TOWARDS A LIBERATING PEACE

TOWARDS
A LIBERATING PEACE

✻

**Rajni Kothari, Richard Falk,
Mary Kaldor, Lim Teck Ghee,
Giri Deshingkar, Jimoh Omo-Fadaka,
Tamas Szentes, José A. Silva Michelena,
Ismael Sabri-Abdalla, Yoshikazu Sakamoto**

✻ ✻ ✻

THE UNITED NATIONS UNIVERSITY
Tokyo

LOKVANI
New Delhi

*

TOWARDS
A LIBERATING PEACE

*

This book is dedicated to the memory of

José Augustine Michelena

Member of the Core Group of the United Nations University Project on Peace And Global Transformation of which this book is the first composite outcome and in the making of which, as well as to the project as a whole, he had made a substantial contribution.

The United Nations University's Programme on Peace and Global Transformation was a major world-wide project whose purpose was to develop new insights about the interlinkages between questions of peace, conflict resolution, and the process of transformation. The research in this project, under six major themes, was co-ordinated by a 10-member core group in different regions of the world: East Asia, South-East Asia(including the Pacific), South Asia, the Arab region, Africa, Western Europe, Eastern Europe, North America, and Latin America. The themes covered were: Conflicts over Natural Resources; Security, Vulnerability, and Violence; Human Rights and Cultural Survival in a Changing Pluralistic World; The Role of Science and Technology in Peace and Transformation; and Global Economic Crisis. The project also included a study on Peace and Regional Security as part of the U.N. Year of Peace.

Preface

We are living in a world where there is a widespread sense of general malaise, made worse by crises, new or emerging, of one kind or another at the local, regional and global levels. At one end of the spectrum, there is the constant threat of a cataclysmic nuclear war. At the other, even without a war, nuclear or conventional, hundreds of millions of people are facing slow death because of destitution, disease, forced migration, political and cultural repression and other denials of life-sustenance by the elites in authority.

The terror of instant annihilation remains unrelieved by the nature of political institutions, be they liberal, socialist, nationalist or of other persuasions. With the exception of a few States, e.g., Brazil, Argentina, and to some extent China, where the process of 'redemocratisation' is under way, an ever larger number of States are getting militarised; armed threat, repression and coercion are the currencies of power in many parts of the world today.

The rapid and rapacious destruction of life-sustaining natural resources goes on in tandem with the process of militarisation. Again, regardless of the nature of the State, human rights are being violated routinely in several countries. In the poor two-thirds of the world, even the right to life is flouted by many regimes. The struggle for sheer survival goes on simultaneously with the struggle against cultural destruction. To add to all this, the world is in the grip of an unprecedented economic crisis; no political or economic system has been able to extricate itself completely from it. The global

i

polities in Western Europe, represented major efforts in this direction. Equally major were the variety of efforts at building independent, self-reliant and democratic systems in the post-colonial world, and in countries such as Yugoslavia, a leader of the non-aligned world. Yet today, all of these face crises of one form or another and are deeply affected by the global malaise described above. And everywhere the processes of fragmentation and/or cooptation are becoming evident, though, no doubt, in almost all these regions there is some evidence of both social and intellectual restlessness.

The United Nations University (UNU) has joined the intellectual quest for a holistic diagnosis of the crisis and for remedial action by launching an action-oriented research programme entitled Peace and Global Transformation. The programme is based on the conviction that the issues of peace are inextricably related to the process of transformation; a stable and just peace is unattainable without realising a desirable transformation of the international political, military, economic and cultural order and similar transformations within States; on the other hand, the processes of transformation are difficult to pursue and remain unattainable in the absence of peace.

We, the contributors to this document, have constituted ourselves into a 'Core Group' to initiate, pursue, monitor and sum up the research activities of the Peace and Global Transformation programme throughout its five-year duration (1983-1987). This way, we believe, we can avoid the fragmentation of the research effort and knit it into a whole. This initial statement of ours on the *problematique* of peace and transformation describes our multidimensional approach and indicates the direction in which we believe the solutions lie. We hope to follow up this initial exercise with a more elaborate statement which will be informed by the theoretical and empirical research undertaken under the Peace and Global Transformation programme in various parts of the globe.

There are many groups these days sounding alarms and proposing solutions. We do not belittle such organised efforts to promote rationality and humanistic solutions through appeals to the leaders of governments round the world. We have in mind, particularly, the notable work of the Brandt and Palme Commissions,

(The responsibility for the contents of the final version rests with the Drafting Committee.) We come from different regions of the globe. Our vantage points, given our different ideological, disciplinary and cultural backgrounds, are necessarily different. We accept these differences, even celebrate them. Nevertheless, after working together, we have come to realise how much we share with each other.

For enabling us to come together and work together our collective and grateful thanks go to Dr. Soedjatmoko, the UNU Rector, who was the first to encourage us to translate the original Conceptual Paper into a concrete research programme and to Dr. Kinhide Mushakoji, Vice-Rector, whom we count as one of us in the 'Core'; the latter has, in many ways, worked harder than the rest of us for the P&GT Major Project. We also owe our thanks to Dr. Janusz Golebiowski, Senior Programme Officer, for serving as an intellectual critic as well as a nurturant administrator. And, of course, we gratefully record our thanks to the very large number of individuals in various regional 'networks' who were brought together for this programme, the large variety of persons at the Tokyo Centre, the Programme Office in Delhi and in our respective institutions in the various countries and regions without whose silent contribution this statement of ours would not have been possible.

<div style="text-align: right;">

Rajni Kothari
Richard Falk
Mary Kaldor
Lim Teck Ghee
Giri Deshingkar
Jimoh Omo-Fadaka
Tamas Szentes
Jose A. Silva Michelena
Ismael Sabri-Abdalla
Yoshikazu Sakamoto

</div>

Contents

1

Introduction

The character of the challenge we face today at the world level or indeed at any other level is elusive and controversial. It is impossible to isolate 'the problem' and say *this* is it! Confusion persists. It is difficult for the people of the world to envisage a line or lines of response.

In such a troubled setting neither established leaders nor traditional opposition leaders are able to define clearly, much less effect, a convincing resolution of the diverse challenges facing the organised political communities throughout the world. At the same time, the severity of problems leads to a variety of attempts to 'fix' the situation. In this atmosphere, coercion becomes an easy substitute for political imagination. Thus, across the globe, an orgy of militarism has ensued; repression of basic rights of the people is on the increase; resort to violence to maintain stability or to effect change is rampant. War and terrorism define the dialogue between those that have and those that want or are aggrieved.

But simultaneously with all this, our field of awareness has also enlarged to take in the mass ordeal of everyday existence for the poor of the world. We cannot escape the image of malnourished children by the millions facing a life of illness, probably with retarded faculties even if they are lucky enough to survive. We are appalled, as well, by the millions and millions of refugees who live more or less permanently in desolate camps, often treated harshly and inhumanly. We also cannot escape the obscenity of the luxury

and waste that divert the elites of the world, with their estates and racing cars, their jewels and extravagant vacations, their total self-indulgence beneath the gaze of the sad-eyed poor and that of the growing hordes of persons displaced from their homelands. Only recently, we are also becoming aware that our generation on this planet, disturbed as it is by a series of deepening crises, may well be considered blessed compared to what our descendants in the next century may come to experience. It is now perfectly realistic to imagine a denatured landscape in which brute force prevails and the struggle for individual and class existence is continuous, or its seemingly opposite, a computerised mantle of totalitarian bureaucracy, a world devoid of feelings and humour. Lyrics of rock songs and popular films convey this message as a kind of cultural distress signal. It would be edifying to invite world leaders to offer their response to films like *Mad Max, Brazil, 1984, Aakrosh* and *Damul.*

Are we taking these ominous forebodings too seriously? Is it not still possible to believe in the resilience of nature and human life? Are we not already taking steps to alleviate the dangers, or at least those crises that confront us with the prospect of extinction? To be sure, there are responses that express an overall preference for preservation. Outbursts of violence and warfare still operate as 'exceptions' on the world scene as a whole; disaster relief mitigates, or appears to, the most acute suffering due to drought, earthquakes and floods. Confrontation between antagonistic forces gives way, after bloody interludes, to a variety of ceasefires. Generally, the most glaring excesses are contained, except at the local level where a variety of *pogroms* have ravaged particular peoples in country after country and where locales of 'natural disasters' are abandoned by the affluent; and only the poor, the aged and the most vulnerable are left behind to suffer.

Preventing the worst is not nearly enough. Tensions persist at intolerable levels. The worst has been tasted time and again, often irrevocably in the form of genocide. As a result, total irreversible collapse forms a vital part of our self-understanding as a species in this historic era. Humanity has a record of many failings in its short history but for the most part, human viability was threatened only from without—by an angry god at the end of his or her patience

or by a divine plan to bring existence to a dramatic end, or by some arbitrary quirk of natural forces operating beyond the reach of human control. Because earlier threats to existence were external, it was always possible to shape social response, either by way of waiting for the end or through conversion of energy into a programme of positive action.

The new circumstance is different. Today, technology enables global reach and apocalyptic threat. To survive by threatening extinction, a prospect made vivid by the horrifying menace of nuclear winter, is what we mean by deterrence. To modernise by threatening culture is what we mean by development. To modernise through 'Star Wars' technologies is, at the outer limit, what we mean by security. Our moral sensibilities are torn asunder by such postures. Without respect for the innocence of others there can be no human identity. Without respect for the nurturing of nature there can be no sense of participation in the surroundings of human existence; even if affluent, we will wander the planet as aliens. Walking the streets of Hong Kong or Houston or Lagos or Calcutta conveys an impression that collapsed human beings are being scattered as litter; experienced as problems of garbage collection. More than a quarter million serious victims of poisonous gas and chemicals were left unattended, many months after the haunting catastrophe of Bhopal.

The same tragedy of neglect applies to the collapsing cultures of ethnic minorities in plural societies. Even in the so-called 'developed' world there is a breakdown of community·so profound that many turn to a life of drugs, alcohol and diverting entertainments to dull the anguish of wandering the planet as strangers obsessed by a meaningless craving for what is no longer clearly recollected, a search for a definite place amid an incoherent criss-cross of rights, duties, rituals and customs.

And so, desperate quests for identity and meaning are everywhere taking such diverse forms as to be often unrecognisable from one setting to the next. Affinities are often hidden. There are poor in the North, rich in the South. There are traditional islands of identity in the North, abandoned or relinquished traditions in the South. What we wish to underline is the painful experience almost everywhere

that is associated with struggles to sustain individual and group identity or to achieve a meaningful life in its absence. The passions unleashed around the quest for identity have encouraged the growth and regeneration of new and old forms of fundamentalism and even of idolatories. These dogmas insist on the unconditional virtues and claims of a part of the larger community as against the rights and opposing claims of another part or even of the whole. When the aroused Shias of Iran terrorise their secular neighbours or put to death hapless Baha'is, we observe the demonic energies of fundamentalism at work. Equally, when the ultra-secular cadres of Pol Pot carry State socialism into the world with literal and bloody logic we are witnesses to a fundamentalist storm-centre. Not every expression of fundamentalism ends with the execution of the other. When James Jones persuaded his followers to leave their worldly life behind in California and set up an utopia in distant Guyana, there was implicit in this an absolutist confidence. When the confidence disintegrated, there was nothing left to live or die for. It becomes more understandable why 900 or so adherents of the People's Temple allowed their oath of obedience to extend to swallowing deadly poison *en masse*, on instruction by Jones. Perhaps Reverend Moon's Unification Church in the United States and the large number of *ashrams* following extremist *gurus* from India have not exerted quite so dominating a hold on their faithful, but they draw to the fold many of those wanderers who will pay virtually any personal price to be given a sense of purpose in life. There are countless further examples of how this quest for identity is being perverted or put in the service of horrifying missions.

Of course, it is also evident that we live at a time when certain bonds of oppression have been lifted. The great popular struggles against fascism in Europe and the Pacific ended in victory, and after World War II the rise of non-Western peoples against colonialism did engender a sense of potency for many ordinary people and positive outcomes of these struggles are experienced even today. In Europe, guaranteed employment and a minimum standard of living became basic material rights, at least until somewhat abridged in the 1970s; and remain so in Eastern Europe. In the last few years, Spain, Greece, Portugal, Argentina, Haiti and the Philippines have

re-established parliamentary democracy. There is an upsurge of struggle in South Africa and support for the anti-apartheid movement grows throughout the world.

But there have also emerged into view numerous festering wounds. The world has never been constituted by natural political communities, nor by relations of equality and mutuality among distinct communities. The State is never coterminus with the boundaries of a natural political community. Sometimes the State manages to embody a compromise among its distinct societal elements, as was the case in Lebanon before the civil war of 1975 or, as in India, until ethnic strife has intensified in recent years. But compromises are fragile when passions are intense or manipulated by a variety of internal and external forces. Often the apparatus of the State is captured by the representatives of a given political majority (or by a powerful and oppressing minority as in South Africa), securing for its members a disproportionate share of rewards in terms of economic, political, and cultural resources. The 'inferior' communities feel abused and must be coerced into acquiescence. In situations of overall hardship, the circumstances of the inferior communities can become intolerable. Resistance of some kind, however desperate, is often undertaken. Repression is thereby invited, generating still more resistance, and an upward spiral of political violence is underway. Without a genuinely just and fair treatment for individuals and groups, the intensity of conflict between the State and a portion of society is almost assured, given contemporary awareness that oppressive conditions are not justifiable. The protracted struggle of the Basques in Spain, the Nagas and Mizos in India, Tibetans in China, the Shans and Karens in Burma, the Timorese in Indonesia and the Kurds in Iran, Iraq and Turkey bear witness to the reality that even a small, regionally restricted natural community cannot be easily pacified by the instruments available to the modern State.

In some circumstances, the colonial order, or other forms of authoritarian rule, bottled up tensions among communities, froze them in time. But the removal of the colonial masters released the subsidiary horizontal tensions contained within the State's often artificial boundaries. Tribal and racial resentments long held in check erupted with fury, often serving the fortunes of calculating

polit..:ans. The campaigns against the Asian merchant families in East Africa, or even more so, the bitter campaigns of popular terror against the Chinese in Indonesia and lately against the Tamils in Sri Lanka convey a sense of the depth and pervasiveness of these lethal tensions. There are many peoples facing the dreadful possibility of genocidal campaigns directed against them by the managers of State power.

The post-colonial State had hoped for some measure of economic development amid such turbulence. But capital and technology continued to remain out of its reach. More importantly, a re-colonisation of elite minds in these 'liberated States' has been manifest in the desire to imitate the lifestyles and consumerism of the former colonial masters. This impulse is reinforced by multi-national corporations, banks, global institutions and a variety of materialist creeds that are the Mephistopheles of our time, tempting and enticing the Third World, while imposing sinister new types of bondage in exchange. Inappropriate technologies, misconceived priorities in terms of public and private investment, alien concepts and techniques and, underneath, a false conviction that massive human engineering, of which militarisation is an essential component, are needed and even desirable during the State-building era.

In the background of this restructuring of world politics in the post-colonial era is the failure of the main political ideologies to fulfill expectations. Liberalism with its faith in the individual and in the limited State was not able to offer much consolation in circumstances of mass poverty and discontent. The stress on economic growth which promised to make a country—mainly its elite—strong and prosperous tended to turn its productive energies over to capitalist or State-capitalist forces; little effort was devoted to satisfying the needs of the poor, that is, of 90 per cent or more of many countries. Since that is the case, the class base of the governing process is obvious, and is bound eventually to produce a revolutionary situation that is often deferred and disguised by reliance on the terrorist capabilities of the State—swift, efficient and ruthless.

Liberalism fails also in the First World. Increasingly, the technology of war, particularly nuclear war, is incompatible with political democracy of a genuine kind. The required permanent readiness

for war, with mobilised resources and an intelligence operation that provides leaders with secret assessments of impending danger, necessarily removes citizens, and even representative institutions, from the governing processes. This removal is further assured by a military bureaucracy that 'knows best' when it comes to national security and opposes all forms of popular scrutiny. In effect, the various elements of representative democracy are being increasingly coopted by the militarised sectors of the modern State; political parties and elected politicians are required to carry on their operations within preset boundaries. Citizens have been converted into subjects when it comes to national security. And the definition of national security is an ever-expanding one that reaches deep down into the sinews of domestic life and also involves defence against external danger.

On the other side of the ideological equation is the socialist experience. When mass discontent gets mobilised and launches an armed struggle that results in violence, the socialist State is confronted with a different kind of problem. Safeguarding the revolution justifies, even necessitates, a deepening militarisation. If militarisation persists over the years, a revolutionary State is distanced from its own people. Secrecy pervades even routine operations of the socialist States. Personnel and policy changes are kept well removed from popular scrutiny and even events in the outside world are carefully filtered by a tightly regimented media before they reach the people.

The transformation of Marxist thinking also explains this drift into statist rule over society. The whole analysis by which a State is defined as exploitative if, and only if, it is dominated by feudal or capitalist exploiters, makes the ideology defenceless against a State dominated by the vanguard of the oppressed. In this respect, the official Marxist-Leninist belief that a socialist State is by definition the vanguard of the peace movement can lead officials to brand independent peace activists as 'criminals'. Such results are the consequence of naively assuming that any concentration of power in the hands of a supposedly progressive class is not liable to be grossly abused. Yet, gross abuses of power have taken place in socialist States and have been admitted as such by successive regimes

in the Soviet Union, China, and some East European countries.

These various dangers are reinforced by the interplay of ideologies at the international level. The competition of ideologies partially masks conflicts among rival power-centres for resources and spheres of influence, that is, old-time *geopolitik*. The ideological rivalry also helps mobilise tensions and fears which provide leaders with a pliable domestic atmosphere. The military technology and strategic doctrine of the adversary are relied upon by both sides in the rivalry to justify constant vigilance and protection against the 'enemy' who may not pose much of an actual threat, being more worried about the costs and consequences of war and preoccupied with upholding the *status quo.*

The basic world historical situation can be summarised thus: a series of pressures from above and below have tended to militarise the State, its conception of government and external relations; this militarisation has occurred in a context of technologies of scale and vast potential for devastation and in a setting beset by ecological, economic, social and cultural distress and acute societal grievance; as a result, multi-faceted conflicts and civil strife are rampant; to sustain order in such circumstances has meant internal repression and permanent readiness for major wars; these processes and structures imperil the future relationship between State and society, between society and nature, and damage the overall quality of interaction within the assembly of States.

We are left with an overarching question. Is there a way out? The paragraphs that follow do no more than anticipate some possible lines of response. We make no claims to have cleared a path that can lead humanity safely to the future. We know that a variety of path-clearing projects are underway, many of them at the grassroots and therefore largely unknown. Our concern is to point some of them out. Our hope is that several of these paths will be used by larger numbers frequently enough and that those who travel along their course will gain in confidence and capability. In the end, emergent social forces need to reclaim control over their destiny, not by negating the State or technology or ideologies but by transforming these in liberating directions, strengthening their life-giving potential, while weakening their capacities and dispositions towards

dominance, exploitation and destruction. We think and act on the firm conviction that such possibilities can be realised or, at the very least, that movement in these restorative directions can occur, and that such movement will establish new horizons of aspirations. It is by moving toward goals in support of real social tensions and counter-tendencies that we affirm our faith in humanity, not by unfurling one more blueprint that could be superimposed, *deus ex machina*, by a like-minded leadership.

The affirmation that underlies our concern takes its stand on the terrain of society and political community. If the State and technology are seen as derivations justified only to the extent that they serve the purposes of society and political community, then a start can be made on the crucial task of informing thought and understanding with an innovative, alternative orientation, framework and vision. As we see it, the State and technology originally emerged out of human needs and wants, in different forms, at given times, for particular ends. It is to these two interlinked dimensions of the *problematique* of peace and transformation that we now turn.

Role of the State

In the present epoch of history, we tend to forget that the institution of the State was a human creation to meet human needs. The State was liberating to the extent that it provided greater assurance to societies and communities against disorganised violence and could channelise productive energies and cultural creativity for constructive purposes, including a lessening of the impact of scarcity on the quality of human existence. The State promised defence of territory against war and/or criminality and also over-saw the market so that trading in what was desirable could take place. Above all, the State, in recent times, undertook to correct or contain the inequities inherent in antecedent or emergent social traditions and structures, relying on more general notions of minimum decency.

Despite these historic liberating functions, however, the State in its essence remains a system dedicated to political domination and control. The relations of domination, of course, take different forms; the State dominates through consent and, failing that,