treaties that are clearly in the collective interest of all nations, but compromise its own wealth and power in some way. Its recent bid to be the only nation exempted from the workings of the statute of the new International Criminal Court is just another example of its attitude of incivility.

To some, it may seem absurd to apply these standards of civility in the present world



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order. Yet such standards ought to be applicable in a changed world order. In fact, some nation-states are standing up on their own to meet this challenge, in spite of United States leadership in the opposite direction. For example, Spain sought to bring Chile's [former military leader and president] Pinochet to trial in its national court for crimes against Chilean residents even as Pinochet continued to serve in a legislative body of his own country. This is the first time a state has sought to assert human rights in its own courts for its citizens as well as for citizens not its own against a foreign political leader, holding him criminally accountable for human rights violations that occurred during his rule.

However, because of the prevailing Westphalian model, it is unlikely that other states will rush to follow Spain's example. In fact the obverse is true. Many sought to discourage Spain from its stated goal.

### *Next Steps: Broader Ethical Movements With Religious Support*

The world needs a better-organized international civil society that can more effectively challenge the disordered state system. This is starting to occur through a strengthening of the shared ethical foundations of the CSO movement. What threatens to divide CSOs, however, is interest lines. CSOs specializing in sustainable development and environmental protection work together on their interests. On a somewhat separate track, human rights groups work on theirs.

Only recently have some human rights organizations in the West considered expanding their scope to include economic and social rights. In another field, disarmament groups are working together in a broad-based movement, Abolition 2000, to eliminate nuclear weapons and develop an even more far-reaching strategy for abolishing war.

A more integrated ethical vision is developing through an alliance between CSOs and broader cultural resources, most particularly religions. In my view, religions are taking on a role here, seeking in part to atone for past involvement in fomenting war, but also to express the spiritual yearnings of their adherents for world peace.

A brief history is in order. German theologian Hans Kung, working with a group of religious scholars, developed a shared ethical statement for the Parliament of the World's Religions held in Chicago in 1993. This statement sought to build on versions of the golden rule found in almost every world religion to create a larger spiritual vision for a peaceful world. Unable to reach a consensus on exact language, the Parliament nevertheless agreed to give its approval to this document as a stimulus to further public dialogue and named it "Toward a Global Ethic."

In another move, the Interaction Council, a CSO founded by former Prime Minister of Japan Takeo Fukuda, submitted to the General Assembly a draft Universal Declaration of Human Responsibilities to complement the Human Rights Declaration. Hans Kung has also been involved in this initiative. The focus on duties reflects the greater influence in the international order now enjoyed by those religious and cultural traditions, especially Eastern ones, that give weightier emphasis to responsibilities than do the rights-minded traditions of the West.

The "emerging alliance of religion and ecology," an unprecedented series of conferences and published volumes, has recently been undertaken by Bucknell University professors Mary Evelyn Tucker and John Grim at Harvard's Center for the Study of World Religions. At the project's culminating U.N. conference, Maurice Strong, senior adviser to U.N. Secretary General Kofi Annan, took into account these and similar religiously motivated international initiatives when he observed, "I do not believe that our civilization will in fact



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make it through the next century unless . . . our economic and security and political life is driven by, motivated by, and in the service of our highest moral and spiritual instincts and values."13

Today, various ethical strands are being gathered together in a new worldwide social movement launched by the Earth Council and the Earth Charter Commission, of which Maurice Strong and Mikhail Gorbachev are co-chairs, working with Steven Rockefeller, a religion professor at Middlebury College. The Earth Charter seeks not just to elaborate a new set of ethical principles to guide human-earth relations but also, more broadly, to serve as a people's treaty, to provide an integrated vision of the ecological, economic, and social values needed to address the full range of interrelated problems facing humanity.

This Charter challenges the anthropomorphism that has permitted so much destruction of the world's ecosystems. For the first time, the Earth Charter would expand the human community's moral universe to include nonhuman living beings. The religion and ecology project and the Earth Charter are harbingers of hope, promising to draw in new cultural resources and grassroots participation to support the objectives of the CSO movement.

Richard Falk, a scholar of international law, in commenting on the religious dimension of these global movements, has observed that "time partially displaces space as the essence of what the experience of global citizenship means; citizenship thereby becomes an essentially religious and normative undertaking, based on faith in a world to come—not in heaven, but on earth—guided by convictions, beliefs, and values."14

### *The Question of Culture*

These broader global movements indicate that a larger and deeper process than simply the further growth of international civil society is going on here. Peace scholars are beginning to speak in terms of an evolving culture of peace, replacing the dominant culture of violence and war. Or rather, to avoid hegemonic constructions, this evolutionary process might be better conceived as the emergence of numerous cultures of peace. These cultures are enabled to harmonize rather than clash with each other, because a shared ethical and spiritual vision is developing through respectful dialogue.

This is why, at this stage, the U.N. and UNESCO are beginning to seek broader support for a humane, even spiritual, vision through something called the Culture of Peace Program. UNESCO initiated this program as a peace-building effort in war-torn countries. The U.N. decided to expand it by establishing the year 2000 as the International Year for the Culture of Peace.

In addition, peace scholars, who have been working with UNESCO on its culture of peace program, have begun to write and think about peace in terms of culture. Their conviction is that war itself is a cultural invention. Therefore, it can be replaced by another set of cultural inventions that will make it possible for humans to live in dynamic peace with other humans and the earth.15 Similarly, UNESCO sees the goal of its culture of peace program as nonviolent relations not only between states but also between states and their citizens and between human beings and their environment.16

This concept of cultures of peace is extremely promising. As a way to think about peace, it has several advantages over the concept of international civility. By progressing from a political idea to a cultural one, we leave behind some cumbersome baggage. For instance, there's a more inclusive sense to the notion of a culture of peace. Everyone's participation is needed, not just that significant and growing vanguard of international CSOs. Further, this conception of peace cultures does not have the historical connection to city life that



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the idea of civility does. Therefore, it has a more personal, familial ring to it. The term culture holds out the prospect of balancing and integrating modern lifestyles with the lifeways of indigenous, pre-industrial, and agrarian societies, implying a recovery of intimacy with the earth. The cultural approach even seems to strike a better balance between the feminine and masculine, since women have historically participated much more fully in the shaping of cultures than they have in the shaping of the public space of city life.

The root word from which culture derives is *cult*, which at least linguistically brings religion back into the picture of peacemaking. The inclusion of religion raises possibilities for drawing on a deeper well of inspirational feeling than mere civility offers. Culture is also tied more closely to education, as its chief means of transmission. Civility, on the other hand, implies training—a learning that is not as deeply rooted and fundamental as education.

### Making Peace

Lifelong peace activist and poet Denise Levertov served as poetry editor of *The Nation* magazine. Her poem "Making Peace" suits our topic well. Peace researchers have pointed out that though "war" can be used as a verb, "peace" cannot.17 When she refers to poets, she is addressing all of us. All of our imaginative potential and goodwill is needed to accomplish the cultural change involved in peace-making.

*A voice from the dark called out,*
*"The poets must give us*
*imagination of peace, to oust the intense, familiar*
*imagination of disaster. Peace, not only*
*the absence of war." . . .*
*A feeling towards it,*
*dimly sensing a rhythm, is all we have*
*until we begin to utter its metaphors,*
*learning them as we speak.*
*A line of peace might appear if we restructured the*
*sentence our lives are making,*
*revoked its reaffirmation of profit and power,*
*questioned our needs, allowed*
*long pauses. . . .*18

It is for all of us to become "a voice from the dark," for all of us to carry out the work that derives from imagining peace. ❑

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*The full text of this article originally appeared in the book* Civility *compiled by Boston University Institute for Philosophy and Religion, edited by Leroy S. Rouner and published by University of Notre Dame Press, Notre Dame, Indiana, 2000.*

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***Some Thoughts on NGOs and the SGI by SGI President Daisaku Ikeda***

## Excerpts from his annual peace proposals

President Ikeda has been issuing an annual peace proposal on January 26, SGI Day, since 1983 when the SGI became a nongovernmental organization of the United Nations.

### *1984*

I propose that the United Nations adopt a Universal Declaration Renouncing War. Consensus among nations on such a declaration would be an important breakthrough in actualizing eternal peace. Lest I be criticized for over-optimistically believing the goal can be attained at once, I further propose that, as a first step, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) begin the process by building up a foundation for the ultimate adoption of a Universal Declaration Renouncing War in the United Nations. Discussions between states tend to give priority to strategy and considerations of gain and loss, and this precludes consideration of the basic revulsion against war shared by people at the grass-roots level everywhere. Because of their nonpolitical nature, NGOs more accurately reflect the concerns of the ordinary people.

### *1987*

The existence of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), among which the SGI is numbered, is symbolic of the upsurge of worldwide "people power." At present about 10,000 NGOs worldwide are said to be working on such issues as the environment, human rights and arms reduction. All of them are powerfully inspired by the ideal of furthering the peace, well-being and security of humanity. Approximately 800 of these NGOs participate officially, though in a limited way, in the work of the United Nations. These groups have introduced the voices of the ordinary people into that body's proceedings. Increased civic influences as a consequence of more extensive participation from such NGOs should renew and revitalize the United Nations. Furthermore, intensifying mutual exchanges among private groups can be expected to cultivate a solidarity transcending national boundaries.

At present, the authority of such NGOs in the United Nations is minute. Furthermore, there is no well-ordered controlling organization to establish solidarity among them. These factors, plus the tendency that NGOs are developing mostly in advanced nations, create numerous difficulties. But there is no reason to think that international popular opinion can be easily united. Such an undertaking demands the perseverance and patience that "faith can move mountains."

### *1989*

Needless to say, the construction of a new U.N.-centered world order is not possible without popular support, and that is exactly where the NGOs come into the picture. They must pool their resources to influence world opinion. To that end, I would like to propose the holding of an NGO Peace Summit as one means of focusing



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popular wisdom and energy on the question of how to build such an order. In addition to NGO representatives, the proposed conference ought to include peace researchers and activists. The SGI is prepared to extend its full cooperation while remaining in close consultation with the other NGOs of the world, toward the realization of such a meeting.

***1992***

This year is likely to be an extremely important turning point in our attempts to solve our global environmental problems. In June, the heads of state from many countries and representatives of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) will meet in Rio de Janeiro under the auspices of the United Nations Conference on the Environment and Development (UNCED), the so-called "Earth Summit." Although I share with others a hope that the results will be positive, the outlook leaves little room for optimism.

Another prominent problem of the nineties is the plight of refugees, whose number has already swelled to some seventeen million people. In addition to ordinary refugees, who leave their homelands and flee to nearby countries to escape the ravages of war, we are also seeing a sharp increase in the number of people pouring into industrialized countries to escape poverty, as well as victims of ethnic strife, who wander homeless within the confines of their own countries. As an NGO of the United Nations, the SGI recognizes the seriousness of this international problem, and has earnestly undertaken refugee aid activities.

***1995***

If we maintain our faith in the future of humankind and consciously work to close the gap between North and South, I am confident that we will find our way to a brighter future. In this effort, I believe the resources and contributions of the nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) will be in greater demand than ever. These organizations are creating an international civil society on a global scale by working in fields that transcend national boundaries and ethnic groups, such as human rights, humanitarian aid, and peace education.

***1996***

Inspired by a sense of responsibility for the future, the SGI has sponsored many events over the years. As a non-governmental organization (NGO) with official ties to the United Nations, we have held various exhibitions designed to raise awareness of global problems (including "Nuclear Weapons: Threat to Our World," "War and Peace," and "Environment and Development"); we have supported the UN human rights education campaign with another series of exhibitions (including "Toward a Century of Humanity: An Overview of Human Rights in Today's World," "What Are the Human Rights of Children?" and an exhibition on the Holocaust entitled, "The Courage to Remember"); and we have pursued various humanitarian activities throughout the world to support the efforts of the office of the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).

SGI's efforts are not limited to U.N.-centered endeavors for peace. We are also active in the spheres of culture and education as we strive to realize what we



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consider to be the social mission of religion.

Our aim is to pursue humanism, to practice religion in the service of people, and to take resolute action to overcome the difficult problems now confronting humankind.

***1998***

For many years, there has been agreement that the human rights agenda must move beyond standard setting; true implementation must begin. Needless to say, the path to universal implementation of human rights standards is strewn with difficulties. As one possible means of overcoming these obstacles, I would propose a network of human rights agencies, present in each national setting yet with a status independent of the national government, charged with implementing the human rights agreements which that state has signed.

The work of these agencies would include compiling reports on national efforts to implement international human rights treaties, fostering public awareness of human rights, and working to secure redress in specific cases. The essence of this plan is to create a new framework of transnational cooperation, involving national human rights agencies, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and competent U.N. bodies, in order to make existing human rights agreements most effective.

***2000***

The members of the SGI worldwide are actively engaged in the work of fostering a culture of peace. For example, in 1999, the youth membership of SGI-USA launched a "Victory Over Violence" campaign to help young people uncover and counteract the root causes of violence in their lives. It encourages young people to respect their own lives, respect all life and inspire hope in others.[1]

Similarly, SGI representatives participated in the NGO (nongovernmental organization) conferences held at The Hague in May and in Seoul in October [of last year], on both occasions organizing symposiums to explore various aspects of the culture of peace. The SGI-affiliated Boston Research Center for the 21st Century (BRC) held a series of conferences and consultations on this theme in the first part of 1999.[2]

Linking all of these dialogues was the question of how the deeply ingrained and culturally reinforced psychology of confrontation and hatred can be transformed into an even more robust psychology of peaceful and harmonious coexistence.

1. "Victory Over Violence Peace Pledge," 2. Newsletter No. 13, Spring/Summer 1999, http://www.brc21.org/n13a3.html, January 7, 2000.



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