Martin Lees, Scotland. A project descriptive essay which speaks to Principle 16 on education at the University for Peace

The Earth Charter as a Guide to Building a Culture of Peace and Sustainable Development

After some years as a manager in industry, **Martin Lees** started a thirty-year international career at the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development where he was responsible for programmes on Cooperation in Science and Technology, on the Procedures and Structures of Government, and the "InterFutures Project" on the long-term future of the world economy. He then served at the United Nations in several capacities and in 1982, he was appointed Assistant Secretary General for Science and Technology for Development. He has also been responsible for several high level programmes of international cooperation with China. From 1991 to 1996, he developed and implemented programmes of cooperation with the Newly Independent States of the Former Soviet Union, as Director General of the International Committee for Economic Reform and Cooperation. For two years, he assisted in the revitalization of the University for Peace as Director for Programme Development, leading to his appointment as Rector, 2001-2005.

In spite of undoubted progress, we will leave to our successors a difficult and dangerous world which still suffers from injustice, threats to peace, and abiding poverty for millions. There is, consequently, an intense and deep public concern about the state of our world, about relations between peoples and ethnic and religious groups, and about the prospects for peace and equitable development for future generations.

We can no longer rely on the concepts and policies which have guided us since the Second World War. We need a transformation of thinking, new strategies, and the mobilization of public support and commitment to address the threats to peace and progress in the twenty-first century.

Here, the stated mission of the Earth Charter takes on a profound importance: "to establish a sound ethical foundation for the emerging global society and to help build a sustainable world based on respect for nature, universal human rights, economic justice, and a culture of peace." Representing the accumulated wisdom of a wide diversity of groups and interests brought together over an extended period through a worldwide process of consultation, the Earth Charter serves as a basis for dialogue and the evolution of new values and approaches adapted to the needs of the twenty-first century.

Over the past five years, the Earth Charter has demonstrated its value as an educational tool, as a catalyst for dialogue, as a framework of values, and as a call to action. For this reason, the Council of the University for Peace (UPEACE) has formally endorsed the Earth Charter, which has come to play an important role in the conception, design, and implementation of the newly developed academic programme of the University. UPEACE has oriented its programmes of education, training, and research for peace to focus on issues critical to the Earth Charter's four major themes: respect and care for the community of life; ecological integrity; social and economic justice; and democracy, nonviolence, and peace. Moreover, we are teaching in critical fields that contribute to a culture of peace. These include academic programs in: Human Rights; International Law; Peace and Conflict Studies; Peace Education; Gender and Peace Building; Environmental Security; Media and Peace; Economic Development, Peace and Security; and Disarmament and Non-Proliferation.

To develop a global strategy to achieve a culture of peace, we must clarify the causes of violence and conflict in the modern world. In the past, conflict occurred principally between sovereign states. However, in recent decades, the nature of most conflict has changed. Today, the overwhelming majority of armed conflicts take place within, not between, states. One tragic consequence of this mutation in the nature of conflict is that approximately ninety percent of all those now killed in conflict are civilians – most often women, children, and the elderly.

Establishing a culture of peace depends on the many motivated and expert men and women in, and from, the countries concerned who can work to achieve reconciliation and reconstruct equitable societies. And, peace and progress can

Principle 16. Promote a culture of tolerance, nonviolence and peace.

only be sustained if deeply-entrenched attitudes and behavior throughout society at large can be changed, away from hatred, intolerance, and violence and towards solidarity, respect for human rights, gender equity, and reconciliation. In both these vital respects, the role of education for peace, through many channels and at every level, is of fundamental importance, as reflected in the mission and programme of the University for Peace.

What is the meaning of "peace"? Peace is not simply the absence of conflict. Rather, think of peace in the same way as you think of health. Being truly healthy is much more than simply not being sick. True health means living an active, productive life; pursuing your aspirations; and even contributing to the happiness of others. Thus, when we wish for a culture of peace, we wish for a world of security, justice, dignity, solidarity, opportunity, progress, and hope for the vast majority of human kind. We wish in fact for a world to the measure of the high aims of the Earth Charter! We are far from this today.

We can, in fact, only achieve security for ourselves if the world around us is peaceful and prosperous. Our security and progress are, in the long term, indivisible from the security and progress of others. A pre-condition for peace in the twenty-first century is the creation, through national and international cooperation and action by governments and civil society, of conditions in which the vast majority of our fellow humans can feel secure and hopeful in their lives.

We do have the capacity to create a better world. It is not simply a question of resources – we have seen how vast resources can be rapidly made available for war. As made clear by the Earth Charter, it is a question of values, priorities, organization, and will.

The threats to the lives, security, and well-being of hundreds of millions of people in the coming century will not

arise only from the willful consequences of conflict – "man's inhumanity to man" – but also from economic and environmental pressures such as poverty, famine, pollution, and disease, and the collapse in "failed states" of the minimum social and political capabilities essential to preserve the framework of stable, peaceful societies. We are, in fact, challenged to manage systemic problems of increasing complexity and under conditions of dynamic change, substantial uncertainty, and risk. A more systematic, interdisciplinary approach must be developed which recognizes the key relationships between the issues we face and also between the strategies and policies to address them. This approach commands a new respect for international solidarity and cooperation and shared ethical principles. It must take full account of the diversity of ideas, aspirations, and approaches in our pluralist world. In all these respects, the Earth Charter provides a guide and a starting point.

If we are to manage our future problems, we will need a new generation of leaders, adapted to the conditions and challenges of the modern world. They will have longer-term vision and commitment to the future of humanity. They will be able to operate across disciplinary, sectoral, and institutional boundaries. And, they will not be prejudiced by narrow ideological or national views; they will be open to different cultural insights and opinions.

This is an immediate challenge to our academic institutions – to undertake the interdisciplinary and multicultural research and teaching on which new policies and leadership must be based. The new generation of leaders and teachers, if they are to function effectively in the modern world, must be willing to recognize their own limitations – to understand that they themselves have been conditioned by their own backgrounds and experience. They must not believe that their task is to impose on others their own opinions because they consider these to be unambigu-

ously correct. They may then be able to function successfully in a pluralist world, benefiting from and respecting diverse cultures and opinions while retaining a clear sense of purpose for the common good.

In our increasingly interdependent world, it will simply not be feasible in the longer term for the wealthy and privileged of the planet to defend their advantages by military means, or by vast expenditures of human ingenuity and material resources. We must renew our efforts to strengthen international solidarity and cooperation to build solid foundations for world peace.

Our planet is at risk of separating into two worlds within and between countries – a relatively safe world of wealth and privilege and a dangerous world of poverty and hunger, injustice, and misery. But, these two worlds are fundamentally interdependent – through environment and climate change; through the movement of people, through migration, and mass tourism; and in the face of rapidly spreading, deadly diseases which respect no national boundaries. We now understand that we are also obliged to face together the threats of international crime and terrorism which affect developed and developing countries alike.

In effect, the well-being and the security of all of us depend directly and indirectly on an intricate web of international relationships and cooperation, which, in turn, depend on good will, trust, and common interest among groups and nations – easily destroyed, very difficult to reconstitute. To achieve a culture of peace, we must explicitly strengthen international solidarity, trust, and cooperation. On the positive side, humanity has never had greater resources in terms of knowledge, skills, technological systems, and resources to address threats to peace, security, and development. But, these resources are not effectively applied on a significant scale to prevent conflict and build the

foundations of solidarity and peace. The flows of resources to stimulate development remain small in relation to the needs and opportunities.

Our current policies, principally focused on reaction to specific and immediate problems, are not, in fact, laying the foundations for sustainable peace. In the absence of a renewed and concerted effort engaging the whole world community to prevent conflict and to build the foundations of peace and progress, the prospects for peace and security in the twenty-first century are limited, even for the most wealthy and powerful countries.

Committing ourselves in practice to sustainable peace requires new ideas, new policies, and new leadership, as so clearly set out in the Earth Charter. Education for peace can make a critical contribution. The developing countries and the countries in transition cannot be stable and cannot reduce poverty, illiteracy, hunger, and disease unless violence and conflict can be prevented and resolved. And, this can only be achieved if there are thousands of leaders, teachers, and professionals in these countries who work to prevent and mediate conflict and achieve reconciliation; teach non-violence, tolerance and human rights; build the basis of good governance, justice, and democracy; and undertake the programs needed to achieve equitable and sustainable development. To prevent conflict, it is essential to achieve a culture of peace in society as a whole by changing attitudes and behaviour away from intolerance, hatred, and violence, and towards tolerance, reconciliation, respect for human rights and gender equity, and mutual understanding among different ethnic, religious, and cultural groups. Such changes in deeply-held beliefs and attitudes can only be encouraged by education through many formal and informal channels and through a positive role of the media.

Strengthening educational capacities in developing and transition countries to provide teaching, training, and research on critical issues of peace and development at every level has emerged as an increasingly important means to build the foundations of peace and progress. Also important will be widely informing men, women, and children in the developed countries on world issues and peace education. Voters in these democracies must become aware of and understand the present and future realities of world affairs if they are to support the outward-looking, longer-term policies needed to achieve a secure and peaceful world for all.

By disseminating knowledge and supporting efforts throughout the world to educate a new generation of leaders, teachers, and experts on the critical issues of conflict prevention and the building of peace, we can contribute to a more peaceful and secure future for humanity. And in this global effort, the Earth Charter will play an important part. ●