

An Appeal for Peace During Kosovo War

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Many people at the conference were primarily impressed that there was any action in support of human rights in response to ethnic cleansing. Others were primarily concerned by the destruction of the bombing and its impact on the scale of ethnic cleansing and on the flow of refugees.

Nearly 10,000 men, women, young people and children took part in the Hague Appeal for Peace events from 11 to 15 May, 1999, making it the largest peace conference in history. They came from more than 100 countries, one-fifth of which were at war in Yugoslavia, and from other countries where there was war, in Africa, Indonesia or Kashmir.

The conference launched an action plan, The Hague Agenda for Peace and Justice for the 21st Century, with 50 detailed programs. These set an international agenda for the coming decades on conflict prevention, implementing human rights, peacekeeping, disarmament, and coping with the root causes of war. This included “strengthening of the UN’s capacity to prevent violent conflict, mass violations of human rights and genocide — for example, through the creation of standing UN peace forces for use in humanitarian interventions, and through the identification of alternative sources of finance for UN peace operations.” Hundreds of civil society organizations from many countries cooperated for more than a year on producing the Hague Agenda. It has been published as a UN document in six languages for the 1999 General Assembly as A/54/98. The event marked the centennial of the first International Peace Conference, which began a process of active interaction by civil society with governments to prevent war and control its excesses. Over the years the process contributed to the establishment of the Permanent Court of Arbitration and the International Court of Justice. The 1999 conference demonstrates the new democratic diplomacy of cooperation between civil society, governments and intergovernmental organizations that has been effective to obtain the treaty to ban landmines, the draft statute to create an International Criminal Court and the World Court opinion on the illegality of nuclear weapons. The Hague Appeal for Peace defined peace as not just the absence of conflict between and within states, but as the presence of economic and social justice. Environmentalists, human rights advocates, humanitarian aid and development workers shared a common interest in building a culture of sustainable peace.

While the statement printed below represents the predominant views of a very large majority of the conference participants who took part in three long evening meetings on the situation in Kosovo, others in the conference had slightly different attitudes and views.

The Hague Appeal Conference took place as the military and paramilitary forces of Yugoslavia attacked the ethnic Albanians in Kosovo, and NATO dropped bombs on Serbia and Kosovo.

There was an alternative to NATO air strikes on Serbia and Kosovo that would have saved more lives than the bombing campaign. Because of conflicting views at the Hague about how to achieve peace in the region, this point did not emerge clearly.

In brief, UN endorsement for a large peacekeeping force might have been obtained; at least a greater effort should have been made. Such a force, together with the OSCE observers who were in Kosovo could have protected civilians — which bombing could not do.

The key NATO states, which are also major players on the UN Security Council, could have made an effort to

keep non-NATO countries, especially Russia, involved and helping. This should have been done at and after the Rambouillet negotiations and also earlier at Dayton when Kosovo was kept off the agenda.

If Russia had been involved as an intermediary with Milosevic, efforts to avoid a Security Council veto of a UN peacekeeping plan might have succeeded. And, if the Council had not been ready to endorse action to maintain peace, the General Assembly could have acted under the Uniting for Peace Resolution of 1950, which like the proposed Council action, would have needed to be under Chapter VII of the Charter since Yugoslavia would not invite the United Nations, or anyone, in to stanch the gross violations of human rights within its borders.

This strategy for an alternative to bombing was promoted at the conference. It was workable, but would have been more so if the UN peacekeeping capacity proposed in the Hague Agenda had been in place already. For more details see the article by the author on the ECAAR web site: www.ecaar.org.

The ECAAR statement on Kosovo as published in The Nation issue of May 31 was also circulated at the Conference. That statement, dated May 7, is also on the ECAAR web site. The following points are quoted from that "Statement from Members of ECAAR's Board and Associates."

"To a great extent, the bombs have been aimed at the civilian economy of Yugoslavia, and so at the political and social destruction of that country. We condemn all human rights abuses in Kosovo. But this is a strategy that brutalizes a nation for the crimes of its leadership, without effectively punishing those crimes."

"The bombs have no humanitarian rationale. They have not slowed the eviction of the Kosovar people, the many murders that have been reported, nor the destruction of Kosovar homes. And to those casualties, the bombs add hundreds of innocent Kosovar and Serb civilians, who are dying in entirely predictable accidents every day."

"Here at home, the bombing serves as a pretext for those who wish Congress to provide vast new funds for military expansion, without debate.... "

"Finally, the American people must confront the deep contradiction in our position in the world, laid bare by the past month's military, diplomatic, and human disaster:"

"— If we wish to remain the world's policeman, we must be prepared to maintain a large Army and even larger reserves, to invest in air-lift and sea-lift, and we must be prepared to spill American blood on the ground in many distant conflicts, including this one."

"— The alternative, which we favor, is to build stronger and more effective international institutions, especially the United Nations, its agencies, and other multilateral institutions that work through law and mediation to promote peace and sustainable economic development. These agencies deserve our strong political and full financial support."

"In either case, there is no justification for maintaining the strategic air power we now possess in its present form. Those forces were built for fighting the Third World War. They are not suited to our real security needs in the post-Cold War world."

Consigning War to History:

UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan praised the work of the Conference in his closing-session statement. He

pointed to the 17 current wars in Africa, but also stated that, “Disputes can be resolved peacefully. Wars can be ended. Even better, they can be prevented.”

Archbishop Desmond Tutu asserted that, if the world could abolish slavery and end apartheid in South Africa, then it could also abolish war. He said the Conference delegates should take on the wider challenge of building the structures that would consign war to history.

Meeting in over 400 panels, workshops and round tables, participants discussed and debated mechanisms for abolishing war and creating a culture of peace in the 21st century.

The Conference launched at least 11 action initiatives:

- (1) International Action network on Small Arms (IANSA), web site: www.iansa.org
- (2) Global Campaign for Peace Education, email: <bar19@columbia.edu>;
- (3) Global Ratification Campaign for the International Criminal Court, email: <cicc@igc.org>;
- (4) International Campaign to Ban Landmines, web site: icbl.org;
- (5) Abolition of Nuclear Weapons, email: <wagingpeace@napf.org>;
- (6) Global Action to Prevent War, email: <info@globalactionpw.org>;
- (7) Stop the Use of Child Soldiers, web site: www.childsoldiers.org
- (8) A call for a global ban on depleted uranium, email: <mtpdu@ime.net>
- (9) Campaign to End Genocide, email: <gstanton@wfa.org>;
- (10) International network on Disarmament and Globalization email: <ss Staples@canadians.org>
- (11) Campaign on Women in Peace-Building email: aadrian-paul@international-alert.org The Hague Appeal’s own website will, from time to time, have update information on the list above at www.haguepeace.org.

Proposed statement on the war in the Balkans for the final plenary session of the Hague Appeal for Peace Conference:

8,000 people have met this week to learn from one another and to discuss long and short term strategies and actions to create a world without war.

Many hundreds have come here from war zones, where there is daily killing, violence, massive human rights abuses and the use of weapons against civilians, particularly women and children. Many here are refugees, some have been without a home and country for decades, some for only days or weeks.

But many thousands of us come from countries which are at present involved in war here in Europe and we have been struggling with how to address this within the context of this conference.

Several hundred people have met on 3 nights for a total of 14 hours and although there has not been unanimity, it was the feeling of the vast majority of those involved, that the following statement should be presented to the final plenary.

We participants at the Hague Appeal for Peace Conference call for:

- an immediate end to the war on the ground and in the air in Kosovo, Serbia and Montenegro;
- the urgent reintroduction of an enlarged force of OSCE monitors to end intimidation of the remaining civilian population;
- the introduction of humanitarian agencies to address the plight of internally displaced Kosovars;
- the creation of conditions for the safe return of all those who have been driven from their homeland;
- the adherence to all aspects of international humanitarian law and human rights conventions by all parties to the conflict;
- immediate involvement of the United Nations in the search for creative and viable solutions for a secure and equitable future for all the people of the region;
- the devotion by the international community of massive political and financial resources to a comprehensive economic and social reconstruction plan for the affected region;
- the recognition of the United Nations by all governments as the only appropriate body to authorize international action to maintain or restore peace, security and respect for human rights;
- the examination by the governmental conference in the Hague 18-20 May of instruments which could have been developed to prevent the Kosovo catastrophe. NGOs can make a vital contribution to a peaceful outcome in the Balkans and in all other areas of conflict by offering support to those courageously acting for peace and justice in their region.

Economists for Peace and Security

<http://www.epsusa.org>