

## **Definition of peace**

*Extract of “non-militarisation throughout the world”, forthcoming publication, Åland Islands peace institute.*

*Do not forward.*

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### **1.1.1. Peace**

Peace and its definition, as well as the study and improvement of conflict prevention and conflict management methods have been on the agenda of the scientific community for more than fifty years<sup>1</sup>. Withstanding all the good of it, we still find it useful to look deeper into the definition of peace, as we will use and practice the concept all through our study. We shall look at the definition of peace first by looking at various technical aspects of the attempt to define peace and then by looking at the contents and the limits of peace defined.

#### **a. Technical aspects of the definition of peace**

##### **1) Effects of the definition**

What is important about the definition of peace is not as much the accuracy of the wording or the preciseness of the contents of the definition, than the effect the chosen definition will have on the peace practices of anyone referring to or using the chosen definition. In this regard, defining peace is an involvement process.

##### **2) Integrity of the definition**

Therefore, we need a definition of peace that expresses peace *per se*, a definition that can stand on its own, because peace cannot be defined, at least wholly, by what it is not or by its contrary. So forth, we have little use for a definition of peace that includes un-peaceful or less peaceful aspects of life. For example, we do not need a definition of peace such as the one we sometimes still find in dictionaries: peace defined negatively as the absence of war or conflicts, because peace also has positive aspects, including feelings of harmony and serenity and the necessary means for peace to progress and prevail. Inasmuch, we can have an objective and positive knowledge of the needed conditions for such a peace to be present and to last, or case being of how to improve it.

##### **3) Origin of the definition**

Peace, like life itself, is pre-existent to its definition. Many aspects of our lives would not be possible without peace, although we do not always recognize this as such, as being peace. Peace is necessary to live and to love, to thrive and to prosper, to raise our children and for various other essentials acts of life, big or small. Peace is therefore largely present in our lives and more than not, it does prevail. There is a need to recognize this (and to be thankful for it) in order for peace to progress even more and to last, whenever or wherever it is still needed.

##### **4) Proactive aspects of the definition**

Further than this natural, basic or instinctive notion of peace, there are conscious and interactive aspects of it. Peace needs to be chosen, to stand as a value or a symbol and to be used through a vast array of knowledge, skills and practices.

##### **5) Scope of the definition**

Peace is both humble and universal. It starts in our hearts and minds and goes into all our relations, through all our thoughts, words and actions and at large has effects all over the world.

#### **b. Contents of the definition**

Practically, where and how does the definition of peace take effect?

##### **1) Domains or fields of expression of peace**

Schematically, peace has four realms:

- A core. A fully peaceful place and moment in which inner and outer feelings of peace and well-being, of harmony are felt and eventually shared. This “deep peace” can be acknowledged and expressed or it can stand tacitly. If expressed, it is easier to replicate.
- A social dimension. Again a place and a time but between people (or eventually through institutions made of people), where peace enters into or is the full part of an interrelation.

“Relating peacefully” is a matter of empathy and dialogue, which require a fair set of values and skills, the choice to use them and an environment sufficiently sound and safe for progress (e.g. into peace) to take place. Though they could be used a lot more, the values needed to communicate peacefully are more or less common and natural. Yet, the more implicit they are, the greater is the risk of misunderstandings or manipulations. Therefore, there is also a need for social infrastructures for peace, formal and informal spaces of communication to address eventual difficulties. Evaluations are needed as well, as they provide a learning space and reasonably allow for trial and error for experience building. Moreover, these spaces of peaceful communication of all sorts can serve as means to share values and goals, projects, commitments and achievements.

- A political sphere. Both the resolve to see peace progress and the infrastructures needed for the safe progress of peace and the gentle handling of conflicts need to be supported through our institutional mechanisms and by our political representatives, universal structures and procedures by which the resolve for the realization and the progress of peace can be realized, “peace universally”.
- A frontier. Last but not least, there will always be, to some extent, a zone not yet or not so fully at peace. A place where the work for peace needs to be done and where existing peace tools may lead to the improvement of peace, “peace in the making”.

## 2) Necessary contents of peace

There are some requirements for peace to be effective.

- As said, peace needs to be defined as a goal and chosen as such. Sometimes peace can be chosen simply out of necessity. But to prevent such a necessity and to establish or to re-establish peace, there is a need for peace to be made, to be pre-existent and to stand as an essential value at all times. Therefore peace needs to be given proper attention, energy and means for its realization, a valued choice.
- The satisfaction of all basic needs, including the recognition of identity, intellectual and emotional needs is essential for peace. Their absence may lead to conflict.
- Peace mechanisms (peace education, infrastructures for peace, for conflict prevention and gentle conflict handling methods) need to be present and available everywhere and at all times to achieve and maintain peace.
- Preventive action and lessons learned need to be fully included in the construction of peace.
- Conflict-prone elements must be prevented, reduced or evacuated. Mainly, the presence of weapons, of unjust economical systems and of threats to the environment is to be reduced if peace is to progress and last.
- Conflict-prone people or cultures are nevertheless entitled to respect and dignity, they have rights as anyone. However, violence is never permitted whatever its form and self-defence is limited to necessary means under due trial. But more than the legal answer, whenever possible, generosity, empathy, common sense and non-violence are humane ways to teach and to restore peace.
- Moreover, an understanding of the delight of the possibility of prosperity and happiness experienced when living in peace is an essential element of peace and peace education.

## c. Are there limits or limitations to the definition of peace?

In our opinion, a proper peace culture and adequate prevention can reach and curtail all types of violence. However, until we get there, we admit that the incapacitation, as peaceful as possible, of violent or destructive forces may be required. Yet, any use of force, in our opinion is the expression of a failure of prevention, something to be perfected for such a need to use force in similar circumstances not to appear and never to occur again. To progress in this direction, there is a need to keep in mind that peace offers and provides necessary and efficient tools for the prevention and resolution of most if not all types of difficulties that may arise throughout our lives.

d. **Integrating the definition**

Harmony serves as a fairly adequate synonym for peace and so does serenity. Serendipity is another possibility. To be in harmony with one's self and with others, with all others, with life and nature, with society in present time as for the future and throughout the permanent processes of change, to be able to be in harmony with the past as well...

All of this seems to be, at least for me, a fair way of being in peace and of being at peace with all aspects of life and reality. Moreover, peace as it stands and as defined here needs to become part of human history for humanity to last and survive and for dignity to prevail. We call it "mainstreaming peace".

e. **Tentative definition**

Bearing all this in mind here is the definition of peace we propose:

*"Peace is part of human dignity. It is living in, as well as the right and the duty to live in, to prepare, to maintain or to restore a creative state of permanent harmony amongst all".*

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<sup>i</sup> Johan Galtung's definition of positive peace (including peace building and social justice) and negative peace (absence of conflict) is a good start: *Violence, peace and peace research*, Journal of Peace research Vol. 6, No. 3 (1969), pp. 167-191. For a more proactive definition: Davies-Vengoechea Ximena, *The positive concept of Peace*, p. 11-18 in *Keeping the peace*, Douglas Fry and Graham Kemp, eds., Routledge, 2004.