

Editorial

Does Peace Have a Chance in a Warring World? Is Peace a Choice or a Necessity?

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Abstract

There is a deficit of confidence regarding whether, and to what extent, peace has a chance in today's warring world. A natural question arises: "Is peace a necessity or a choice?" This editorial examines these two issues. Beginning with a description of the contemporary situation in countries engaged in cross-border violence marked by casualties, the destruction of schools, and the disruption of learning. It analyses the anatomy of unrest and violence, bringing together visible events and long-term factors that contribute to them. The article traces the evolution of the concept and practice of peace alongside the development of human civilisation, indicating that peace is the natural choice for people. In contrast, violence is often driven by political compulsions, imperialist agendas, and the pursuit of a monopoly over global resources. It further highlights the need to recast peace education to improve its effectiveness and cautions that peace education alone cannot achieve peace. It asserts that education can help create the ethical, political, and cultural conditions that make peace more likely.

Keywords: positive peace, anatomy of violence, geopolitical rivalries and resource conflicts, cross-border terrorism, climate change, philosophical foundation of peace, recasting peace education.

1. Introduction

The most important question being debated is whether peace has a Chance in a warring world. With several countries involved in cross-border violence, and many countries being nuclear-powered, the question has assumed a new importance because of the future of human civilisation on Earth. In this editorial, we will examine whether peace has a chance and whether 'Peace a Choice or a Necessity?'

The world is once again marked by widespread conflict. Armed violence remains alarmingly high, with conflicts spanning multiple regions and causing severe human suffering. "According to ACLED, there are 46 active armed conflicts across 76 countries, with over 240,000 people killed by political violence in the past twelve months alone. From full-scale interstate wars to grinding insurgencies, the global conflict landscape is expanding — not contracting" (Kramer, 2026), based on the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED).

The Russia–Ukraine war has caused enormous casualties and displacement since 2022, including millions of displaced people and very high military and civilian losses (UNHCR, 2026). The Sudan civil war has claimed 20,000- 30,000 lives and uprooted 10 million (ACLED, 2026). Gaza's death toll has exceeded 45,000 since 2023 (UN OCHA, 2026). Myanmar's civil war continues to claim thousands of lives. Conflicts in Iran, Lebanon, and Syria further illustrate how resource politics, regional rivalries, and proxy warfare continue to dominate leaders' priorities. Iran's confrontations

over nuclear capability and oil transit routes, Israel's repeated strikes in Lebanon, and Syria's prolonged civil war with foreign interventions all underscore the bleak prospects for peace in the Middle East.

The volatile geopolitical landscape of the Middle East highlights the limits of militarised diplomacy. Even when temporary de-escalation occurs through mediation or backchannel negotiation, the root causes of conflict—dominance, insecurity, and competition over resources—remain unresolved. Even when temporary de-escalation occurs through mediation or backchannel negotiation, the root causes of conflict—dominance, insecurity, and competition over resources—remain unresolved. This agreement may help restore peace in Lebanon and Palestine. According to Galtung's peace theory, this is an example of negative peace. Direct violence may temporarily stop, but the underlying causes of conflict remain unchanged. A sustainable solution is positive peace. To achieve positive peace, a deeper examination of the anatomy of violence and war is necessary, especially the power imbalances that sustain them.

2. Anatomy of Violence and War and the Role of Peace Education

Several factors fuel unrest and violence, obstructing the establishment of positive peace. These include Climate Change, Human Rights Violations, Economic Inequality, Lack of Justice, Rule of Law and Governance Issues, Forced Displacement, Migration, Cultural Dislocation, Terrorism and cross-country organised crime, Geopolitical Rivalries and Resource Conflicts (Mukhopadhyay, 2026).

2.1 Climate Change

Climate change does not directly cause war; instead, it acts as a threat multiplier. Climate change contributes to rising sea levels, forest fires, desertification, drought, food insecurity, poverty, displacement, health risks, species loss, melting glaciers, and ocean acidification (Mukhopadhyay, 2026). These result in resource scarcity, economic collapse, and mass migration, which can trigger tensions between local communities and displaced populations. Climate change is not a local phenomenon.

The role of peace education should be to promote environmental peacebuilding by managing scarce resources cooperatively across borders. Further, it needs to cultivate the attribute of ecological citizenship, understanding the intricate relationship between human security and ecosystem health. Environmental education, however, has been restricted to science instruction in schools, where these concepts have no place. As a result, peace education in its present form does little to help.

2.2 Human Rights Violations

Powerful historical examples of human rights violations include colonial rule and apartheid in South Africa. Whenever and wherever the state denies its citizens basic rights, deep-seated discontent, civil unrest, insurgency, physical violence, and mass protest erode trust between the government and the people, making stability fragile.

Peace education promotes rights-based literacy, familiarisation with frameworks like the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, empathy, and inclusion. It also challenges the mindsets that sustain racism, sectarianism, and xenophobia. Peace education has moved some distance, though a long way to go, from memorising the Universal Declaration of Human Rights to actively focusing on moral inclusion, understanding and challenging systemic barriers in ensuring human rights. Peace education still has to make the voice of the discriminated heard and restore human rights.

2.3 Economic Inequality

An important determinant of peace is economic justice. Economic inequality creates a polarised society of haves and have-nots. This is true within the boundaries of a country as well as across the boundaries. The average GDP per capita across advanced economies is approximately \$66,180 (nominal), and the average GDP per capita for 44 Least Developed Countries (LDCs) is approximately \$1,293 (nominal). In India, a fast-growing economy, the top 10 per cent are far wealthier than the bottom 20 per cent, which reflects deep internal inequality.

The concentration of wealth in a few hands deprives the large majority of upward mobility, financial security, health care, education, and other services. In such conditions, individuals and communities seek radical changes in the system, sometimes resorting to violent means and class war.

Peace education, which should naturally have helped students analyse the root causes of inequality and not accept them as personal failures, and future leaders advocating for social justice have chosen to focus on interpersonal harmony. Instead, peace education could have focused on economic injustice as a core driver of violence and a deterrent to peace.

2.4 Lack of Justice, Rule of Law, and Governance Issues

Governance entails establishing rules and procedures to solve collective problems and maintain social order. When governance is weak, corruption thrives, laws are applied arbitrarily, law-and-order authority operates under political influence, and the judiciary is compromised, a crisis of accountability ensues. When peaceful channels for redress are closed, citizens may resort to rebellion.

Peace education can play a major role in civic empowerment by helping learners understand how government should function transparently and accountably, and enabling citizens to demand reforms within a peaceful and democratic framework. It can also help institutionalise restorative justice - conflict resolution through negotiation, community reintegration and fair governance. Peace education is being built into the civics curriculum, converting abstract legal concepts into operable restorative justice.

2.5 Forced Displacement, Migration, and Cultural Dislocation

Mass displacements are usually driven by war, persecution, or economic hardship. “At the end of June 2024, 122.6 million people worldwide remained forcibly displaced due to persecution, conflict, violence, human rights violations, or events seriously disturbing public order” (UNHCR, 2024). Additionally, UNHCR (2024) estimated that at the end of 2023, 68.3 million people remained internally displaced due to conflict and violence. Mass displacement affects host countries, leading to rapid demographic changes that can spark resource competition, social friction, and political challenges. The displaced population suffers adverse effects such as cultural dislocation, trauma, loss of livelihoods, and diminished sense of dignity and belonging. This identity crisis among displaced persons and localised tensions may persist for generations, leading to localised conflicts.

Peace education can facilitate intercultural and integration dialogues between the host community and migrants, addressing shared concerns, rejecting harmful and hateful myths, and collectively building a common identity. Further, it can provide social and emotional learning to help displaced youth overcome trauma, reducing the risk of feelings of exclusion and prospective radicalisation in future. Amid massive global displacements, peace education has integrated psychological support. Host

countries have increasingly introduced structured storytelling during art-based migration dialogues in schools, helping to reduce helplessness, xenophobia, and migration-related trauma.

2.6 Terrorism and Transnational Organised Crime

Terrorism and Transnational Organised Crime undermine international security, destabilise states, and impede sustainable development, besides causing the loss of innocent lives. Beyond religious fanaticism, terrorism can also stem from drug trafficking, arms smuggling, kidnapping for ransom, and extortion used to finance operations and expand reach (UNICRI, 2020). Criminal gangs and organisations, including sympathisers of terrorists, especially those with religious affiliations, shelter them and fund their activities. They create porous borders that challenge governance, diverting resources from health, education, and other essential services to military-based defence and deterrence against terrorism and cross-border threats.

Peace education can help students think critically, distinguish between right and wrong, and reject terrorism as a means of change; and reject online grooming, propaganda, and narratives of division. Peace education can also teach about economic deprivation and cross-border violations that could have supported the livelihoods of underprivileged people.

As terrorism and cross-border organised crime have become almost universal, affecting a large number of countries, peace education remains an important area of support for UNESCO and other global organisations. The major emphasis of peace education in this domain is cognitive reorganisation and resilience, helping students develop critical thinking and advanced media literacy.

2.7 Geopolitical Rivalries and Resource Conflicts

Climate change, terrorism, and cross-border organised crime disrupt the global peace equilibrium. However, geopolitical rivalries and resource conflicts over trade routes, technological supremacy, or fossil fuels, along with dangerous nuclear brinkmanship, are responsible for inter-country, multi-country, or World Wars, seriously affecting global peace. Wars cause massive devastation of education infrastructure, such as schools, displace people and students, and lead to huge learning loss. The destruction of school facilities or their repurposing for sheltering the affected and use as military barracks limits access to education, causing irreplaceable learning loss. Geopolitical rivalries and resource conflicts are global phenomena, except perhaps among military superpowers, which can protect their interests (Mukhopadhyay, 2026).

UNESCO promotes global citizenship education among students as a response to the challenge. The aim is to develop them as members of the global community and global citizens whose lives will be guided by international law and collective security. However, since peace depends on both public values and political will, the effectiveness of global citizenship education remains restricted. The United Nations was constituted in 1945, after World War II, as a platform for nations to come together and resolve differences through negotiation and diplomacy. 80 years later, geopolitical rivalries and war persist, while UNESCO pursues its agenda and mission to promote global citizenship.

International conflict management was primarily guided by Western cosmopolitan ideals, without considering the power dynamics of the post-colonial world. There is an effort to introduce change to accommodate the indigenous models of conflict resolution.

Lessons from the anatomy of violence and war are discouraging for achieving positive peace. Peace education, as an external intervention through the education system, has had a limited impact so far.

There is a need to explore how peace, embedded in the evolution of human civilisation, can be leveraged and complemented by modern-day peace education.

3. Evolution of Peace

Peace is deeply rooted in the evolution of human civilisation. It has taken different philosophical expressions across regions. In African thought, Ubuntu, Ma'at, and Oromo's Safuu are expressions of peace. Whereas Ubuntu stands for "I am because we are," truth, justice, balance, cosmic order, and the divine are the central themes of Ma'at and Safuu.

In ancient Mesopotamia, peace was achieved through treaties (negotiated settlements), divine order, and the restoration of cosmic balance following conflicts. In Greek philosophy, harmony, justice, and inner tranquillity, tied to virtue and order, were seen as pathways to peace. Pythagoras emphasised cosmic harmony and universal brotherhood. In Chinese philosophy, harmony, balance, and social order are considered means of achieving peace.

Ancient Indian wisdom celebrates peace as a prerequisite to happiness. According to Vedantic philosophy, the state of bliss, *Anandam*, is the ultimate form and aspiration of life. In its *Panchakosha* or five sheath theory – *Annamaoy* (physical), *Pranamoy* (life force), *Manomoy* (mental), *Bignanamoy* (wisdom), and *Anandamoy* (happiness or bliss), *Anandamoy* is presented as the fifth layer of human existence. Blissfulness is the ultimate sheath. In this model, peace is not merely the absence of war. Still, a state of equilibrium across the mental (*manomoy*) and wisdom (*bignanamoy*) sheaths, allowing the *anandamoy* (bliss) to be realised (positive peace).

In the Gita, Lord Krishna asks a question: how can there be happiness and bliss where there is no peace (Chapter 2, Verse 66: "*ashantasya kutah sukham?*"). Krishna positions peace as a prerequisite to happiness. In modern times, many countries that rank highly on happiness indices also rank highly on peace indices. This Indian metaphysics matches very well with modern-day data. Iceland, Ireland, Denmark, Austria, Switzerland, Finland, Slovenia, the Czech Republic (Czechia), the Netherlands, Canada, Belgium, and Australia are a few countries that rank in the top 20 on both the Global Peace and Happiness Indexes. This commonality also holds good for the bottom 20-ranked countries on both indices.¹ This correlation strongly suggests that peace is necessary for happiness. If, as the Gita suggests, "happiness is impossible without peace", then our current global 'warring' state is not just a political failure—it is a collective sabotage of human well-being.

Ancient India propagated the concept of global citizenship not merely as a slogan, but as a reflection of character. A famous verse from the *Maha Upanishad* contrasts the narrow-minded (*laghucetasam*), who see only 'mine' and 'thine,' with the large-hearted (*udaracaritanam*), for whom the entire world is one family (*Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam*)². In the modern era, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, the first Prime Minister of independent India, proposed five principles for peace - Panchsheel. The five principles are mutual respect for territorial integrity and sovereignty, mutual non-aggression, mutual non-interference in each other's internal affairs, equality and mutual benefit, and peaceful coexistence. At the 1955 Bandung Conference, 29 Afro-Asian nations adopted Panchasheel in their declaration. It was endorsed when India, Yugoslavia, and Sweden presented it at the UN General Assembly in 1957. Panchsheel shaped Zambian President Kenneth Kaunda in his Letter to My Children: "You will grow up to be not only citizens of Zambia and children of Africa but also people

¹ Afghanistan, Yemen, Sudan / South Sudan, Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Syria, Somalia, Mali, Burkina Faso, Lebanon, Zimbabwe

² *Ayam nijah paro veti ganana laghucetasam / Udāracaritānām tu vasudhaiva kuṭumbakam ||*

of a world struggling to find wholeness and unity” (Kaunda, 1973, pp. 98–99 in Pacho, 2013, p. 36). Further, Kenneth Kaunda, in his October 1964 address to the United Nations General Assembly, said: “I hope and pray the day will soon come when this great body, the United Nations, knows every one of us only as citizens of the world—nothing more and nothing less.”

Despite the deep-rooted philosophies of peace in different nations and cultures, the two world wars, border conflicts, and recent violence in the Middle East involving the USA from another continent are worrisome. When such powerful states choose to engage in violent alternatives to conflict resolution, Bertrand Russell’s wise warning, “Coexistence or No Existence”, becomes most relevant. The question that troubles peace-loving, sensitive minds is whether peace has a chance in the warring world.

4. Does Peace Have a Chance?

It is not easy to answer this question. The question can be examined through pessimistic and optimistic lenses. While pessimistic views emphasise ongoing wars, militarisation, and resource-driven conflicts, optimistic perspectives highlight historical precedents of reconciliation, non-violent resistance, and the transformative potential of civil society.

The pessimistic views are reinforced by recent experiences of armed conflicts in Ukraine, Iran, Lebanon, Syria, Gaza, Sudan, and Myanmar. Developments in precision weaponry, including drones capable of targeted killing and long-range infrastructure destruction, are a major threat to world peace. Such structural violence is dangerous because of its potential for massive destruction and loss of life.

Behind such structural violence lies the global arms economy. Global military spending hit \$2.443 trillion in 2024 (SIPRI, 2025), diverting funds from education, health, and general well-being. UNESCO reports that 250 million children are out of school, and nearly as many primary-age children are failing to learn the basics (UNESCO, 2025). Nearly as many children of primary school age are failing to learn the basics, jeopardising SDG4’s 2030 education ambition: “ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all” by 2030.

The political authority and imperial ambitions of global superpowers often undermine human-centred development. This subordination of human welfare to narrow ‘nationalistic policies’ is evident in a few contemporary crises. Whether through sanctions, strategic pressure, or attempts to influence access to energy resources to reopen the oil reserve to Western corporations, the threat of aggression on Kharg Island, or the conflict over the Strait of Hormuz, resource monopoly and security supersede international norms. Russia’s actions in Ukraine and repeated airstrikes in Lebanon exemplify how resource and security dominance can override human-centred development.

The pessimism is further fuelled due to the involvement of the major world powers in the ongoing conflicts. At present, the chance of peace looks very bleak.

The optimistic view of peace is largely rooted in history. Nelson Mandela’s ‘Long Walk to Freedom’ marked the end of apartheid and the peaceful transfer of power in 1994. The Gandhian non-violent movements, such as Satyagraha and the Quit India movement against British colonial rule, are other examples (History Journal, 2025). Diplomatic initiatives and grassroots social movements continue to challenge militarism. Civil society, empowered by transnational digital connectivity, increasingly bypasses state-controlled narratives of war. Moreover, as wars become more destructive and economically unsustainable, leaders face growing difficulty in justifying prolonged conflict. Having presented both pessimistic and optimistic views on the prospect of peace in the world, it is necessary to reiterate that peace is not a choice; it is a necessity for human survival on Earth and is

embedded in the evolution of human civilisation. The challenge is to mobilise collective peace as people's and leaders' choices to achieve sustainable positive peace.

The following two episodes indicate that peace is part of human nature and hence inspire hope.

In a personal communication, an Israeli professor wrote that Israelis and Palestinians took shelter in the same bunker during the bombing, sharing the same warmth, breathing the same air, and sharing a common fear.

In another instance, at a meeting organised by UNESCO in Manila (E-9 follow-up), the organisers were 'shocked' to see Bangladesh, India, and Pakistan were seated next to one another engaged in friendly gestures and conversation, though originally, the organisers had placed the three countries on three sides of a U-shaped arrangement. The Pakistani delegate was the first to move his nameplate from the left arm of the U-shaped arrangement and place it next to India, warmly embracing the Indian delegate. Next was the Bangladesh delegate, who picked up his nameplate from the right arm and placed it next to India on the other side. The organisers were surprised to see them sitting next to one another. In response to their expressions of surprise, all three humorously stated that the people of Bangladesh, India, and Pakistan do not fight with one another; rather, they share a common culture. Eastern India shares linguistic and cultural ties with Bangladesh, and northwestern India shares similar ties with Pakistan. They share literature, various art forms, housing and architecture, food, and clothing, as well as a drained economy inherited from 200 years of British rule. There is no animosity among the people of the three countries of the Indian subcontinent.

There are many instances in documented and oral histories that the members of the minority in danger were sheltered by the majority for safety on both sides of the border of Bangladesh, India and Pakistan, as well as elsewhere. The history of conflict and war clearly demonstrates that war is a political choice or a matter of compulsion for leaders, while peace is the choice of the people. If people's choice can prevail over leaders' or politicians' choices, peace has a fair chance.

While the opportunity for global peace appears bleak, a shift in leaders' incentive structures from resource monopolisation and dominance to advancing human rights, education, and sustainable development still offers a ray of hope. Peace is still possible if incentives shift toward human rights, education, and sustainability, aligning politics with grassroots will.

A robust step for sustainable positive peace is to create a constitutional commitment to peace and harmonious living, as constitutional commitments involve both people and leaders. Japan pioneered, through its constitutional commitment (Article 9), the recognition of peace as a Japanese way of life and governance.

Chapter II. Renunciation of War

"Article 9. Aspiring sincerely to an international peace based on justice and order, the Japanese people forever renounce war as a sovereign right of the nation and the threat or use of force as a means of settling international disputes.

In order to accomplish the aim of the preceding paragraph, land, sea, and air forces, as well as other war potential, will never be maintained. The right of belligerency of the state will not be recognised." Please refer to Prof Horio's article in this issue of the Chronicle for greater details.

China's foreign policy and features in the Preamble of the 1982 Constitution state, *"The future of China is closely bound up with the future of the world. China pursues an independent foreign policy, observes the five principles of mutual respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity, mutual*

nonaggression, mutual noninterference in internal affairs, equality and mutual benefit, and peaceful coexistence, keeps to a path of peaceful development, follows a mutually beneficial strategy of opening up, works to develop diplomatic relations and economic and cultural exchanges with other countries, and promotes the building of a human community with a shared future". The Preamble, further states, "China consistently opposes imperialism, hegemonism and colonialism,"

Constitution of India, in Article 51, states, *"The State shall endeavour to (a) promote international peace and security; (b) maintain just and honourable relations between nations; (c) foster respect for international law and treaty obligations in the dealings of organised peoples with one another; and (d) encourage settlement of international disputes by arbitration"*.

One visible impact of Article 9 of the Japanese Constitution is Japan's long-standing postwar restraint in the use of force, with its Self-Defence Forces operating primarily in defensive and humanitarian roles — limited to non-combat, humanitarian, and reconstruction activities such as building roads, supplying water, and providing medical aid.

Several other countries have also created provisions for peace in their constitutions in different forms. However, this scattered distribution of constitutional provisions in favour of peace is not enough. Such a clause must be included either in the Preamble or as a directive principle of every country registered with the UN. Peace is achievable through its institutionalisation by incorporating it into national constitutions and prescribing it as a fundamental duty of all citizens, and recasting peace education.

5. Recasting Peace Education

Peace education, as a community initiative for conflict resolution, has evolved since time immemorial. Ian Harris (2008), in his essay on the History of Peace Education, wrote, *"Throughout history, humans have taught each other conflict resolution techniques to avoid violence. Peace education is the process of teaching people about the threats of violence and strategies for peace. Peace educators try to build consensus about what peace strategies can bring maximum benefit to a group"*.

Despite its long history, peace education has still not been integrated into school education. It often remains a desirable activity overshadowed by other issues in civics and moral education. Peace education as a stand-alone subject with credit value comparable to other subjects, such as history or mathematics, remains very rare worldwide. To maintain peace education as a meaningful part of education, it must find a prominent place in the school curriculum and textbooks. It should begin right at the start of the year's foundational learning. In parenting programs for parents of preschool children, parents should practice conflict management through discussion and negotiation (Mukhopadhyay et al., 2026, *Scientific Parenting Book*). This will serve as a real-life example for children to illustrate conflict-management values and techniques.

Peace education, largely taught in schools or by NGOs, stops short of reaching the doorsteps of decision-makers. The content largely centres on conflict resolution and empathy, which are inadequate for dealing with political conflict and military pressures. What is needed is a new mindset of global citizenship, one that translates the Indian ideal of 'the world is one family' into lived reality. The UN must find a way to provide peace education for leaders.

Learners at all levels must understand that peace is not merely the absence of war; it is the absence of the causes of war; not negative, the world deserves and needs positive peace, characterised by tolerance and respect for diversity, including diverse opinions. At the societal or macro level, positive

peace is characterised by social justice, economic equality, equity, and institutions that foster harmony, resilience, and sustainable development. Furthermore, this mindset cannot be taught conventionally; every citizen of the world must discover it for themselves through an alternative pedagogy, perhaps Paulo Freire's critical pedagogy.

Further, peace education must free itself from the narrowly conceived Western model. As peace has evolved alongside human civilisation, every nation has rich indigenous knowledge and practices for managing peace (see Prof Jack Maebuta's article in this issue on the Solomon Islands). Peace education must be built more seriously on indigenous and postcolonial perspectives. It needs to be decolonised to be made relevant and effective in a diverse world.

6. Conclusion

Peace appears fragile in light of recent conflicts, especially in the Middle East. Nonetheless, all countries, whether at war or at peace, recognise that peace is necessary and achievable. Education by itself cannot stop wars, but it can help create the ethical, political, and cultural conditions that make peace more likely.

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