International Education for Peace Conference

November 16, 2007, 9:00 to 10:30 a.m.

Century Plaza Hotel

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Thank you, and good morning.

It is customary in moments like this for a keynote speaker to begin by thanking organizers for the invitation to speak. But I would like to go one step further this morning and to thank Dr. Danesh and the International Education for Peace Institute for organizing this entire conference.

I find among my own friends and colleagues a split sense of the world just now. On one hand, I see a ready sense of fear. Globally, we have lost the post-Cold War optimism that prevailed during the early 1990s. In Iraq, in Afghanistan, in Darfur – in Myanmar and now in Pakistan – we have clues to how quickly the world can descend into chaos. The so-called "war on terror" is built on fear; justifying dangerous adventures and repressive policies that attack civil liberties.

The collapse of the ocean's bounty and the global environmental threat of climate change also suggest that we face risks of chaotic migrations and resource wars in the coming century. It is an unnerving time.

On the other hand, I also sense a degree of hope that the world is coming to its senses. I see hints of promising policy shifts among some of the world's great governments and inspiring personal changes in the habits of the people around me. Certainly, students at universities around the globe are working hard to address issues such as climate change. At the University of British Columbia, thousands of students have now signed a sustainability pledge, committing themselves to make personal choices that reduce their ecological footprint. The University itself has made institutional choices that have resulted in our reaching and surpassing our Kyoto targets years ahead of schedule.

At such a time, the world needs both inspiration and leadership – leadership that is sometimes in short supply.

The great Canadian Prime Minister Lester B. Pearson offered this comment when he accepted the Nobel Peace Prize in 1956. Pearson said: “The grim fact is that we prepare for war like precocious giants and for peace like retarded pygmies.”

Pearson can be criticized now for his political incorrectness, but the underlying point is germane. There are many colleges of war, but too few institutes for peace. Our “departments of defense” seem increasingly to be on the offensive while our aid agencies are forced into tax-cutting retrenchment.

The EFP example is, indeed, inspiring. It is exactly the kind of leadership we need. So thank you to Dr. Ganesh and the EFP

and thank you to all of you for coming and making this conference a success. You give me hope.

I have promised today to talk about the role of universities in educating for peace – a role that I think of as highly integrated, highly interdisciplinary and thoroughly interactive with surrounding communities and institutions.

But I'd like to begin by telling two stories – stories that I think give the topic a certain degree of context.

The first involves the children of a colleague, three young boys born in quick succession.

The eldest of these three is a gentle soul who was born into a gentle household. In his first year, the boy was coddled and comfortable, and when the next brother came along, that level of

physical tenderness continued to prevail. Neither boy had any experience of violence or even much of discomfort.

Boys being boys, the experience of the third child was a little more rigorous. As an infant, this youngest child learned to expect that a well-intentioned hug might sometimes feel more like a rugby tackle. He learned very quickly to put up with a certain amount of bumping about – and he didn't take it personally.

But sometime before his second birthday, this youngest child learned something else. He learned that his elder brothers couldn't take a punch.

This knowledge came in the way that most knowledge comes to toddlers – through experimentation. In an early effort at what we might call "dispute resolution," the youngest brother had lashed out – and to very good effect. Rather than punching him back, the

eldest brother had collapsed in a puddle of shattered dignity and tears.

A tyrant was born. In the weeks that followed, the youngest brother reset the power relationships in the entire household. He demanded what he wanted and he extracted a quick and violent price if he didn't get his way. In fact, it got to the point that this toddling terror would bash a brother for pure entertainment. In a way that was horrifying to his parents, he was clearly enjoying his new position of dominance.

These were challenging days for the parents. Like any overstretched police force, they couldn't stand guard every moment. And for obvious reasons they were hesitant to coach the eldest brother to defend himself. They were hesitant to say: "Hit him back."

But the father was delighted to be on the scene the day that finally happened. Driven to a breaking point, the eldest brother finally retaliated – and with sufficient fury to make his little brother reconsider the intelligence of starting a cycle of violence.

The result was a rather larger puddle of shattered dignity and tears – as well as a very "teachable moment." Scolding both children with relatively equal vigor, the father proposed a set of more sensible dispute-resolution techniques –and the reign of terror passed. The boys, now teenagers, are still brothers. They still "fight" in the sense of disagreeing vehemently. But none of them has thrown a punch in more than a decade.

I tell this story not to suggest that violence is inherent in the human heart. Children who hit one another in frustration or anger are not evil.

But we are a curious and innovative race. We experiment. Long before we have the capacity to understand what is “right” and what is “wrong,” we try things out. And if a certain strategy works in a certain situation, we put it in the tool kit and we try to apply it again as other opportunities arise.

And, as the cliché goes, when your only tool is a hammer, all of your problems start to look like nails.

The second story I want to tell is darker and deeply personal. And it also involves three boys.

I have only a younger sister, so there were no ebullient brothers in my own so-gentle upbringing. I was in my thirties before anyone laid a punch on me that really hurt. Then my life was rocked in a way that I still find unimaginable.

I was, at the time, the Dean of Law at McGill University in Montreal. I had a wonderful wife, a lovely daughter, and a son who had just arrived. I had every reason to believe my parents' teaching – that we were living in a beneficent universe.

Then one day, during a meeting, I was given an urgent phone message. I learned later that night that my parents had been brutally murdered in their quiet suburban home.

Within a couple of days the perpetrators had been caught; three teen-aged boys, who had no real motive, who had killed for fun.

I suggested only moments ago that I saw no evil intent inherent in the human heart, but that incident – the murder of my parents – was an act of pure evil. I can't think of it in any other way.

And I can't imagine the circumstances that created three nihilist teenagers out of three, once-innocent boys. I can't begin to accept the number of times that the teachable moment must have been lost in those ruined lives.

That, for me, is the context of our challenge.

That is why I will argue today that the university's role in education for peace is not theoretical. Because, for me – as for many of you – the absence of peace is not a theoretical concept.

That is not to say, however, that we cannot benefit by thinking about peace education in theoretical terms. I was helped, for example, by the work of University of Wisconsin Professor Ian Harris, with which some of you may be familiar.

Harris sets out five postulates for peace education and five different *kinds* of peace education. The postulates – five principles that speak to the challenges of teaching about peace – are these:

1. Peace education explains the roots of violence.

Painful as it is to look deeper into violence, it has been demonstrated through processes like the South African Peace and Reconciliation Commission that violence must be understood to be overcome.

2. Peace education teaches alternatives to violence.

If we arm our citizens with an inadequate tool kit – if they believe that violence is their only available strategy – violence will be the inevitable result.

3. Peace education adjusts to cover different forms of violence.

There is no single lesson that is applicable in all instances, and no single dispute resolution institution or delivery mechanism that is universally appropriate.

4. Peace itself is a process that varies according to context.

As educators – and as citizens – we must be constantly alert to cultural, social and economic contexts.

5. Conflict is omnipresent.

I said earlier that violence is not inherent in the human condition, but I think we must accept that it is inevitable. It is a strategy that some people will stumble upon and experiment with.

We must recognize that despair, and we must redouble our efforts to design and promulgate alternative paths.

Harris's categorization of five different kinds of peace education is also helpful and begins to speak more directly to how I see the university role.

The first of the five categories Harris describes as "International Education" – the pursuit of which is very much what brought me to UBC.

The UBC Vision Statement – in place before I arrived– is this: "The University of British Columbia, aspiring to be one of the world's best universities, will prepare students to become exceptional global citizens, promote the values of a civil and sustainable society, and conduct outstanding research to serve the people of British Columbia, Canada, and the world."

The active part of that vision, for the purposes of this conversation, is the creation of "exceptional global citizens (who) promote the values of a civil and sustainable society."

Engendering this level of citizenship is not the work of a single department at UBC. There is no mandatory civics course that we force students to take so they can be suddenly anointed as global citizens. Rather, it is a call to action in every part of the university. It is the job of every faculty and staff member at UBC to try to help our students understand their responsibilities in a global context.

For some students, that involves something obvious like participating in one of UBC's many international co-op or community-service learning opportunities, or living in one of our four international residences, where Canadian students work, study

and play in the company of international students from Ritsumeikan University in Kyoto, from the University of Seoul in Korea, from Mexico's Tec de Monterrey and from Hong Kong University.

But learning about citizenship and sustainability can also occur when students ride the bus rather than bringing a car, when they use their math skills to help aboriginal high school students to reach higher – lessons can be drawn from how every individual lives and works at any of our UBC campuses.

Harris defines his second category of education for peace as "Human Rights Education." This speaks to an area of personal interest. My own academic specialty is International Law, International Human Rights, and Legal Reform. I was, for example, Chair of the United Nations Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances and I served as Fact Finder for the

Commission of Inquiry into the Actions of Canadian Government Officials in relation to Maher Arar, a Canadian citizen who was rendered from the United States to Syria, where he was imprisoned and tortured.

It is essential that all of us – in all countries and in all walks of life – understand the inviolability of human rights. It is essential that we understand that you cannot abrogate the human rights of a single community, or of a single individual, without ultimately compromising or devaluing the sense of peace and security of every individual.

Harris next identifies "Development Education," and I am inclined to return here to the lessons of citizenship. We tend to think of development, automatically, as something that occurs in "developing" countries – something that under current budgets is not occurring nearly often enough, especially in Africa which is

once again being ignored after a brief flurry of interest on the part of OECD governments.

But there is a more immediate example of development that is much closer to home. UBC has a community service learning project called the Learning Exchange, in which volunteers from UBC– students, staff, faculty, and alumni – go into inner city schools and non-profit organizations. They contribute to community programs while learning about inner city issues and working in solidarity with community and educational leaders . And as much as possible, the volunteer work of students is integrated into academic course work, creating truly mutual benefit: the community benefits and the student volunteers take away invaluable lessons in citizenship – in human development issues occurring in their own backyard.

I am proud to say that we are currently a national leader in developing and implementing the community service learning approach.

The fourth area of education for peace Harris identifies is "Environmental Education," and I have referred to this already. It will be difficult to maintain peace among the human populations on earth if we don't first make peace with the planet. We are consuming its resources at a rate that is unsustainable. Many of the wars that are currently underway have direct links to those resources, whether it is oil in Iraq or water in Darfur. Even the longstanding disputes in the Middle East arise in no small part from environmental issues, from the battle over the resources of land and water.

At the university level, these are issues that are addressed across nearly all faculties, whether we are looking directly at the

environment in the sciences, creating alternative energy options in engineering, looking for more sustainable economic mechanisms in our business school, or making progress in environmental law.

UBC is also a world leader in environmental action-research through the work of people like John Robinson of the Sustainable Development Research Institute and Bill Rees, who developed the concept of the ecological footprint.

Harris's last category in peace education is one of the most obvious: "Conflict Resolution." Here again, the potential for university input is huge.

This may seem like a theoretical area, but conflict resolution is all about tactics and strategies. It's all about figuring out better ways of addressing disputes and seeking peaceful outcomes. We do it at the theoretical level – but we also do it at the practical level

through agencies such as the Liu Centre for the Study of Global Issues, our School of Social Work, or the UBC Centre for Asian Legal Studies, from which our faculty are often called to work on pressing, current local and international issues.

I said at the outset that I thought the university role should be integrated, interactive and interdisciplinary, and I would like to come back to that. Just as we have chosen not to departmentalize internationalism, I think it would be a mistake for a university like ours to try to trap peace education in a particular faculty or department.

First, the history of such efforts suggests that they are ultimately limiting. For example, if you lodge an education for peace program in a psychology department, it is almost inevitable that the other members of the department will discourage work that may be relevant to peace, but is not directly related to the

advancement of psychology. Similarly, an education faculty might fight for the development of pedagogy but shun complex discussions of human rights or the environment as work more appropriately pursued by other departments.

Education for peace should be understood and included as part of education for citizenship. It should be all-encompassing, as it is necessarily interdisciplinary. Clearly, we cannot absolve early childhood learning specialists any more than we would dismiss international legal scholars. Education for peace, like the goal of seeking a more sustainable world, must be the task of a diverse cross section of faculty members, staff members –students and graduates of UBC.

In terms of the interactive aspect, the University must recognize, in everything that we do, the value of doing it in partnership. There is no magic ivory surrounding the towers at

UBC's Point Grey campus. There is no cloister in Kelowna at UBC Okanagan and there are no walls around our downtown location at UBC Robson Square or at the Great Northern Way campus, where we work in cooperation with Simon Fraser University, the Emily Carr Institute of Art + Design and the B.C. Institute of Technology to reach across traditional barriers.

We do our best work when we do it in concert with the community. Our students tell us that they learn the liveliest and most lasting lessons when they connect their classroom work to problems in the wider world, whether they are working in co-op positions in Canada or around the globe, or volunteering in a dentistry clinic in the Downtown Eastside.

The Dalai Lama, who has connected strongly to our community right here in Vancouver, has compellingly championed the goal of "educating the heart." Only through self-reflection –

through contemplation – can we nurture the qualities of peace, empathy and compassion in our own hearts, qualities that can inform and transform the education of the head.

I believe that we are, once again, at a critical time in the history of humanity. Through our innovation and experimentation, we have achieved a seeming mastery over our environment. We now work with various technologies that have the capacity to destroy our own world – and it appears that we are doing so by inadvertence if not by intent.

The question we now must answer is whether humankind has the capacity to live in peace – with one another and with all the other living things that comprise a sustainable globe. As we seek to answer that question, we are privileged to greet each new child as an open book, each new day as an unrealized opportunity. Everywhere we look, there are teachable moments. We cannot let

them pass. At our universities, the opportunities to help our community to reflect on the values, possibilities and processes of peace are myriad. We must take them up.

I want to thank you all again for your attention this morning and for your commitment to this important issue. I wish you the best, for the remainder of the conference, and in all that you do.