



National Consultation in preparation of 10th World Assembly Religions for Peace
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CARING FOR OUR COMMON FUTURE

Circle Sessions: **Peace education**

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We see peace education as a lifelong process. Education Permanente. Irrespective one's age, we consider it a challenge and actually a duty to exercise the practice of peace.

The concept of 'Peace Education' is not only limited to the exclusion of conflict between states, it's especially about respectful, peaceful attitudes, about harmonious encounters, about just societies. This takes place at all levels of human society from individual- to state level. We need to work at our own inner peace: train ourselves in dealing with our own conflicts and aggravations. Don't push them aside, but observe them, think them over and start an inner dialogue.

Religions, for example, offer many examples to develop oneself and to outgrow one's ego. They also show how to behave to others in the best ways. Despite the disgraceful roles followers of different religions have played as well, during the centuries...

But the latter doesn't disqualify religions with their helping hands for bridgebuilding, for compassion and reconciliation, for preventing or solving conflicts and for giving good examples. It's up to us to be(come) a role model of our belief!

What has been achieved in the field of peace has been achieved because of cooperation for the good purposes. Together we're stronger. We can make the needs in society known to our governments and parliament members, so the fulfilment of these needs can be obtained via democratic decisions. We have to underline the importance of harmony and justice to politicians. Society will profit from that. There is an unwritten rule that you will receive (in return) what you give or do to others. The seed of this wisdom cannot be planted early enough in the consciousness of everyone.

In Rotterdam the Platform for Life Philosophies & Religions started '*Peace Tables*' where Christians, Muslims and Hindus -and in districts with Jews and Buddhists, they too-participate. Together they talk about what peace means to them, they discuss practical problems and daily life matters: poverty, lack of respect, their cultures, chances in life for young and old. (One problem is, for example, that students who have to find a traineeship they are often refused after giving their (not originally Dutch) name.)

At the Peace Tables they also talk about 'law or heart'. They share the longing for peace and being a good person. They spread that they treat each other respectfully and help each other – and they invite others to do the same.

On that important level of interhuman relations we discover, when we start talking with each other, similarities. Everyone wants peace. Everyone is sometimes confronted with discourteous behaviour. How to deal with that? Can we forgive? Or do we focus in feelings of

revenge, hate or maybe fear? It's important to learn how to socialize with other people, how to communicate. It's necessary to teach this to children. Communication without violence.

A young student tells her experience of being born in an Islamic country where everyone had to be Muslim. (She has relatives who are Christians.) "It was a reason to hate Islam." After meeting Muslims in Holland, she discovered that they lived a similar life as she did. In the beginning she felt scared to talk to people who thought or believed differently from her. Because that was dangerous 'back home'. In the Netherlands she started realizing that the government there was suppressing people "to make them think what they wanted them to think. Islam was misused to have power over the people." Here, her image of Islam changed. Her lesson: let everybody free to make his/her own choices, because we all want peace.

Note: her story made the listeners realize how difficult it is for us to imagine that you cannot freely speak out. Not mentioning how freedom of speech has been downgraded here to 'be allowed to say whatever we want to say to and about others.' Whether the words are hurting others, downgrading, offensive or full of hate... To us, this is a misconception of what freedom of speech really means. The previous has more to do with social behaviour and with (lack of) eloquence of speech.



This new experience of living together in freedom and peace was for this young girl (14 yrs old) reason to make a flyer for this meeting of Religions for Peace, to show her vision, that only by reaching out to each other, by respecting and taking care of one another we can reach peace together. "We should give a good example to the new generation."

Why is it so hard to live in harmony? Is it a lack of knowledge? Or a lack of respect for the core values and sources of inspiration of each other? Is it fear? When people get to know each other better, they can live together. Search for basic human values, look for connection. Once people get to know each other they do find ways to coexist. (“I dislike Muslims, but Ali, my neighbour is a great guy”)

A shared reflection is that society in the Netherlands is hardening. This brings concerns to many people.

A teacher noticed that since she can teach “Levensbeschouwing” (reflecting on life philosophies, religions and ‘life’ itself) her students are much more reflective about what to do with their life and what choices they can make. They wonder about questions like: what are vital questions in life? What are ‘facts’?

To her experience, these lessons of “Levensbeschouwing” should be compulsory on each and every school. “In these lessons students get the opportunity to express themselves and to meet the other.”

And of course, we prefer mixed schools with the variety of children that live in the Netherlands.

Schools of Peace, in which the basic social values are being internalized in the subjects at school, are another chance for peace education. RfP Netherlands is involved in such an initiative.

In Norway, after the education renewal, the schools have to be ‘Peaceful schools’.

Another teacher underlines the importance of the ‘keynote’, the basic principle of the teacher. “No tolerance for peck-order or the sentence “I’m better than you”.

Harry Overmeijer
RfP Board Member

Recommendations:

1. Recommendations RfP to discuss among RfP participants or with politicians and educational organizations:

- Peace education and ‘Levensbeschouwing’ should be a compulsory subject in secondary education.
- Stimulate the study and founding of Schools of Peace, in which basic social values are being internalized in the subjects.

2. Recommendations for new thinking and behaviour based on future needs:

- Teach new generations the art of handling power with responsibility for society and life and show them the dangers of war and destruction by teaching them *to choose for life* instead of destruction;
- Learn and teach to do our utmost to prevent conflicts and to prevent conflicts to turn into worse;
- Teach how to communicate in harmonious ways and to solve problems;
- Where needed, help to overcome fear in ourselves and in others;

- Teach social values in (preferably mixed) schools and let students share their stories, their questions and offer them the opportunity to meet the others. Since meeting one another offers us a mirror of who we are, it may deepen our reflections on our self and may enrich our hearts and mind;
- We need to create a fostering environment to help discover inner freedom and ways to reach one's own choices;
- Stimulate creativity and critical, independent thinking;
- Give real attention to pupils and students – who they are, what bothers them and who they might become with your help;
- Help building their inner strength to be able to face different attitudes and to tackle difficulties and frustration. Teach them to be trustable;
- Show children the beauty of nature, the beauty of love.

3. General Recommendations

- We need to look for what connects us and let's celebrate that and celebrate who we are with our differences;
- Create awareness that 'religions' are not equal to 'religious people' or people who tell they're acting in name of religion;
- Stimulate intergenerational meetings – they're very inspiring for both generations;
- To avoid meetings turning into debates or polarisation use the circle method – where listening to and understanding each other is the aim. Everybody is in a different stage of life and has her or his own lesson to learn;
- To stimulate meetings in general, there are best practices like 'Peace Tables', 'Houses of Peace', 'Street pastorate' activities and meetings and, where needed, provide warm meals for everyone once a week, in places where it's important to offer opportunities that people can meet one another.