

Peace zones, non-militarization and the future of humankind

Dear Ladies and Gentlemen, thank you for coming to this symposium.

Dear friends from Zenko and from the “non-defended localities movement”, thank you very much for organizing this symposium, and for inviting me on this panel. I am honoured by your invitation, and I will do my very best to well deserve the given honour.

I will talk mostly about two of APRED’s fields of study and work : peace zones (including non-defended localities) and non-militarization. And a bit about my country, Switzerland.

Non-militarization :

Amongst the 27 countries without armies of the world, quite a few do ban the army in their constitution ! But none as strongly as Japan does with article 9.

It may seem pretentious on my behalf to talk about the article 9, you know it well ! But for a peace researcher like me, who works daily on non-militarized societies and issues, this constitutional article is the greatest legal expression of non-militarization, and even of peace altogether, that has ever been passed !

My wonder is big at thinking that such a great intention has somewhat remained void in facts. But at the time this article was adopted, the examples of a successful country living without an army, as well as the examples, means and successes of non-armed security, were all still largely lacking. This has changed !

I’ll state it very simply : Living without an army is perfectly possible ! One country out of eight in the world is doing it, and doing it alright. And it is starting to be well documented and known. This is a large part of our scientific and promotion work at APRED.

Let me give you three examples :

1° In 1948, Costa-Rica has given up it’s army. Since then, it has been in Central America the only country living in peace (without civil war) and in democracy (without dictators). This has given Costa-Rica the immense advantages of stability, good development and eco-peace-tourism. It has also given to the country the honours of receiving the seat of the Inter American human right’s court and of receiving the seat of the United Nations University of Peace.

2° In 1995, Costa-Rica’s southern neighbour, Panama, recognizing the accuracy of these non-militarized and peace policies, by a unanimous vote in parliament, followed the example of Costa-Rica and dismantled its own army.

These two examples do show, the social and political benefits of not having an army, and moreover, the values of making the choice, to always appeal to non-military solutions. For Costa-Rica it also shows that, though very discreet, a large part of the international community has given a strong support to such a solution.

And for Panama, it shows that banning militarism can be a strong option, a true choice for a future of peace ! The unanimous vote in parliament also shows that it is a choice made by the people ! And as the right to peace is vested in the people, this is very important because it is us, “the people !” that will choose in the future, the means and ends, of our security.

Non-militarization opens up a very wide range of questions on safety and security issues. These questions do need indeed, for peace building, to be addressed, specifically and peacefully. As my time is here limited, I will not go deeper into this matter, but know I do care. And your questions regarding how these countries organize their security are indeed very welcome. They are fully legitimate : every one has a right to safety and peace !

Let me give you one more example, showing that being non-militarized does not mean being defenceless !

3° Said flatly, Iceland has started a war without having an army. A non-violent war of course ! And though one man died in this war (by accident !), it is already one death too much. Iceland had a fishing problem in the late fifties, through the sixties and the seventies, as industrial fishing vessels would over fish it's territorial waters, depriving the country of it's basic food resource and of it's main source of income. I pass on the details of how the Icelandic coastguard would fend off, without a firing, trespassing vessels and cut their trawlers off. But in the end, in 1982, when the world treaty on the law of the sea was adopted, it is the Icelandic solution of the exclusive economic zone, that prevailed.

This example shows that rights are not to be given up just because the country does not have an army. On the contrary, not having an army gives a country new and more peaceful solutions, more creative, successful and humane means to address problems.

As peace science and peace awareness bring more and more tools to prevent and peacefully transform conflicts, as non-violent revolutions happen more and more frequently and as the public opinion – you ! – is less and less ready to accept violent and military solutions, I do think that the prospects of banning war for ever and of creating non-violent states and therefore a non-violent world are rising !

In this context, I do hope that Japan will achieve, and the sooner the better, the ideal of peace that your constitution has set up, for yourself to live and for the world to see and respect as an strong example.

Demilitarisation and disarmament in Switzerland

In the nineteenth century, Switzerland, a rather small country, was totally surrounded by the countries that where then the superpowers of their time. In that sense, there is big similarities with the present situation of Japan.

To resist to that, Switzerland build a special military man power, based on permanent training, 3 weeks or so every year till the age of fifty, for all Swiss men.

Military has therefore become some sort of a strong tradition, a military culture, that did not disappear when the technological evolutions of warfare made that manpower useless and when the said enemies disappeared.

In 1989, a constitutional vote to abolish the Swiss army was called by 100'000 citizens. Taking place just after the fall of the Berlin wall, the result of the nation's vote wasn't a total success, but 35.6% of the people where ready to abolish the army.

That was enough to give a stunning warning to the authorities that the army had to change, in its goals, in its conceptions and in the weight it was putting on the people's life and on the public budget.

This reduction of military means is still happening. There is now a civil service for consciousness objectors, budgets have dropped and days of service are being reduced as well.

But better, the population, as well as their representatives, are now being more and more involved in the discussions and in the decisions regarding military issues.

And tough, not expected before a while, the idea of abolishing the Swiss army is still present.

But I do think, that the greatest success of that strong popular intervention on military affairs, is that the country is now turning away from military solutions, and relying more and more on new policies for international security. I do call them peace building policies. Human security, prevention of conflicts, early warning, conflict impact assessment studies for all international and development activities of the state !

There is a real change of paradigm, and I do think it will last.

As well, I do know that more and more countries will follow that example.

Peace zones and non-defended localities, peace made locally

I will give here a bit of the theory of peace zones, then some examples and some thoughts on non-defended localities.

A peace zone can indeed be very small, just one person is enough ! So please be a “one man peace zone”, be at peace with and within yourself !

Peace zones can then be a little bit bigger. Please be at peace with others ! And preferably be at peace with all others, at all times, everywhere and in all circumstances !

When we will all be doing that, we will have a “world wide peace zone” !

The goals of a peace zone can be various, but to be such a zone, somehow it needs to promote, prepare and live peace, and that is peaceful means.

The United Nations assembly has recently declared the 21st of September of every year, to be the international day of peace. And though there is no content nor obligations regarding that day, we can nonetheless say, that we now have a new peace zone, located in time, every year.

It is our responsibility to fill it with growing peace, a peace that will pass the borders of that zone, of that single day, into making more and more peace, more and more days of peace.

All the presidents of South America, meeting for the second time in history in 2002, declared that the South American continent would be a “peace zone”. And they did chose some really concrete measures to make this peace zone peacefully efficient.

The “non-defended localities movement” aims at creating places in which, under humanitarian law, armed conflict cannot take place. These places will therefore be peace zones.

And the more “Non-Defended Localities” there will be, the less space will be left for armed conflict.

As a lawyer, I must say that there is a few points and possibilities that are not quite clear in the article 59 of the protocol of the Geneva conventions. But it is up to the “movement for non-defended localities” to open up the concept and to use these possibilities in a peace creating manner !

As a peacemaking lawyer, I am ready for that !

But to me, this not the only interesting aspect of your movement.

Because the “non-defended localities movement” starts in times of peace, it has high potentials for the prevention of conflicts :

First simply by existing ! As more and more people and human communities will say : “if there is a conflict, we will surrender, we will give up without a fight !”, the less the odds will be that this conflict will ever take place. Because the more people surrender, the more the high authorities will realize that they do not have the support of the population for military solutions. So the authorities will indeed think of new and better ways to solve conflicts than threat and war, than spending safety budgets on militarism.

This is “human security”. The right to live without fear and the right to see the population – not the territory, the country, the institutions or the economical powers – but the people, receiving the means and the ends, the successes of peaceful safety measures.

This is only the passive approach : Simply because non-defended localities do exist and as they do deny the possibility of armed conflict in a given place, they do impose alternatives, and they do highlight the inhuman consequences of armed conflict !

Then the active approach is to promote peace, in these localities and everywhere, by saying and proving, over and over and to every one, that peace is possible, in all circumstances !

There again, with the example they give, non-defended localities, peace zones and countries without armies are peace messengers, and they can and shall become strong peace promoters.

Peace science, peace creating, peace building, peaceful transformation of conflicts, with the help of motivated activists, of peace professionals, of dedicated politicians; with the good sense of the population put to good use, all give sufficient ground to say that : war and armed conflict will not be legitimate anymore, ever !

There is something very Gandhian in offering to be non-defended ! But there is also something very modern in saying and in proving, by this offering, that peace is possible, that we do have the means for it and that we do intend to live up to our ideals and to chose peace, now and for ever !

We live in a very interesting time !

A time to conceive our future as a specie, as a humanity, on a limited planet.

I trust in the globalization of peace !

A time when not only nations, but also people, every single human being has right's, including - I insist ! - the human right to peace.

A time where nation-states and moreover where superpowers will realize that their future is only possible if the future can similarly be granted to others, to all others, to humanity.

A time that implies a little bit more peace than what we have known or created so far; than what we have been able to use.

This is also a marvellous time because we are to choose what type of future we will give to ourselves and to the future generations.

And for that, our fore children will either judge us, or praise us.

They will praise us if the choices we now make, do not only guarantee their survival, but bring them a better, a more peaceful and happy living, than what we and our forefathers had and made.

Let us be part of the solution, not of the problem !

Thank you for the creation and for the well-being of the non-defended localities movement !

Thank you for your attention !

Have a good day, and a good life !

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