

NO WAR 2019: RADICAL PATH TO PEACE

Hosted By World Beyond War

L I M E R I C K , I R E L A N D

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Departments for Peace and Peace Centres

Why Every Country Should Have Them

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Introduction

Hello and good morning distinguished speakers, chair and delegates, good to see you all. It is an honour to be at a World Beyond War conference who have and are tirelessly working for the abolition of war. Thanks also to David Swanson and the team of World Beyond War for giving me an opportunity to speak at the No War 2019 conference at Limerick.

Dear Friends, UN Charter Goals of saving succeeding generations from the scourge of war, World Beyond War and the message of my book How Not To Go To War are the same as they all advocate for building a peaceful world.

Understanding the Military Mindset

Dear friends, UN Charter goals of saving succeeding generations from the scourge of war and message of my book, How Not To Go To War are the same, as both are advocating working for building a peaceful world.

Please allow me to ask a relevant question. Is peace possible? Can it pay and how do we build it into the fabric of daily life? Is war inevitable, necessary or beneficial, as we are often led to believe, with humanity doomed to ever increasing military spending or is it a charade to support the war economies. Years and even decades of perpetual war in Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, Yemen and Libya have pushed militaristic spending to its highest ever level - \$1.82 trillion for 2018 (SIPRI). US has spent \$6 trillion since 2003 with a result that its economy crashed and the banks had to be bailed out to the tune of \$16 trillion, directly affecting the poorest of the society.

Global impact of violence in 2018 was \$14.76 trillion, a direct result of it is the 75 million refugees forced to flee from conflict and persecution. By contrast, the UN budget for peacekeeping operations was only \$6.7 billion for 2018, less than the yearly budget of Tokyo fire station, or what US citizens spend on plants and flowers in a year. Dear friends, no society on earth can afford to waste trillions of dollars every year.

In my book, **How Not To Go To War**, I have explained the psychological underpinnings of enforced culture of fear and militarism which is responsible why do taxpayers consent to pay billions, if not trillions of dollars to support military structures when their country faces no realistic threat of invasion and has not been attacked for centuries?

Real security doesn't come from belligerent posturing or reckless military interventions in Middle East spreading conflicts rather than settling them. Real

security comes from working for peace and justice, cooperation and diplomacy and addressing the root causes we all face like terrorism and insecurity, widening gap between the “haves” and “have nots.” The systematic destruction of arms control and treaties and disregard for international law by some world leaders have led to a new nuclear arms race and concern for national and global security.

Dear Friends, to understand the military mindset we need not go far. Even the Church of England has £10 million invested in global arms firms. In May 2019 Westminster Abbey (a church) hosted a bizarre and shameful thanksgiving celebration to mark the 50th anniversary of the UK’s Trident nuclear submarine system, armed with the kind of weapons infamous for indiscriminately killing 100,000 people in Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The event took place in the presence of government ministers and the royal family, showcasing how political, social and even religious elites combine to glorify the weapons of apocalypse.

We have learnt nothing from the death toll of Hiroshima and Nagasaki as US and Russia after abrogating the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Force Treaty (INF) are developing the new usable nuclear capable weapons, a dangerous development which if used in a conventional conflict could trigger a third world war. The truth is that there is no way to win a nuclear war without eliminating civilisation.

With the rise of populists, far-right nationalist movements, and authoritarian leaders, the rules-based global order is being dismantled in front of our eyes, at the moment we need it most. The ultra-nationalists worship military along with racism, swaggering masculinity and dismissal of environment which is of great concern. The world faces complex overlapping crises in the form of poverty, inequality, climate change, forced migration, conflicts, terrorism and intolerance, dangers from new technology- cyber warfare, artificial intelligence and hypersonic missiles.

The military sucks the blood from the economy like some vast leech which leads US and other Western economies to crumble while it still continues to ask its government for more fighter planes they don’t need. Devastating result of the large military spending is that over 820 million people are suffering from hunger and go to bed without any food.

Why is the world spinning out of control? This is because the global economy is rigged in favour of rich countries at the expense of the poor countries, also because of our wrong spending priorities. People are brainwashed with deceptions and mistruths and are led to believe that we can’t afford the National Health Service (NHS), education, public transport, renewable energy, doctors, teachers, nurses, fire fighters, social workers and police.

Things we can afford and the government draconian laws force us to support are unregulated banks, war in the Middle East, £93 billion corporate welfare for 2014, 2015, tax cuts for high earners, £42 billion for HS2 Railway, 11% pay-raise for MPs, £7 billion for Westminster Parliament refurbishment and, £205 billion for replacing the Trident Nuclear Submarine.

Departments for Peace – A Great Institutional Invention

Dear friends, we need to change this culture of militarism, populism and extremism or we will face the scenario of what John F Kennedy said in his speech to the UN in 1961, 'Mankind must put an end to war or war will put an end to mankind.' This dire situation demands strong collective action, with new institutions to strengthen the international rule-based order, as you never change things by doing the same things again and again. People are taking to the streets and demanding new institutions to harness change. To change something, build a new model that makes the old model obsolete. My new book, **How Not To Go To War** has a way out. It examines how governments can bring these new institutions about.

It is a shameful fact that although almost every country has a Ministry / Department of War / Defence, very few have a Ministry / Department for Peace. There is an urgent need for ground-breaking institutions like Departments for Peace which will create the infrastructure for peace at governmental level. These departments will promote a culture of non-violence both at home and abroad, by seeking common ground through dialogue, diplomacy, negotiations and alternatives to war. Departments for Peace will institutionalise peace in the same way that war has been institutionalised by Departments for Defence.

Departments for Peace will promote a foreign policy of live and let live principle. It will not apply threats, sanctions and bombings and instead it will have less confrontational approach to Russia, China, Iran and North Korea.

Departments for Peace all over the world will work for the promotion of culture of peace and eventual abolition of war. A Minister for Peace will be a voice at the Cabinet table to speak up for non-violent conflict resolution and alternative to war. It will advise on policies which can be developed to reduce the potential of conflict. It will provide and coordinate government resources to foster understanding in Britain and the world of how war can be avoided and peace achieved.

It will work to undo the systems that result in violence including the arms trade, racism, environmental destruction and shift the focus from war making to a culture of peace advancing practical techniques to avoid outbreaks of violence before they arise. Peace departments will also support and promote research into the causes

and impacts of conflicts, monitoring potential areas of conflict and implement policies for conflict resolution. It will produce materials to be used by parliamentarians and public debates promoting negotiations and alternatives to conflicts.

Successful Examples of Departments for Peace – Costa Rica and Ethiopia

Among the countries that have already established a Department for Peace, Costa Rica and Ethiopia are shining examples of shifting the focus away from war-making. In 1948 Costa Rica abolished its military, allowing it to spend more on health, education and international peace. That is one of the main reasons Costa Rica, a Central American country of 5 million people, tops the Happy Planet Index, which measures personal well-being.

In contrast most of the countries with huge military budgets and possessing nuclear weapons have a level of peace which remains far below the global average. According to the Global Peace Index 2018, the ranking of UK is 45, France 60, China 110, USA 128, Russia 154.

In 2018, Ethiopia established a Ministry for Peace and in a ground-breaking move, its Prime Minister, Abiy Ahmed, brokered a peaceful resolution to a 20-year-old border conflict with Eritrea which had claimed more than 100,000 lives. Relations between the two countries have improved, with flights and communications resuming, separated families reunited and embassies reopened.

UN Resolution supports building Ministries / Departments for Peace

United Nations General Assembly draft resolution (REV. 4/26/10) supports building Ministries / Departments of Peace within governments to strengthen the Culture of Peace. The UN resolution cites all documents on the written on Culture of Peace since 1945. These include Charter of the UN, Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), UN Year, Decade and Programme for Culture of Peace and Nonviolence, constitution of UNESCO and global partnership for prevention of Armed Conflict. All of them point out the need of a Ministry / Department of Peace. So this idea is reinforced by United Nations as well and works for building a peaceful world.

Peace Centres – New Concept of Peace Building for Individuals, Civil Society and NGOs

One of the roles of Departments for Peace will be to open Peace Centres in major cities and towns to act as training, community and educational hubs for peace builders and community leaders, hosting inter-faith dialogue, multi-cultural activities

and seminars on reducing knife crime, violence, shootings and murder. These centres will be the engines for cultural transformation. They will also address divisions in society by promoting a culture of peace in which conflicts can be resolved in a non-confrontational way.

Peace Centres will help create a vibrant local community, training in a non-violent way of life, through methods of reconciliation and conflict resolution, which will help in revitalising the society. It will seek to reconcile differences by community relations programmes, de-radicalisation efforts, prison visits, public diplomacy and outreach. By opening peace/social centres or franchises in each city, town and village, the peace movements can contain violence and foster a culture of non-violence.

The Peace Centres will work towards violence prevention, at home and abroad. It will work with local community for reducing gang violence, drug and alcoholism abuse and meaningfully reduce aimless military pursuits and bloated defence spending.

At the global level, Peace Centres will give peace-building support and humanitarian aid resources – food, healthcare, education and more – to assist countries ending conflict.

Making Peace a Profitable Industry

To start a peace industrial revolution, and dedicate ourselves for creating infrastructures for peace which will work for the benefit of humanity. Against the huge military spending peace can be feasible at a fraction of the cost of military interventions.

It is in the interest of big businesses Fortune 500 companies who operate around the globe to operate in peaceful atmosphere for their business to flourish. These big and small businesses will be too willing to give funding to entrepreneurs for prevention of conflict and establishing urgently needed institutions that can build culture of peace.

Culture of Peace is Universal

The culture of peace is universal. It is shared by people and nations worldwide. A peaceful society is one that acts responsibly for the needs of the entire planet and the beings that inhabit it, a society that is just and sustainable and not characterised by sudden outbreaks of violence and war.

Wars and militarism make us less safe rather than protect us, that they kill, injure and traumatize adults, children and infants, severely damage the natural environment, erode civil liberties, and drain our economies, siphoning resources from life-affirming activities. We should engage in and support nonviolent efforts to end all war and preparations for war and to create a sustainable and just peace.

It is analogous to the Confucian concept of “Ren,” altruistic virtue encompassing kindness, compassion, and goodness promoting the welfare of others. The first duty of government is to safeguard the lives of its citizens, but this mantra was long ago hijacked by arms dealers and warmongers. It is incumbent for all the countries of the world to take peace as seriously as they take war, and build permanent institutions to this end for the transformation of the society.

Way Forward

So let’s work together to fight the challenges we face as a human race. Let us combine our resources and work for a better future for all living creatures on this unique planet earth, because I strongly believe that when we work together, we can achieve extraordinary things. Together we can overcome the threats that affect us as a global community and together we can create a better future for ourselves and our children through forging dialogue, diplomacy, cooperation, collective resolve, innovative partnerships in pursuit of peace, justice and human dignity.

Most of the people have never killed anyone. 102 countries have abolished death penalty. 22 countries including Costa Rica, Iceland, Haiti, Liechtenstein, The Marshall Islands and many more have no armies. 47 countries in our planet have relatively peaceful societies including European Union, Batek of Malaysia, Hadza of Tanzania, Martu of Australia, Lepchas of Himalayas and numerous others. No one has attacked those countries, so in reality non-killing cultures and building a peaceful society is a work in progress. So we can build foundations of peace by adopting non-violence as a mode of action.

Conclusion

When you look through the burning glass of media you mainly see, catastrophes, wars, lies, hypocrisy and destruction. Warmongering dominates the headlines and peace seems to be fading and suppressed by authoritarian leaders. What we all know is a narrow view of the whole picture.

Men, women and children in their billions have suffered the atrocities of war, poverty, human induced environmental disaster with the persistence of ongoing conflicts in various parts of the world. So, how do we save succeeding generations

from scourge of war and militarism. The way out is to build Culture of Peace at individual, national and global level by the establishment of Departments / Ministries for Peace and Peace Centres Worldwide.

Dear Friends, global civil society must continue to play a critical role particularly governments and it's leaders who often make decisions based on self interest of the economic and political elites as is evident from the recent US congress decision to allocate half of its budget 2020 / 2021 an amount equal to over \$700 billion to the military and the rest for healthcare, jobs, infrastructure etc.

As peace activists, our job is to help set up political agenda, provide support to policy makers and mobilise resources around issues. Radical social change doesn't just happen. Change happens when people take action together in non-violent ways that are effective and strategic to build foundations for peace. My message of hope is to empower people to build those foundations and networks of peace by establishing Departments for Peace and Peace Centres in all countries of the world for real and positive change.

Dear friends, the peace movement can and must establish a **strong institutional base** (Departments for Peace) from which to grow. We need a peace industrial complex (that **profits** from preventing conflict) sustained by the same combination of public and private enterprises that keeps the military industrial complex going, generation after generation. War has been **institutionalised**, yet all these weapons have not made the world less violent. Only by **institutionalising** peace at many levels of society can the peace movement become coherent and powerful enough to face down the many commercial and official networks that have a vested interest in armed violence. With peace baked into our institutional framework, in the same way that warfare is already budgeted for.

I'm encouraged by the comparative research of scholars in a book, 'Why Civil Resistance Works' which provides evidence that non-violent campaigns are twice as likely to succeed against principally violent ones. Indian independence movement and the Civil Rights movement in the past are examples of successful non-violent struggles. Movements like Black Lives Matter, Me Too, Extinction Rebellion and mass protests in Hong Kong are recent examples that the civil society of today have what it takes to change the world as the world is ready to be moved.

As always, cynics continue to deride the attempts of us peace activists to make a just, equitable, and peaceful society, as naive efforts which will accomplish nothing, or make matters worse. I think their dismissive attitude is just an excuse to do nothing, take no action and keep business as usual.

Dear friends, in conclusion let me say that dreams never get fulfilled, commitments do. It is protest and activism which brings change and always have. The publication of my book, How Not To Go to War, and establishing Departments for Peace and Peace Centres worldwide, are steps in the right direction, which will permeate non-violence and a culture of peace. This will ultimately put an end to a culture of militarism, violence and war. This is an aspiration for which I am willing to devote the rest of my life.

Thank you for listening.

Peace Quotations:

‘Peace is not a dream. It is an arduous task. We must start by finding peaceful solutions to everyday conflicts with the people around us. Peace does not begin with the other person; it begins with each and every one of us.’

- Oscar Arias Sanchez

‘The only thing that will redeem mankind is co-operation’. That has never been more appropriate than it is today.’

- Bertrand Russell

‘Don't answer criticism by your mouth but by significant hard work’

‘Don't worry about your destiny; do sincere hard work and destiny will become good on its own’

- Acharya Shree Mahashraman

Notes:

1. Vijay Mehta, Peace is Possible – Inaugural Oldham Peace Lecture, International Day of Peace, September 2017
2. Vijay Mehta, Is Non-Violence Peaceful Future Possible, 8th International Conference on Peace and Non-Violent Action, Jaipur, India, January 2014
3. Vijay Mehta, Peace Beyond Borders, New Internationalist, 2016
4. Vijay Mehta, How Not To Go To War, New Internationalist, 2019
5. Institute for Economics and Peace, Global Peace Index 2019 Rankings
6. Erica Chenworth and Maria J Stephen, Why Civil Resistance Works: The Strategic Logic of Non-Violent Conflict, Columbia University Press, 2011

7. UN Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), Worsening World Hunger Affects 821 million, says UN, 2019
8. Peace Pledge Declaration, World Beyond War, 2019
9. Billy Binion, Marianne Williamson Wants To Defeat Dark Psychic Forces With New Department of Peace

Vijay Mehta is an author and peace activist. He is Chair of [Uniting for Peace](#) and founding Trustee of [Fortune Forum](#) Charity. His notable books include 'The Economics of Killing' (Pluto Press, 2012) and 'Peace Beyond Borders' (New Internationalist, 2016). His current book is '[How Not To Go To War](#)' (New Internationalist, 2019)

The Sunday Times described him as a "longstanding activist for peace, development, human rights and the environment, who along with his daughter Renu Mehta has set a precedent for striving to change the world" (**The Sunday Times**, February 01, 2009).

In 2014, Vijay Mehta's bio "**The Audacity of Dreams**" appeared in the book form "Karma Kurry" published by Jaico Publishing House, India with a foreword to the book by **Nelson Mandela**.

"Thank you for all you do Vijay – both the organisation Uniting for Peace and yourself are inspiration and give us all hope that both yourself and the organisation can bring a world without a war. Indeed it is possible, even in our own time." – **Mairead Corrigan Maguire, Nobel Peace Laureate 1976**

*"Vijay Mehta proposes in his book **How Not To Go To War** that in countries and communities, in governments, private institutions and media, Peace Departments and Peace Centres be established to report on and promote peace."* – **Jose Ramos-Horta, Nobel Peace Laureate 1996 and Former President of Timor-Leste**

"I'm happy to give my support to Ministry for Peace whose responsibility would include being a consistent voice for non-violent means of settling disputes" – **His Holiness the Dalai Lama, Nobel Peace Laureate 1989**

In 2017, Vijay Mehta's article, '**Reforming the UN for the 21st Century**' was included in the anthology '**Approaches to Peace**' edited by Prof. David P. Barash published by Oxford University Press, New York. The anthology feature classic and contemporary selection of work on peace which included **Leo Tolstoy, Martin Luther King Jr., Pope Francis, Dalai Lama, Desmond Tutu and Noam Chomsky** among others.