

Welcome to Turning Conscience Into Action, the Earth Charter podcast. Join Mirian Vilela, Earth Charter International Executive Director, in her fascinating conversations with great thinkers, scholars and activists from around the world who are working in the fields of sustainability, ethics, education and social transformation. Our purpose is to generate new insights on how to face current global challenges and inspire informed action.

So welcome for our today's conversation and session that I have the privilege of having Amr Abdalla here with us.

Amr is Professor Emeritus at the University for Peace, but Amr has been teaching peace education and conflict resolution mediation for many years. Welcome Amr and thank you so much for being here. Thank you so much for having me here. Amr, you have so much experience in the field of peace and conflict and in education. Can you share with us some thoughts on what is the role of education in transforming conflict and building a more peaceful world? Thank you Mirian for the opportunity and also for all the good work that you and the Earth Charter have been doing to advance the notion of sustainability, which is a critical notion in the field of peace and conflict resolution.

And when we talk about the role of education in peace, I always distinguish in terms of peaceful interventions and conflict between different levels. There is a level where I need to intervene to stop violence from happening or to aim to balance the power if there is power at symmetry or build trust between people so that I can start to prepare for peaceful approaches to resolve the conflicts that are happening between nations, people, communities and so on. So where is education here? Education comes when we are thinking how to make peace last, how to make it sustainable.

The long term that change that we need to do to people and to communities at a deep level so that conflicts don't continue to come back. I always tell my students on the first day of class, conflicts are inevitable. Conflicts will always happen. There is no escape from that. But the escape is from the violence, from the negative aspects of conflict. And to do that, you need to educate more people and more communities so that they know how to deal with conflict effectively. The effect of such education, you cannot see overnight.

I can see overnight how I can stop violence in a conflict. I can see overnight how I can resolve immediate issues of conflict between parties. But to educate people, to change, to transform, to become more peaceful with themselves and with others around them and with the earth and the environment, that takes time. And therefore, when we say, let us use education for sustainability and for peace, we need to set up ourselves with the expectation that it will take time until this thinks in and people really internalize what they are learning and become more effective in dealing with conflict that will always happen in a peaceful way.

So when we think about enduring peace, education is essential. It's essential for long lasting peace, but also to prevent conflict. Is that right? Absolutely. As a matter of fact, it is in that intersection between transforming conflict and learning to prevent conflict that education is critical. Because if I can, in the process of peace building and transformation, which is a long-term process, include education that will help people to learn how to

internalize peace and how to deal with conflict, then they will develop the proper tools to prevent the negative aspects of conflict as they emerge again.

We are not saying that prevention of conflict means we will stop conflicts from happening. That's impossible. But with proper education, we will provide to people and to communities and nations better tools to know how to prevent the negative aspects of conflict. Even more important, they will learn how to predict conflict as it is emerging, to have early warning systems, whether on a national level or even individual and family level, and to have the proper tools and skills to know how to deal with it early enough before it starts to become violent.

So how about any insights you have on your practice, your experience in education? You have been teaching for over 25 years. You are a professor emeritus at the University for Peace. And actually, I think you are the star professor at the University for Peace, where you have been involved for so many years and teaching the foundation course. Could you share with us any insight you have had in the actual education practice, in your experience in education, insights from your, of this many years of experience, one or two insights you have had over these years of your own teaching practice?

I have to say that UPEACE is definitely open for me as a space to develop even farther methods of teaching that are suitable for peace and conflict resolution, primarily participatory interactive approaches. And I think that there is no way around teaching through participatory interactive approaches in the field of peace and conflict resolution. The reason for that is that when it comes to conflict and peace, we as individuals, all of us have experiences related to peace and conflict, whether on a family level, community level, national level, sometimes we demonstrate on the streets because of political issues.

So we get involved at that national level. Sometimes we demonstrate again as the international issues and we'll be part of the actual conflict and we'll take a position in it. Certainly, we all have experienced conflict with families or in work environments. Exactly. And we don't know how to address them. And sometimes we do. And that's exactly what we want to open a space for people to come and share. We want them to bring their own experiences in the classroom, to connect it to the theories and the frameworks and through this interaction between the intellectuals, the academic, with the personal experience that people bring, you can enrich those very skills that you mentioned about sustainability.

Because the more we can make people understand, oh, when we are talking about this model of analysis or the theory that is important in the field of peace and conflict, I need to make sure that the students know that it is connected directly to what they have been dealing with and that what they have to contribute in the class is so valuable. And so it was through this interaction between what the students can bring and what we are bringing to them from an academic perspective that I found UPS especially to become and to be an amazing space, especially when you have students coming from all over the world.

The diversity. The diversity. So that, I mean, people sit and share and sometimes they share very, very intimate issues that it shocks people that when they hear some of those

stories, maybe one story on there asked me for a specific one. And as students, I remember from several years ago, it was in a class we were discussing nonviolence. You can imagine the students coming to study at UPS. Everybody is about nonviolence, Martin Luther King, Gandhi. So the students in my seminar, 20 students or so, all of them are so enthusiastic about how nonviolence will work to deal with any conflict in a peaceful manner, will transform other people, blah, blah, blah, all the good stuff.

And of course, all of us are in agreement. But there was one young student, a woman, was quite in the class. At the end, she raised her hand and she said, I understand everything you say about nonviolence and I agree with you. However, when I was 14 years old, I was sexually assaulted by two men. In retrospect, I wish I used violence to stop this from happening to me. And she started to cry. The whole class was so silent for two minutes, nobody would even breathe. And then of course, everybody came to support her.

But I think the silence that I, every time I share that story anywhere in the world, it is amazing the silence that you hear in any space where you share, when you share it. And I think because we challenge assumptions of people, okay, we want nonviolence, we value nonviolence. But how can I reconcile this with the story of this young woman? I cannot dismiss her story. I cannot say, oh, yours is not important. No, it is. It is about nonviolence and violence. How can we reconcile our values with the reality, like such as this one?

Those big questions are what we are after in the education of peace. I also tell my students, if you think that you came to UPS or any other institution teaching about peace to get the answer, I'm sorry, you are wrong. Our goal is to make you walk away with more questions. In other words, we want you to develop critical thinking so that you can expand your horizon as you think of all those difficult issues. So you have shared this important point about bringing students' own perspective and life experience to make meaning out of this series.

So certainly we have found, of course, a similar approach in education for sustainability. But you just talked about critical thinking. What is critical thinking for you in practice? Well, critical thinking for me is actually a 360 way of looking at established assumptions about the world, not to say that here is even in a subtle way to come to people in different parts of the world and say, you need to develop your critical thinking about what's happening in your society. And in a way, you are telling them, work hard to be like us.

And I find that this subtlety is the dominant to a great extent in some of the processes of critical thinking that I see happening in the field of development, in the field of peace building, with institutions coming mainly from the West, going to tell people in conflict areas and underdeveloped areas that you need to develop your critical thinking. That's fine. I really appreciate that. But I think that they should also be open to realize that their own way of coming to offer critical thinking is critical thinking about itself.

And to appreciate that it's a 360. And for all of us to be open to the idea that we need to deconstruct our own assumptions about how power issues, dominance, and many other institutions in every place that seem not to help individuals and communities to grow in a healthy, equitable, sustainable way. Wonderful. Thank you for sharing with us this

important way of looking at critical thinking, meaning that it's not just about criticizing for the sake of criticizing, which is a misconception of many, that critical thinking is equal to just criticizing.

But it's rather giving people an opportunity to have a broad view, a 360 view of things and also an invitation for us to question our assumptions. So critical thinking is certainly an element of education for sustainable development, of peace education, of global citizenship education. So there has been these different schools of thought, scholar work, research, and also UNESCO slash UN agendas on these different educational approaches or policies even. So education for global citizenship, there's a whole world, peace education, and then education for sustainable development that often are seen as if they were fully or totally fragmented.

And certainly critical thinking is part of all of this. So from your perspective, can you share what does this different education agenda mean? What do they mean to you? And is there any synergies or differences between them? Global citizenship education, peace education, and peace education, but also education for sustainable development? I think that definitely the linkage in my mind is very clear between those three elements. And maybe to try to put it like straightforward, I would say that if I want to teach about peace, then I need to make sure, as we said that I accept that I'm going to be in it for the long term.

That's number one. And my objective is to ensure that whatever I will teach would be sustainable. I don't want to teach you about one time to solve one problem. No, I want you to have the, to know how to fish, not to give you the fish. And to know how to fish is about sustainability. So you will be able to take care of yourself and also to share this with others. So I think the triple effect and the replication and the ability to be able to use this on an ongoing basis to reduce violence and to achieve more peace is the objective of peace education.

And so in doing it this way, we are helping number one with the notion of sustainability in terms of sustainable peace. But sustainable peace in itself, if I am able to achieve it, it becomes an element inside sustainable development. Because if I can help more communities, societies, individuals to know how to use a notion of lasting peace in how they do things, that it becomes a way of life, then I can envision how this can be an effective element in how they can develop themselves in the broad sense of development, not just the economic one, but the economic and the social and everything else.

Leading to developing a notion of connection to everyone else. And this is where maybe I'm inspired by what I see at UPS. And we bring people from all over the world. They don't know about each other. They are different. Different cultures, different ways of looking at the world. Different experiences. And they come here and they bond that connect to connect them. And of course I am blessed that I have been around UPS for 20 years. I have connection to imagine, to some graduates from 2003 and graduates of 2022.

And when I see how they connect with each other in the professional realm, in the social realm, when they finish UPS and how they are interacting and helping each other as global citizens, it's because they embraced also that notion that everything we learned about peace education and sustainability is going to be only effective if we are connecting and

get to everyone around us on a global sense. Because if I am taking this knowledge and this experience and the beliefs and values about sustainability and peace and don't know how to share it globally when we are already in a global village, whether we like it or not, then we will always have elements that are not helping us to move forward all over.

But to the extent that we start to expand the notion of peace and sustainability to be inclusive of others around us and to challenge ourselves to how to respect differences, how to discover creatively ways to overcome differences if they exist between people across the globe, then we will be able to also learn how to be effective global citizens. In doing this, we will discover that there are shared universal values that we need all of us to embrace. They may look different from place to place and that's part of the challenge and fun.

The richness of the process. Absolutely. I mean, even if I think of how to do interactive education, I have to be creative in how to do it while being sensitive to different cultures. And we have done that. I mean, sometimes we go to a place, I mean, if we tell people to stand up and everybody holds hands with everyone next to you. In some cultures, that would not be appropriate based on age or gender sometimes. So you need to see that how can I still have them do things that are interactive and participatory but without insulting their culture.

For example, I mean, a very quick example for this. And I do have a very illustrative picture of it. I was doing interviews about peace building program in Darfur in Sudan. I'm sitting first with a man, the mayor or something of the community. And we are talking about his experience with what's happening with the program. The interview is supposed to be one on one. But of course, in a community like this, forget it, nobody would let you just sit one on one. People started to gather, especially his wife and a couple of other women.

And they stood right behind us as we were sitting like this. And they are so curious what we were talking about. He's not bothered. Women are not bothered. I am questioning, like from a research point of view, is this okay that they are listening to me? But I found that it would be so inappropriate if I say to them, please leave. And it would be insulting. I don't know how this would affect him. And he may feel actually that why do you want them to leave? What about transparency? Why are you, what are you afraid that they will hear?

So I thought, oh my God, there are other dimensions that I need to keep in mind. So I actually just kept going and they are listening. And they were so interested in what we were talking about. So when we, as I was finishing, I asked one woman, I think his wife, would you like to be next for me to interview you? She said, yeah, sure. So the man finished. So he left his chair like this. I said, okay, so please, you come here. She said, no, I will continue to stand behind you while you talk to me.

I know now because it is not appropriate from a gender perspective in that setting that she sits across from a stranger man, a strange man, and to do eye contact like we are doing. She was more, she is more comfortable standing behind me. And I do have this picture. She's behind me and I'm busy taking notes and we are doing the interview. Now we take

this, okay, is this okay? I mean, if I look at the books written about communication and how to do interview, I get a zero. But you had to adapt to the context.

But I had to adapt to the context and ultimately, did I get the information? Because I think ultimately it is about I give voice to a woman. So I achieved an important objective probably on a gender level. I got the information about the Peace Building Program and her perspective on it. So where is the loss here? The loss is only that I did not subscribe to one way of doing things that is, we assume culturally that it is universal when it is actually not. And that takes me to that critical thinking that I mentioned earlier.

We need to expand the notion and open our mind and that's how we become true global citizens. Therefore, there is not just one way of doing peace education. There's not only way of doing global citizenship education in ESD either. But you see the complementarity of education for peace or peace education in global citizenship education. Right? And then there is the complementarity. I think many of the elements that we emphasize in peace education, diversity, dialogue, communication, many, many are actually foundational to global citizenship.

You cannot envision global citizenship without appreciation for diversity, without dialogue, without effective communication. And those are integral to what peace education is all about. So I think that there are a lot of commonalities. The difference is I take it from a peace education angle and then when I put it in the framework of global citizenship, they have a bigger objective or a unique objective which is not only like in peace education, I want to help Part A and Part B to learn how to negotiate, mediate, communicate in a dialogue in an effective, peaceful manner.

That's great. So using it in a global perspective, I want to add to it that I mentioned of people are different, coming with different values, different assumptions about the other. So I need to be aware of this as I am introducing the notion of dialogue and communication. So there is an added layer that I must take into consideration in global citizenship. So both in global citizenship education and peace education and even education for sustainable development has a lot to do with values education.

That is not about educating about one way of looking at values but education about learning how to question and make our values assumptions visible. Is that right? Absolutely. And to appreciate that the same value may have different manifestations and we need to be able to get deeper with the values to know ultimately what am I trying to achieve. Take the example I mentioned about the woman standing behind me while I'm interviewing her. Did I achieve what I want? And if you let me know, what you wanted to achieve was to change this woman to make her be assertive.

I mean, of course, always you can come up with nice words for everything. And to be assertive means she needs to be able to sit in front of a man and look him in the eye and to feel strong and confident that she's doing it. Well if you tell me that this is the objective of what we're trying to do in global citizenship and in sustainability and peace education, I would say no, I'm sorry, that's not exactly right. But if you tell me, did I make give voice to the woman? Did I allow her to speak? Did I have her share?

Why was confidence and feeling comfortable and assured and respected in her community? I did no harm. I didn't get in trouble with her husband or other people in the community because they would say, oh my God, how come you sit in front of a strange man and look them in the eye? That can be a big problem for her. What am I gaining if I get her in such trouble? I was like, yeah, I transformed with the woman. I'm not sure that that's exactly what to do. So sometimes I feel like we need to draw the line to learn where we can have respect for people, how they live their life.

At the same time, we make sure that value education that she mentioned is penetrated and it is respected and appreciated that those people will say, yes, I see the benefit of this. But I will do it in ways that will be consistent with how I live my life. And if you add to all this, the dimension of environment and climate change and how people think of what is priority for them, I often found in my work, especially when I worked in climate affected areas such as Darfur, it's like, what do we know by reading books and getting PhDs?

When you realize that people on the ground, they know their reality better and you better take all your knowledge and let them know how to apply it because they know their context much better than we do. Now if we look at conventional education and new paradigms of education, so I see peace education, global citizenship education, education for sustainable development as part of a new paradigm of education that differs from conventional education and all these different educational agendas are emphasizing the importance of student-centered approach, participatory learning, more horizontal, practical, experiential learning, etc.

Can you share a little bit about what you think about these elements of new paradigms of education, but also how do they, how do you think they fit to a specific cultural context such as the Arab countries? I think that they actually can work very well and of course I see this from experience. I myself, I'm a product of the traditional ways of education, especially in my school time and my undergrad with in Egypt. I never had a participatory class or anything of that nature. Vertical? You just sit among the 20, 30 students or even sometimes 1000 people in a big lecture hall in the law school.

More theoretical? And you just absorb, you are absorbing, you are a receiver, receive, receive, receive. And then you have an exam at the end of the year and you just dump everything that you learn and that's how you get an A. If you dump it and if you memorize well and you knew how to put it down in the paper, that's it. You got to get the A. Great. Now I then I go to the U.S. and do my graduate work and I was stunned in the beginning when I sat in classrooms and I found that people are so comfortable sharing and talking.

And I have to say that it goes back to even the initial, the formative years of education in countries like the U.S. I still remember my son growing up in the United States and he went to kindergarten and one day he comes to me while he's in kindergarten and he told me that he's going to take a toy I just bought him and he wants to take it to school the next day. I said no, you don't take toys to school. He said, dad, I need, I have a show and tell and I didn't understand that word at the time. I was still a new foreign person in America.

So I thought he's saying like I am going to show off or something. And I said, so I became more stubborn. No, you don't take a toy to show it in school. Dad, you don't understand.

And I said, he was so upset with me and I couldn't understand what was going on. So I decided to go with him to school next day and to make sure because he said the teacher told him to do that. So I thought like, no, no, no, no, your lie doesn't add up.

So we go to school together next day and I asked the teacher, I said, Joseph wanted to bring a toy and I said, no, he cannot. She said, why? He has a show and tell. I said, you two are telling me the same thing. What do you mean? No. She said, yeah, show and tell meaning that we ask every child to bring something they like from their home and of course with the approval of the parents and that they will come and stand in front of everyone, explain what this is and why they like it. And then they take questions from the other kids and they respond about what they like.

So that was a surprise. So I never knew that that was a form of education. I opened her. I was embarrassed. I was realized, oh my God, there is something much bigger about how to learn and also explain to me why my American classmates and the graduate level are so comfortable talking while I was shaking and nervous and I don't know what to say. Shy. Shy. I don't know how to speak my English at the time was not strong enough. My goodness, it was traumatic to sit for three hours in a graduate class.

And this is something we certainly see at the UPS, right? Oh, yeah. In an environment with students from so many different cultures that we easily can identify students that are much more comfortable in talking in class than others. And it's not just an issue of personality, but also a cultural issue. Right. What do students expect to, how do they expect to interact in a classroom environment? Different depending on where we come from. And as a matter of fact, I can share with you an amazing story from UPS that can prove also the benefit of education and that yes, you can transform people.

A few years ago, maybe 15 years ago or 12, we had a student from a country in Africa. And he was relatively older than the rest of the, you know, here's the average age, 25, 24, but he was like late 30s. So, and he was a quiet man by nature. And I remember I taught in his class a couple of times and he was so quiet. He wouldn't open his mouth. He was also a loner from what?

And so he was part of a scholarship program. So the donor requested that we need to talk to the scholarship recipients and to see how they are doing and what can we do to improve things and to write the report and send it to the donor. So I brought all the students who were part of the scholarship to my office and we were interviewing them one by one, myself and my colleague. And we brought this young man like everyone else. He comes shy as always and he sits in front of me. And by then he's been at UPS for three, four months.

And so I was, how are you doing? Fine. Everything okay? Yes. And he only answered like, yes, no, like that. And I said, so you are in the scholarship. Yes, I'm the scholarship. I said, so how do you think we are doing? Like one of the questions I said, like, can you give me your own feedback on how we are doing our job and how can we improve? How can we make things better for you?

You know what he did? He cried. And I was shocked myself. He couldn't even speak. He cried. And we said, what did we say? Did we offend you? Did we say something bad? He said, no, but I am tired of everything I am facing here. Everything is different. Everything I'm not used to. You want me to speak in class when I don't know how to speak in class. And now you, the boss, are asking me as student to tell you how to do your job or how to do it better. This is just too much. And he said to cry even more.

In other words, it's like, I mean, that's when I realized, oh my God, the dosage of transformation and change, that we don't really think that it is that, could not be that significant or like effect, like has such an effect, is actually, can have some deep traumatic effects on a young man like this. However, I mean, from that moment, of course, we calmed him down and he was okay. This very young man in the second semester started to open up. I think by then talking about the internalizing, I mentioned that in the very beginning.

It takes time. It takes time.

The change doesn't happen everything in one day. Exactly.

So he started to actually open up in class. And he actually, he got to a point that in the second semester, they cannot stop him from talking. Completely changed his approach. Completely changed and to the point. He was interacting class. And he proved to be very eloquent, actually, to the point that on graduation day, every academic program master degree program, they have a speaker on behalf of their program to speak on the podium in front of everyone about the experience of UB. And he was selected.

He was selected by his own classmates. Amazing. That was a true. Talking about transformation, talking about sustainability. Yes. So coming back to these elements of new paradigms of education, we cannot take it for granted that it will be easily embraced in different contexts. Right? But would you agree that things are changing in even in the places where conventional education is more predominant, such as in the Arab world, as you mentioned, going back to the Arab world issue.

I now have been going back a lot in the last 15 years or so and doing interactive participatory teaching and training and even teaching and preparing teachers in Iraq and other countries, university professors on how to teach about peace and conflict. Resistance a little bit, but it varies from person to person. So that's encouraging that it is not like a dominant attitude against such learning and education. So I think that and actually they see the benefit of this. I think that globalization and social media and young people are being exposed now to different ways of how they see the world and how they interact is allowing them to be more receptive.

So but I cannot say only young people are the ones who are receptive, but I also see some of the older people even age 50, 60, 40, and they also welcome those approaches. Some embrace it. Some they still are stuck in their old way. But I think the space is there for us to introduce those new approaches. But most important is to show them the benefit of this and why it can be something effective. It's not just we are importing yet another Western

product. No, we are. This is good for this is universal when you give people the space to share and to speak while respectful.

And that's part of what we are teaching people and not telling people to stand up and just be rude or nasty. No. So understanding that also respect and can also have its own coloring culturally. We can actually make a difference. And they are brilliant in how they know how to take that the essence of what we're talking about participation, inclusiveness and so on and the and the interactiveness. And they frame it in their own way that is suitable. And this is where we need to also. Textualizing it.

And trust people. Maybe that's another thing. Trust that they know what they're doing and they can take what we are saying and color it and frame it in what will work for them. So actually, we need to learn talking about critical thinking that where is our interactiveness? We cannot be again the teacher coming from somewhere telling you what to do. So what is the difference between us and the old guard that have been teaching them for generations? In a state, we need to help them to to treat them from day one as equal.

Isn't that what we're trying to teach? Or do we forget it when we go to other places in the world? So we need to trust them and to trust that they do know how to to incorporate this and how they do things.

So you over the years, you have had this wonderful broad view of how things work in terms of education settings in in the Arab world, in the whole Africa continent, in the northern American. And here at the U.P. is very so multicultural.

So looking at all these 25 years of such a rich experience you have had in education, what have you learned the most about teaching?

What have I learned the most about teaching? That if done right, and if you have, I don't know, maybe this is something we can disagree on, but I found that some people have it to be good teachers and maybe more than others in how they are received, accepted by their audience. And some people maybe don't have the same. Maybe they are better writers. They can write great books and articles. They are and we need that. But to stand in front of people and teach and to touch them as we want to touch them, the heart and mind and soul actually.

This is a gift, I think. And it is not, but it is learnable too. I mean, it's not like you're born with it. And I think you have the capacity, but then if you are taught properly how to do it and given the space to practice, you can sharpen an amazing skill that is really a gift to the world, to be able to share. And that's what I found that that gift touches people. I cannot tell you how many times I had people in tears when I worked with them because they were taught yesterday, just yesterday. I had a student from East Asia coming to share with me about what paper that student want to write about in the foundation course.

The person said that because of what they learned in the class, especially about on the personal level and not just international, that this person had traumatic events in their life when they were young and dysfunctional family, alcoholism affected them and abuse, physical abuse. And they wanted to know how to confront his appearance, not confront,

how to actually reconcile with the parent and to heal and to forgive and to also help the parent to understand what has gone wrong.

So the student wants to write their paper on that topic. It becomes like a healing process for this student. It was just so touching to see the students sitting, telling you something so intimate and deep like this. And they want to take what we, I mean, it was also to see that the students is sitting with those frameworks we've been working with, academic frameworks. And look at their life experience. Yeah, and applying their very own life into the framework and how this can help them to know how to deal with the situations that they are dealing with. Talking about how to take this learning. So I would say teaching that transform people at that very essence and core of what we are as human beings. For me, this is success.

And therefore teaching is not just about bringing knowledge, content, it's way beyond that. Especially in peace, peace of sustainability and global citizenship, as you mentioned. Now we are talking about touching people at the core and I feel blessed that I have been in a place for the last 25 years to contribute in this way to people's lives. Wonderful. One last question. You have also been so involved in interest in this interface dialogue, bringing people together from different religious traditions and culture.

So can you share a little bit about this idea of diversity and unity at the same time, from a diversity of religions and faith, traditional faith in the world, but also the importance of human shared values. How do you see that, of what some people could see as opposite components of human lives, no cultural diversity and religious diversity, religious diversity in human shared values. What have you learned from that over the years through your experience in that field? That's a field of interface dialogue and working with people from different religions to address whatever forms of violence that may happen within or between people from different religious or spiritual groups.

Of course something has been eternally happening in humanity, because we always say that the worst types of conflicts are value-based conflicts. When what I believe to be right or wrong is jeopardy or interfered with, then I will die to protect it. More than I will die because I don't have food actually. I mean people will die and fight for values and beliefs. More than they would actually fight for food and shelter. That's actually the whole theory of basic human needs, get into stuff like that. Now having said this, of course it's a great thing about all belief systems, especially religious ones. They actually have a lot of commonalities between them. All of them emphasize respect, peace, over violence. A lot of, I mean many of these, the problem, of course all those elements are the same.

And the problem is we sometimes get so stuck in that we built a wall around our own religion and we say our religion is the only, and that's by the way also another common characteristic among all of them, that some people who proclaim the legitimacy to speak on behalf of the religion will say and write that our religion is the only right one. And yeah, there are, yeah it is the way. I mean and it's in all these religion and in belief systems. Exactly, yeah, yeah you are right. It's not just religion.

And this is where what we need to break through in our effort to work with people across religions and across belief systems is to get more people to say no, this one notion that

my way is the only way to heaven or whatever it is called in different settings and that in everyone else's doom to hell, also according to different belief systems, this one notion we need to overcome and to connect more on the shared values of humanity, respect and so on. And as a matter of fact, there is, especially in the religious sitting, an easy, not easy way, it's never easy, but there is an argument, again, it's this notion that I put the wall and say I am the only good one, everyone else is doomed, is to actually question that, I mean, are you God?

I mean, most of religions have the notion of God, maybe other secular belief systems are not what that, but they actually end up being like this.

Also believing we are our way is the only way. I mean, even in the name of democracy, they would say our way and look how many wars were fought in the name of like to spread democracy. Well, if other people did this in the name of religion and other things before, that's a whole other story. But back to religions, I will argue if all of them believe in a God, one God often, then we need to accept that, let that God decide who's good and who's bad. And as a matter of fact, that God always said that the good person who is good is not the one who just prays 24 hours a day.

No, it is the person who goes out of their way to help the needy, that is a person who respects the earth and the environment, the one who shares the one who works hard, who has integrity, doesn't steal, doesn't do things that are hurtful, doesn't keep. So this is universal in all religions. And when we connect on this and the break down that wall of my religion is the only one, this is for me is the recipe and it works great. But it worked great. I have seen it works very well with people who are like-minded. And for me, this is not the real battle. My real battle is to go into the communities and places where real people are at risk of being lured by the ones who will tell them that the wall is the right way of being religious and to make sure that we reach them.

This is really where our battle is. So our battle is to see the wall and not build the wall, put down the wall. Put down the wall and make sure that those are at risk of joining within the wall, realize what's wrong with that and to stick to those universal values. Yeah, thank you so much. Thank you for sharing and emphasizing this importance of looking at our shared human values in the midst of celebrating our cultural diversity. Yep. Well, Amr, thank you so much for being here with us. It's such a pleasure to have this conversation with you. Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you so much and good luck with everything you are doing. If you like this episode, please share it and support our movement by making a donation. This podcast is developed by Earth Charter International as part of our work as UNESCO Chair on Education for Sustainable Development with the Earth Charter. For more information, visit our website at earthcharter.org.