

# TALKING ABOUT PEACE

How can we all help build Peace?

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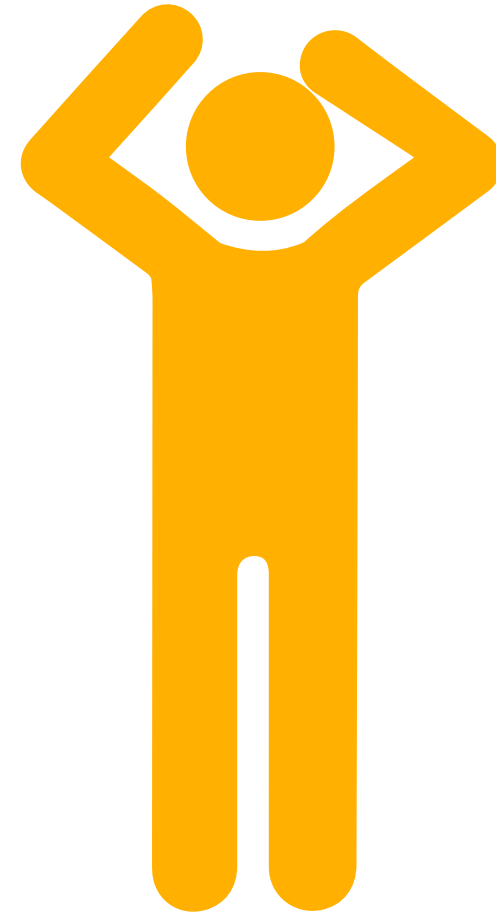
The **desire for a peaceful, sustainable, and egalitarian world seems to be universal. Yet, the number of violent conflicts has increased** in recent years. Today, about a quarter of the world's population live in countries affected by conflict and violence. However, **situations of conflict and violence can happen to all of us** in our daily lives (e.g., domestic violence, sexual abuse, cyberattacks, discrimination, psychological and emotional violence, physical threats and attacks, violent crimes, terrorism, war). **And they affect us all.**

Circumstances of insecurity, uncertainty, and fear - which we have experienced more intensely since the beginning of the COVID-19 Pandemic - are now compounded by the need to protect ourselves from the threats posed by War. This can make it more **difficult to look at the possibility of Peace, to talk about it, and to engage in its construction.** We may feel fear, anger, distrust (especially from people with a different cultural background), and we may be more likely to see negative intentions in other people's actions and **react more aggressively** (e.g., to discriminate against people belonging to the Russian or Ukrainian community).

**The world – us! – urgently needs to respond differently, putting an end to the cycles of violence and investing more in Peace building.**

## IMPORTANT NOTE!

It is essential to remember that violence begets (more) violence, deep societal divisions, and a multiplication of inequalities and injustices.



# WHAT IS PEACE?

Peace is more than the mere absence of war. **Peace is the presence of Justice, Equality, Freedom, respect for Human Rights, Inclusion, and Sustainability.** Peace implies the existence of physical, social, economic, political, cultural, and ecological conditions that nurture the development, in harmony, of all citizens.

## Peace exists when:

- › All people live safely and without fear.
- › No form of violence is tolerated.
- › All people are equal before the Law, human rights are respected, and people trust the justice systems to safeguard these rights.
- › All people have equitable access to basic needs for their Health (physical and psychological) and well-being (e.g., food, water, housing, healthy environments).
- › All people have equal opportunities to work and live in dignity (regardless of gender, cultural belonging, or identity).
- › Everyone has the opportunity to choose, allowing each one to develop skills, flourish and reach their potential.
- › Everyone has the opportunity to take part in political decision-making processes and in sociocultural activities.



**Peace is the result of an active, long-lasting, and sustainable effort by individuals, families, groups, organizations, communities, governments and societies** to recognize their interdependence and develop ways to resolve conflicts and problems in non-violent ways, contributing to the strengthening of social resilience and cohesion.

Peace (the peaceful coexistence of different people, histories, beliefs, creeds, practices, and cultures) **is essential for our personal growth, for the productivity of organizations, for the prosperity of societies, and for the sustainability of our planet.**



## IMPORTANT NOTE!

Contrary to what we may think, we are not instinctively violent. We do not innately prefer violent behaviour. On the contrary, we have a natural tendency to adopt prosocial behaviour (such as doing good, helping others). War is not inevitable! Just as we learn violent behaviour, we can learn non-violent behaviour.

# CAN WE REALLY MAKE A DIFFERENCE?

Many of us really care about what is going on around us - about the situations of violence and inequality that we learn about, either directly or indirectly. **We observe wars, poverty, discrimination, inequalities.** These are very complex challenges, in the face of which we may feel overwhelmed, hopeless, and doubt whether we can really do anything to make a difference.

## Sometimes we believe that:

- › Trying to change things is impossible or too difficult and that ultimately it would be futile, because our efforts would not be enough (*pessimism, fatalism*).
- › “Everything will be fine in the end” (*pure optimism, denial*).
- › There are many problems, but there are people solving them. It’s not up to us since we don’t have the required knowledge/resources/possibility/energy (social unaccountability).
- › We will lose our ability to enjoy life and take advantage of happy moments if we get involved (*self-preservation*).



**For many of us, it is difficult to know how to contribute, how to help.** We may feel paralyzed and guilty that we can't donate money/material goods and are not "doing anything".

But we can. **Each and every one of us can do something.** It is important to be realistic about the scale of the challenge of building Peace, and the commitment it requires. But merging realistic awareness and hope can bring about important changes. Often, **simple ideas and actions are effective and make a real contribution to solving problems and building Peace.**

## IMPORTANT NOTE!

The emergence of some conflicts in our daily lives is understandable and practically inevitable (especially in situations of increased stress, vulnerability, and adversity, such as what we are living through now). Tension and conflict are part of life, and they don't always have to be negative events. It all depends on how we deal with and manage them: they can enable positive changes and strengthen bonds and relationships with other people.



# WHAT CAN WE DO TO HELP BUILD PEACE?

› **Act.** We cannot just wish or hope for Peace. We must be actively involved in its creation and construction. To be a pacifist is not to be a “dreamer”, it is to recognize the enormous impact that war, violence, and injustice have in the world. But not to ignore it or accept it as inevitable. Everyone, each of us, can contribute to Peace in our different life contexts (in the family, at work or at school) and be an “activist for Peace” (by voting, writing an article for the newspaper, volunteering, singing a song, using social networks to spread messages of Peace and tolerance, creating sharing spaces in our group of friends or in our community, etc.).

› **Feeling at Peace.** In fact, the way we act and react also influences the reactions of those around us - we are “role models”, mainly for children and young people. So, building Peace is also a process that we must undergo ourselves, internally. We can cultivate our sense of Peace by using healthy communication strategies with others, engaging in leisure activities, spiritual/religious practices, practicing silence or meditation, and engaging in psychotherapy, among other activities.





› **Defend and respect the values of Justice, Equality, and other Human Rights.**

Peace, Justice, and Equality are complementary and interdependent aspects of reality. To recognize the Human Rights is to argue that all people, regardless of their differences and possible disagreements, have the right to be treated with dignity and fairness, to have their needs met and their potential fulfilled. On the other hand, it is also necessary to recognize that inequality and unfairness directly encourage conflict and violence, and indirectly feed other social phenomena (such as poverty) which, in turn, can also give rise to violence.

› **Develop sensitivity and knowledge about cultural diversity.** It is important to know the diversity of customs and beliefs across space and time, and the characteristics of past and present civilizations. Globalization has brought us closer together, but we are still “strangers” to each other, despite the giant volume of information we share. To get to know others it is necessary to develop curiosity and interest in asking questions and listening to the answers; to look for common ground (e.g., although we may have several identities, there are identities that we all share - Portuguese, Ukrainian and Russian, we are all Europeans, we are all human). This is the only way we can deconstruct stereotypes and prejudices, avoiding discrimination.

› **Establish constructive relationships with different people.** Transforming the way we relate to other people is key for ending cycles of violence and to build Peace. The more we express our curiosity about different perspectives, experiences and circumstances of people who are different from us, the more we get to know them, the easier it will be to focus on common interests, share resources and build bridges. We can start by becoming familiar with the people in our community - who are they? We can introduce ourselves and show interest in their lives, jobs, and families; we can visit different places and observe the different people in our community or invite our neighbours over for coffee. But we can also read stories about people from different cultures or attend a religious event that is not from our religion.



› **Develop our social-emotional skills, especially controlling our emotions, empathy, and critical thinking.**

It is important to recognize our own emotions and the emotions of others, understanding the emotions that may be behind violent behaviour (e.g., anger or fear). In this exercise, using empathy, the ability to understand the other person's perspective, learning to work as a team and improving our communication skills, is particularly helpful. Moreover, critical thinking allows us to question ideologies, authorities, and narratives; to research and analyse evidence-based information (including information contrary to what we believe at the outset), helping us make more rational and informed decisions.

› **Solve problems and conflicts in a non-violent way.** Just as violence is learned, resolving problems and conflicts in a non-violent way can also be learned. We can learn to follow a set of steps when faced with a problem or conflict situation. **For example:**

› **Clearly define the problem/conflict**, describing concrete behaviours and actions. The focus should be on behaviours, not on "attacking" the other person, and the problem/conflict should be seen as having to be solved by all parties involved, in a cooperative rather than competitive way. We should show interest and confidence that it is possible to solve the problem/conflict (e.g., *"I know we have different views on this issue, but I want to talk to you so we can work something out."*)

› **Explore alternative solutions**, giving everyone involved the opportunity to participate and present their views (respecting and exploring, rather than criticizing and rejecting the ideas and solutions of others).

› **Reflect on the advantages and disadvantages of each solution**, trying to find one that creates the maximum benefit for both parties (and remembering that if the chosen solution doesn't work, there are others). It's not about who "wins", it's about everyone winning.



› **Use the jointly negotiated solution** while maintaining our commitment to it, evaluating its consequences, and leaving room for any adjustments needed for its implementation.

› **Talk and Cooperate.** In everyday life, as well as in non-violent problem-solving and conflict resolution situations, it is essential to find ways to talk and cooperate with people who have different backgrounds, perspectives, and values. Even with our family and friends, we can talk openly about violence and Peacebuilding, being aware that they interact in complex ways, trying to maintain an empathetic attitude that is understanding of the different perspectives that are likely to arise. Communicating in a positive way involves presenting our point of view, explaining how we feel and the impact the situation has on us, and suggesting ways to resolve the situation.

› **Invest in our Resilience, Courage, and Leadership.** The work of Peacebuilding involves a persistent, patient effort. It is a long-term process, involving many changes and transformations, both structural and cultural. Building Peace also means, for example, not going along with social injustices, having the courage to intervene when we witness discrimination against someone. As adults, we can be leaders and active voices in promoting diversity, equity and non-violence in our community, in different ways (e.g., if we are managers in a company, we can make sure that we hire and promote people regardless of their cultural background, gender, or sexual orientation; if we are teachers, we can work with our students on peaceful ways to cooperate and solve conflicts; if we have a social network we can make comments that encourage Peace and non-discrimination).

› **Accept mistakes (and apologies).** It is human to make mistakes. Making a mistake is also a learning opportunity. It is natural that, from time to time, we say or do things that hurt other people; the reverse also applies. It is important that we can recognize these situations, accept that they are natural, and talk about them, in order to “make peace”, and from that moment “bury the hatchet”, without hard feelings.



› **Express gratitude.** The expression of gratitude underlies mutual respect, compassion, cooperation and reciprocal help, trust, and appreciation of the other - making a major contribution to building Peace. We can express gratitude through a message, a letter, a gesture (and many other ways).

› **Fostering Creativity.** Building a fairer and more peaceful world requires creativity to imagine and create alternatives to the current reality. Creativity is a skill that we can develop and that is directly related to well-being, productivity, socio-economic growth, and Peace. We can find out more about our **creativity** and how to use it to create new and useful answers.

› **Nurture the commitment to Peace and solidarity by supporting structures and entities.** A variety of structures and organizations are directly or indirectly involved in building Peace. Collective solidarity, cooperation, and compassion are key factors to stop violence and to lessen the suffering and vulnerability, loneliness, and isolation of those in adversity. Accessing information about successful initiatives, being inspired by people who actively contribute to Peace, and volunteering are some of the actions we can take.

› **Contact with nature and protect the environment.** Connecting and interacting with nature and different natural physical environments can be a generator of well-being. One of the main threats to world Peace is climate change. The climate crisis endangers the Peace, security, and well-being of all populations, while accentuating the inequalities and injustices faced by those who are already the most vulnerable. Climate change is linked to greater risk of conflict, more aggression, more competition, and hostility between peoples. Therefore, protecting the environment is at the basis of Peace building.



› **Invest in self-care.** Remaining capable of building Peace and persisting in the struggle for equality and justice involves **taking care of ourselves**. It involves respecting our **sleep** and rest routines, **eating a healthy diet**, getting regular **physical activity**, engaging in **leisure activities**, paying attention to our feelings and needs, **talking about what worries or distresses us**, finding **meaning and purpose in our lives**, nurturing positive relationships with family and friends, and **seeking help** when needed.

## IMPORTANT NOTE!

Building Peace does not mean avoiding tension. Tension is an inevitable aspect of human relationships. In a peaceful world, people can still disagree with each other, but they do so in a non-violent way, respecting each other. A tense (or even conflictual) situation can be resolved in a way that brings people together, rather than distancing and dividing them. Moments of constructive tension can be promoters of growth and development.



The moments of greatest adversity (as is the case with War) can transform us, giving us the opportunity to practice empathy, compassion, tolerance, and altruism. They teach us that we cannot hide behind indifference, inertia, and a pessimistic view of the future. They remind us that we should not take anything for granted, that we only profit from what we invest in. That we must use hope, our skills, our humanity, to help build and sustain Peace.



