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CALL FOR ACTION

Peaceful intercultural coexistence: reconciling universalism and cultural pluralism

Humanity has entered a period of systemic transition in which the existing international order is no longer capable of ensuring peace, stability, and the sustainability of life on Earth. The risks are no longer limited to regional conflicts but include the potential breakdown of global governance and irreversible environmental damage. In this context, preserving peace is not only a political objective but a precondition for the survival of humanity.

The sustainability of life on Earth is increasingly threatened by military conflicts and wars. There is not only a risk of escalation involving the deployment of nuclear weapons; even the use of conventional weapons requires enormous quantities of raw materials and energy, pollutes the environment, and leads to the destruction of human lives, homes, and infrastructure. In addition, it diverts resources that could otherwise be used to meet basic human needs and shifts societal attention away from environmental and other sustainability challenges.

An examination of military conflicts in recent decades reveals an important common feature: their protagonists often come from different cultural backgrounds. In many cases, these conflicts have involved the United States and Muslim countries in North Africa, Syria, Iraq, and Afghanistan. A similar pattern can be observed in conflicts involving Palestine and Iran, where the United States has aligned with Israel, representing Jewish cultural traditions. The conflict in the former Yugoslavia in the 1990s also had a strong cultural dimension. Cultural differences are also present, to some extent, in the war in Ukraine, where populations of Orthodox and Western Christian backgrounds are in conflict. The cultural dimension of these wars is significant, whether cultural and ideological differences are at their core or serve to mask pragmatic interests such as control over natural resources.

Recent discussions on the escalation of wars suggest that the "law of power" has increasingly replaced the rule of law. Instead of adhering to international law and relying on diplomacy, negotiation, and mediation through international organizations such as the United Nations, political leaders are increasingly using economic and military power to pursue their interests. As a result, the UN and other international institutions have been bypassed and weakened. Appeals to return to the UN Charter, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and other formal frameworks are often ignored and appear increasingly unrealistic.

To understand the current situation, it is necessary to consider how the now-fragile international order was established. It was shaped after World War II by the victorious countries, with the United States playing a leading role. The formal agreements and institutions built around the UN largely reflected the norms and values of Western Christian culture. Other countries joined this renewed global order, often without the power to assert the perspectives of non-Christian cultures.

The newly established world order initially functioned successfully under the leadership of the United States and other powers with veto rights in the UN Security Council. However, it soon became clear that interpretations of democracy and human rights—although declared universal—varied significantly across civilizations. Even more problematic was their implementation, as these concepts often did not align with diverse cultural contexts. As a result, international tensions increased. The world experienced a division between Western and Eastern blocs in Europe, the Chinese revolution and subsequent isolation of China, and numerous intelligence and military interventions worldwide—particularly by the United States—aimed at exporting the Western model of democracy. Despite the wave of decolonization after World War II, Western influence continued through economic, technological, political, and often military means.

Despite these challenges, the global order maintained a relative balance, with peace largely preserved under the dominance of one economic superpower (the United States) and two military superpowers (the United States and the Soviet Union) until 1990. After this period, the system shifted toward a unipolar structure dominated by the United States. At the same time, economic globalization accelerated rapidly from the late 1980s onward. This led to deindustrialization in some regions and unprecedented growth in economic, technological, and military power in others. New major powers—including China, India, and other BRICS countries—have since emerged. The United States has responded by attempting to preserve its dominance and prevent a transition from a unipolar to a multipolar world order. If emerging powers, particularly China, adopt similar strategies without agreed-upon rules, global conflicts are likely to intensify, increasing the risk of a new world war.

In the current context, calls to return to the previous international order—including its legal frameworks and the traditional role of the UN—are unlikely to succeed. Major powers such as China, India, and Russia possess sufficient human, economic, natural, and military resources to challenge the existing system. They may choose not to adhere to UN rules that do not align with their cultural frameworks and national interests, especially since these rules were largely shaped—and are now often violated—by the United States and its allies.

Nevertheless, there is hope that these powers will avoid open military confrontation and instead support the creation of a new global order that reflects diverse cultural perspectives and national interests.

To prevent further escalation of conflicts and the continued destruction of societies and the natural environment, the Academy of Sustainable Development Sciences of Slovenia proposes that the Sustainable Development Solutions Network and its partners initiate a new global effort to restore peace. This initiative would include:

- The formation of an intercultural group of highly respected experts from major cultural regions, including North America, South America, the European Union, Russia, China, India, Africa, and both Sunni and Shiite Muslim communities.

- Assigning this group the following primary tasks:

- a) To explore models of peaceful coexistence among different cultures that enable cooperation in economic, technological, cultural, and political fields.

- b) To review and revise key international frameworks—such as the UN Charter and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights—in light of current global realities, with a focus on peaceful coexistence, and to recommend institutional reforms within the United Nations system.

- c) To draft legal texts for amendments to existing international instruments and for the adoption of new conventions related to peaceful coexistence, and to propose legally binding mechanisms for dispute prevention and intercultural mediation.

The group's findings and proposals should be discussed across expert and political communities worldwide, with the goal of developing practical proposals for UN reform. These discussions should be organized in various regions by the UN and/or the Sustainable Development Solutions Network.

The outcomes of these discussions should be submitted to the United Nations General Assembly for consideration and the possible initiation of formal treaty-making processes or Charter amendment procedures in accordance with international law.

Annex

Some steps of the proposed action could proceed in the following directions:

1. A new "International Convention on Peaceful Coexistence of Civilizations" should be drafted and adopted under the auspices of the United Nations, establishing binding obligations for states to promote intercultural dialogue, prevent conflicts based on cultural or religious differences, and institutionalize mediation mechanisms among different civilizational groups.
2. A supplementary protocol to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenants on Human Rights should be developed to recognize cultural diversity as a foundational element of human dignity, including the protection of and respect for collective cultural identities, provided that such recognition remains consistent with fundamental human rights standards.
3. Member states should initiate, in accordance with Article 108 of the Charter of the United Nations, a formal amendment procedure aimed at:
 - Revising the use of veto power in the Security Council, including limitations in cases involving mass atrocities, environmental destruction, or threats to global peace;
 - Strengthening the binding nature of decisions related to preventive diplomacy and peaceful dispute settlement, and introducing mechanisms for compulsory mediation prior to the use of force.
4. States should adopt an optional protocol granting the International Court of Justice compulsory jurisdiction over disputes related to intercultural conflicts, the interpretation of collective rights, and obligations arising from peaceful coexistence frameworks.
5. States should initiate negotiations within the framework of the United Nations General Assembly for the adoption of a protocol to the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court establishing "ecocide in armed conflict" as an international crime, including responsibility for large-scale environmental destruction resulting from both conventional and non-conventional warfare.

A new subsidiary organ of the United Nations General Assembly, entitled the "Council for Intercultural Dialogue and Peaceful Coexistence," should be established under Article 22 of the UN Charter, with a mandate to facilitate mediation, provide advisory opinions, and support the implementation of intercultural peace frameworks.



Professor Emeritus Niko Toš
President of AZTRS