

Kluwer Mediation Blog

Creating Peace from the Ground Up

Joel Lee (National University of Singapore, Faculty of Law) · Thursday, February 14th, 2013

[Author's Note: While this entry is technically not about mediation, I believe that mediators are in the business of peace making and I hope these thoughts resonate with readers.]

I've been thinking about peace quite a lot. This was prompted by my reading of an article about the Nobel Peace Prize and how nominations for 2013 would close in February. I'd like to spend my entry this month pondering about peace.

This is an illusive concept. Since the formation of the United Nations, there hasn't been another world war. To that extent, there has been peace. However, this illusion is easily dispelled when one considers the myriad of armed conflict that exists in various hotspots, some of which may be considered chronic.

Is peace really so hard to have? From a linguistic perspective, "peace" is a nominalization or abstract noun. Put simply, unlike concrete nouns like "pen" or "book", an abstract noun doesn't exist in space. One cannot hold it in the proverbial palm of the hand. A nominalization is technically a process which has had the beginning and end of the process cut off and then frozen across time. "Success", "Love" and "Integrity" are nominalizations. "Peace" is another. Following this analysis, then perhaps it is less a matter of having peace more than how we engage in the process of creating and maintaining peace.

Of course, this is easier said than done. It is said that in order to achieve something, one must want to achieve it, one must know how to achieve it and one must have the opportunity to achieve it. Looking at the amount of posturing among nations as well as the number of peace processes that have broken down, I believe the biggest challenge is the motivation (or lack thereof) of nations to engage in peace. Specifically, the motivation of the leaders of those nations. I am not sure that they want to. Ironically, the beating of the war drums is often attributed to the desires and needs of an amorphous citizenry. The other country is depersonalized and is usually painted as the unreasonable one. It is after all far easier to hate those that we do not see as the same as us.

For all the nations that want to go to war with one another, what do the people in those countries really want? It would not be farfetched to think that the citizens of those countries would have aspirations like you and I. To make a living, to feed our loved ones, to raise our family in a safe and good environment and to enjoy our life. I'm not sure many people would actually choose war. Yet, many suffer the choice of war made by their leaders who may well have other motivations. This disjoint seems a travesty.

I started thinking, what if there was some way for the peoples of those countries to clearly communicate a simple message to their leaders that they want peace? And now. That the war, proposed or ongoing, is not their war and not their wish. If the citizenry spoke with one voice, then it would be very difficult for leaders to hide behind the myth that their people do not want peace. They would be forced to explore ways to give effect to what their people want. Peace.

Idealistic? Absolutely! Naive? When I had these thoughts and shared it with those close to me, they certainly thought it was naive. The idea, and I, was labelled as unrealistic and unachievable. I am sad to say that I bought into their criticisms and did not explore further into making this a reality.

Hope has returned. I recently found out about this initiative by an Israeli Designer, Ronny Edry. Essentially, he decided he was going to design posters with pictures of Israelis expressing to the Iranian people that they were not enemies. Instead, these posters expressed the message “We Love You”. These “Israel Loves Iran” posters were posted on Facebook and the response was both unexpected and overwhelming. This has since inspired other sites like “Iran Loves Israel”, “Israel Loves Palestine” and “Palestine Loves Israel”. Apart from “We Love You”, messages have evolved to include “Vote for Peace”, “Peace It’s Me” and the powerful “Not Ready to Die in Your War”.

People from around the world have given their photos in support of this cause. Creating peace from the ground up indeed. Ronny has achieved what I briefly thought was possible. I could not, did not stay the course. I hope Ronny will. Ronny tells his story [here](#). Please watch it and if you feel it appropriate, help spread his message.

Will this initiative succeed in creating peace? I have no clue. I believe it has brought us one step closer. I am sure Ronny has his fair share of detractors. I hope the number of positive voices out there will outweigh the negative ones. To my mind, those who predict the doom of failure miss the point. The value is in the effort.

I’d like to close with a saying that has made a deep impression upon me and I feel it epitomizes what Ronny and others like him are doing.

“Peace is not the absence of conflict. One must wage Peace as much as others wage war”.

I wish Peaceful Warriors like Ronny success.

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