

UNITING FOR PEACE

AGM and SPRING CONFERENCE 27th March, 2010

Vijay Mehta

vijay@vmpeace.org

Good afternoon and welcome to our Spring Conference.

It is indeed a pleasure to be among peace activists who are a driving force for change in our world.

Thousands of years of conflicts and wars span over history of world civilisation. The world is getting more and more violent and there are wars in 30 locations in the world. Wars and violence affect our capacity to address global challenges of crushing poverty, protecting the environment, eliminating nuclear weapons, terrorism and refugees on a large scale, displaced in different parts of the world. Security situation today is more dangerous now than the cold war as we live in an interconnected and interdependent world and incidents in any part of the Globe affects us all. Violence and wars have to be consigned to history for humankind to make progress for a peaceful future as peace is a prerequisite for building a safer society which can live in harmony.

I will examine what drives conflict, root causes of violence and put forward innovative approaches in promoting a culture of peace and non-violence for peace building in the 21st century.

Root Cause of violence and War - What drives conflicts?

The **culture of violence** pervades in our society, glorifying war rather than educating for peace, non-violence, and international cooperation. The continued military spending (USD \$1.4 trillion per annum) in our society perpetuates a culture of violence and hostilities. Military spending in armed conflicts, involvement of Pentagon and Military Industrial Complex's 'war of aggression' has a direct vested interest in the continuation of such conflicts and is a major cause of ongoing wars.

Violence in local communities paves the way for conflicts at national and international levels.

Escalation of small arms and light weapons (800 million in circulation)

Terrorism, fundamentalism and radicalism

Economic globalisation has marginalised broad sections of the world's population, further widening the gap between rich and poor.

The overuse of environmental resources and climate change wars as in Sudan and Middle East.

Increasing colonialism and neo-colonialism

Ethnic, religious and radical intolerance. In the past holy wars were conducted under the shield of just war theory which is now reflected in the extremist ideology of militants.

Gender injustice and machismo.

Lack of protection and respect for children, youth and women.

The lack of democracy and just global governance

The role of media in one dimensional reporting and distortion of facts.

The level of poverty and hunger of the one sixth of the world's population living on \$1 a day.

Refugees and internally displaced populations (IDPs)

Failing states are an international problem and another cause of conflicts and wars

I will now outline non-violent ideas, actions and examples to stop violence and wars.

The alternatives can be described as supporting role of UN peacekeeping operations, tackling terrorism, promoting reasons to avoid war, pre-conflict and post-conflict peace-building, faster and better peacekeeping enforcements, adhering to UN charter and International Law, disarmament and non-proliferation, humanitarian intervention, sanctions, prevention of war, activism, education, culture of peace and more robust allocation of funds for peacekeeping.

Support role of UN Peacekeeping operations which deploys 120,000 people in 18 locations on five continents in the world. UN is one of the best examples of enforcing, keeping and building peace in the world.

Comply with the UN charter which prohibits states to go to war.

Bringing Security Council reforms for fair representation, more democratisation and increasing the peacekeeping budget.

Tackling Terrorism

Promote reasons to make the 21st century the century of soft power.

There are many good reasons to avoid war. War is expensive and one needs to reduce the military spending, adopting a culture of peace and the prevention of Warfare.

Violent conflict can be prevented with Rapid Reaction Force or a civilian peace mission. Opportunities to avoid the human suffering and economic costs of war have been missed. The role of army should be changed from warfare to peace operations and conflict resolution should become a priority.

Support discussion and dialogue leading to inter-cultural and interreligious harmony.

Applying Responsibility to Protect (R2P) doctrine and international law (under ICC) to stop genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity.

Treating citizen groups as representatives of society instead of warring parties which marginalises the military should be a priority.

Holding Truth and Reconciliation Commissions (TRC) as the one in South Africa. We need TRCs in countries like Sudan, Pakistan, Afghanistan and Middle East.

Campaigning to ban US military bases as in Iraq, Afghanistan and other places around the world. America is a global bully with 750 bases in 130 countries. It is a military juggernaut intent on world domination and in partnership with Military Industrial Complex continues to wage conflicts on a permanent basis.

Protecting civilians in armed conflict and avoid cover-ups. Promote the work of the Peacebuilding Commission to help bridge the gap in co-ordination of peace building activities in countries just a emerging from violent conflicts. It helps post conflict recovery, reconstruction, institution building and sustainable development.

Campaign for article 9 of the Japanese constitution (which rejects war and militarism) to be discussed and adopted by the UN General Assembly, thereby encouraging member states to move away from war and militarism, towards non-violent conflict prevention and resolution.

Promote education and non-violent ways of ending conflicts build on arms control treaties, nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation regimes.

Protect Human Rights violations.

One of the solutions to stop wars could be **to promote culture of non-violence and non-killing for replacing the gun culture.** The task is challenging but for peace to prevail we have to reverse the trend of killing through hating violence, war, and mass psychological transformation for creating harmony, peace and love. Promote reasons to avoid war like war destroys environment, hinders development and hampers the desire for decent living.

Leaders should promote international co-operation to end long running disputes. The decisions by the Security Council are blocked by veto power countries. Most of the world problems today of peacekeeping, conflicts, development, climate change and human rights are inter-related and should be dealt in tandem. Lasting peace cannot be achieved if we concentrate solely on peace when all the inter-related issues are destroying our environment, creating a shortage of food, leading to conflicts and chaos.

Talking to terrorists and learning from the Northern Ireland Peace Process. The peace agreement in Northern Ireland is now held up as a beacon for conflict resolution around the world.

Promoting the role of activism for an active campaign against the policy of governments/politicians leading their countries to war, using preventative diplomacy against the surge of war.

Promote the work of human rights council for dealing more objectively and credibly with human rights violations and build a global conscience to help humanity in crisis.

To make reducing the global incidence of wars and military spending a new Millennium Development Goal (MDG). War retards development, but conversely development retards war. Getting rid of war is not a utopian dream. There already exists in the world large regions for example, European Union, within which war is inconceivable.

To work for promoting democracy, good governance and multilateralism.

Spreading peace and nonviolence by our actions.

There are many examples in history where non-violent struggle has been successful, and nonviolent strategies proved to be more powerful than guns. Some of the examples are below:

- **The Indian Independence Movement, whereby Gandhi's campaign of non-violent action ousted the British from India.**
- **The US Civil Rights Movement and the role of Martin Luther King.**
- The Polish Solidarity Movement of the 1980s that ended Soviet control of Poland.
- Philippines dictator Marcos overthrown in 1986.
- The non-violent movement that ousted the Chilean dictator Pinochet in 1987.
- The collapse of Communist governments in eastern Europe – the "Velvet Revolution" organisation.
- South Africa: the 600 civic organisations that avoided civil war and supported Mandela and De Klerk to end Apartheid.

- The student-led movement that ousted Serbian dictator Milosevic in 2000.
- The Rose Revolution in Georgia, the Orange Revolution in Ukraine, and so on.
- **Fall of Berlin Wall and reunification of Germany.**

I would like to suggest three actions by which we can make a difference in our community, city, country and wider world.

1. Making your borough a Borough of Peace or your city a culture of Peace City and work for building a Peace Museum.

We can change our own city or borough into a culture of peace, which can organise events and festivals for celebrating and building peace. Avoiding conflict is the greatest victory.

2. Creating a Peace and Non Violent media centre. Around 2 billion people across the world are connected to the internet via Youtube, Facebook, Twitter and Myspace among other social networks. Let us use them for spreading Peace

3. Global Peace and Nonviolence Leadership Summits and Ambassadors of Peace

Leaders can spread the message of peace and non-violence to the wider society.

So what we should do is to have a program of global leadership summits and Ambassadors of Peace for achieving a less violent world.

Conclusion

Albert Einstein and Bertrand Russell warned us in their 1955 manifesto that the human race has a choice. We can renounce war or we can bring about our own end.

This is even clearer now than it was half a century ago. Knowing this, countless millions round the world ardently want peace. The people of Britain

want peace. By what right do our leaders continue to impose the curse of war on an unwilling world?

Peacekeeping to be effective is combination of several factors which include dialogue and mediation at the pre-conflict stage, enforcement of peace during the war, giving parties breathing space to reach an agreement, and post-conflict reconstruction when the warring parties entered a peace agreement and trying to work things together for a future free of violence.

There is book called 'The 33 strategies of war' by Robert Greene. It describes the horrific and brutal way wars are fought and won. The lesson from that book I learnt is that Generals and great warriors demonstrate prudence, agility, calm and keen understanding of conducting their armies in the battlefield, so that they can defeat their enemies. Similarly we need to organise ourselves on a massive scale and apply our resourcefulness, acumen, patience, dialogue, negotiation and diplomacy for making successful peacekeeping operations, otherwise peacekeeping will always remain a dream and a distant reality.

The message is simple – To spread peace and nonviolence by your actions in your city, country and international level. The nonviolent actions can change things dramatically as it once did for Gandhi Ji in India and Dr. Martin Luther King in America. The sheer ability of nonviolent ideas and ethics can help powerless people gain a lot of power to change things around for better in a nonviolent way. People can bring change not through violence, not through money but strength of their ideas, personality, ethical and moral stance. We should begin to take the burden of change upon ourselves in a nonviolent way to change society.

Let me conclude by saying that we have just drawn down the curtain on the bloodiest century in human history. We cannot repeat the same mistakes by bombing and killing our way to security. Let us make the 21st century less violent than the one before and I have outlined the innovative ways and the tools to achieve Peace-Building in an Unstable World.

Thank you for listening.